WHAT DOES THIS MEAN—

THE CONNECTION BETWEEN DEBRIEFING AND SPIRITUAL GROWTH

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Abstract

In this thesis, the author will make the case that debriefing is a powerful tool for spiritual growth. Debriefing is a process that allows concrete experiences to be turned into abstract information that can be used in other concrete experiences. This paper explores the prevalent educational theory behind debriefing and suggests that it is a method available to the pastor and adaptable into a Biblical model. The paper investigates the theories of multiple intelligences, constructivism, praxis, educator disinvolvement, and the distinction between soft and hard thinking. This paper suggests that, although apparent inconsistencies exist between these educational theories and Biblical doctrine, they can be remedied. This paper will also describe spiritual growth and the means through which it is brought about. This paper proposes a debriefing model which utilizes current educational theory and orthodox Biblical teaching to facilitate spiritual growth in the individual through a facilitator. Finally, the paper will recommend further areas of study within the realm of experiential education that may be applicable to the pastoral ministry.

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Introduction

Eight people—two adults, three teenagers, and three grade schoolers—stood on strange contraptions. They were simple structures that looked like skis with ropes attached to them. Each participant had a foot on a ski and a rope in each hand. Their task was to learn how to walk together. The problem was learning to communicate in a uniform and clear way, which was further complicated by the fact the advantage of verbal communication had been taken away until they were done. The whole activity is called "The Trollies." It took time, but a system of haphazard sign language developed among them and they walked about fifty feet. Afterward, everyone sat down on the ground to debrief.

Usually for an activity like this, the participants all have something in common: the same school, company, team, age, interest, etc. This group was different. They all signed up to do elements at the challenge course out of self-interest, not for team-building, problem solving, or growth as a group. They were all different as well. The adults didn't know each other, but the two teenage girls were best friends and the teenage boy, Ethan, had romantic interest in one of them. The grade schoolers were all from the same Lutheran day school and friends.

"After a challenge like that, it's important for us to talk together and notice things about what happened. There are things that you may not have noticed that others may have that will help you grow and learn," I said. The group was listening to me as we began the debrief. "As a group, you don't have much in common, and after today, you may never work together again. That doesn't mean this can't be a transforming experience, though. First, what were some things that you noticed as you tried to walk together on the trollies?" From there, the group pointed out and began to discuss what they saw happen. The grade schoolers were the best at making observations. They could point out who they thought the leader was and what went wrong in the beginning before they found success. The adults were helpful for explaining why they eventually came together as a group.

A single experience is not usually life changing, but through a cumulative combination of experiences, growth occurs. That day, my impression was the experience was powerful enough to make a difference in the life of at least one of the participants. The participants of the debrief made it clear that the reason the group came together, accomplished the challenge, and all of that even though they couldn't talk was because of Ethan. Ethan was a quiet guy who came along to spend time with a girl, but he shined during the activity and everyone noticed it and had the

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opportunity to point it out. One of the adults, a man in his 50s, said to Ethan during the debrief, "You may not realize it, but you are an excellent leader. You made us want to follow you because you were so patient and effective."

I don't know if Ethan had ever heard words like that before, but the whole time he looked at the ground and nodded his head humbly. Moments like that are not uncommon when debriefing. From that statement to Ethan, we could discuss what made someone, like Ethan, a good leader, and what a good leader should continue to do. Others told stories and gave examples, and even those from the grade schoolers were insightful. I have not seen Ethan since that day, but when we were done on the challenge course, I asked him if he thought anything was different. He said, "Everyone pointed out something that I could sort of feel, but didn't know how to say about myself."

Debriefing involves the most famous, Lutheran question: "What does this mean?" In his *Small Catechism*, Martin Luther asked that question to apply the Bible's teachings in the form of the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, the Commandments and more. The question gave students the opportunity to make the Word in the catechism their own. More than just a rote memory exercise, Luther provided his students with the raw information taught in the Scriptures and the Symbols and asked the students to synthesize it, that is, to change its form, but keep its essence. He asked his students to understand what the Word was saying to them, so that every time they recited the Creed, or the Lord's Prayer, they recalled not only what the words meant, but what they meant *for them*.

Luther, although he would not have used the term, was debriefing with his students. He was helping them apply and practicalize abstract information so they could use it for themselves. This paper is concerned with how that happens. This paper's thesis is that debriefing is a powerful tool for spiritual growth.

The paper presents and discusses a fuller definition of debriefing in its main body. But, deliberate debriefing is more than sitting in a circle and talking about feelings. It involves converting abstract experiences into useable information that a person can apply to life and the world at large. In countless settings around the world, debriefing is happening right now. It is being used in the military, classrooms, hospitals, businesses, summer camps, etc. In each instance, an experience is processed through questions and statements, so that knowledge is not lost, happenings are not underappreciated, and so that people grow. The process of debriefing

could lead to physical growth, as a high school football team learns they should spend more time hitting the weights. Debriefing may lead to mental growth, as a university student grasps that she cannot write a worthwhile paper the night before it is due and makes a plan to change that habit. It may lead to social growth, as third graders on a ropes course learn how important leaders and followers are and that one is not better than another. The growth may also be spiritual as a pastor debriefs a challenging, congregational experience with his elders by bringing their experience into the realm of God's Word.

Debriefing is a powerful tool for growth, and one readily available to pastors. As a *seelsorger*, a pastor not only carries out his call to preach, teach, and administer the sacraments, but in doing so he is looking out for the spiritual growth of those in his care. The pastor does not cause spiritual growth, but he facilitates it through the means of grace. A pastor has as a goal to see his members become more like Christ, progressing in the knowledge of God's Word, in trust in Christ, and in fruits of faith. Debriefing is a tool pastors can use to accomplish that. By guiding a student, member, teen, or friend through questions that process an experience and connect them to relevant Scriptures, the pastor can facilitate spiritual growth.

It is not the intent of this paper to advocate for every presumption that comes with debriefing in the field of experiential education. It is also not the intent of this paper to say that the Bible explicitly teaches us to debrief. It is the intent of this paper to assert that the Bible demonstrates elements of the theory of debriefing, and that Christians who express themselves in truth and love debrief in the community of believers, of which pastors are a model and leader. It is not the intent of this paper to say that debriefing should be used in every situation, but that debriefing can be used in many, and that those who have used deliberate debriefing have found incredible value in it for spiritual growth.

Introduction to Debriefing

There are several terms used throughout this paper and by authors in the field of experiential education which can be used synonymously in a broad sense, but distinctively in a narrow sense. While not a comprehensive list, these words include reflecting, processing, debriefing, and facilitating[1]. In their broad sense, those words describe a cognitive activity where

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[1] Further terms seeing less use are: contemplating, reviewing, bridging, critiquing, elaborating, analyzing, closing, coaching, etc.

participants review the information or experience, make connections, analyze, appreciate, evaluate, and apply it. The term most often used in the broad sense for this paper will be debriefing, since this term is more widely used than the others in this context without baggage, so there is less of a chance for misunderstanding. The terms, debriefing, processing, facilitating, etc., will always be used in their broad sense as synonyms in this paper, unless otherwise stated.

For some the idea of debriefing may recall the concept of an echo chamber, with participants sitting around a campfire, singing Kumbaya, and saying feelings. This description depicts a time where nothing useful is accomplished and no one learns. That caricature of debriefing is not unfounded, and the sentiment that action is more valuable than processing the action persists. Ineffective debriefing led by inexperienced, unpracticed facilitators without a plan perpetuate this myth, and it is not the concept of debriefing considered in this paper. This paper will recommend debriefing that does often consider emotions, thoughts, and sitting in circles, but that is also purposeful, deliberate, and directed.

For the purposes of this paper, debriefing is a time when the cognitive mechanism by which a person discovers abstract principles from a concrete experience which can be applied to other situations in life is engaged through the deliberate asking of purposeful questions and answers. In other words, debriefing is a time to ask questions about what happened to learn about life. Authors and educators agree "the outcome of [debriefing] is the ability for individuals to 'make meaning' from their experiences or, in other words, to learn from their experiences."[2] While this sounds like an obvious observation, authors also state that it is rarely done: "This process of making meaning is a significant part of the reflection process, yet it is often overlooked."[3]

Three main causes account for this fact. First, accomplishing the making of meaning is not done easily: "It is a truism within experiential education that processing is the most difficult part of the facilitator's workload."[4] Second, debriefing that is not done well may still lead to learning, but it will be learning that feels artificial or forced. Debriefing that is not organic is

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[2] Deborah A. Sugerman, Kathryn L. Doherty, Daniel E. Garvey, and Michael A. Gass, *Reflective Learning* (Dubuque: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company, 2000), 1.

[3] Sugerman, Doherty, Garvey, Gass, 1.

[4] Steven Simpson, Dan Miller, and Buzz Bocher, *The Processing Pinnacle* (Oklahoma City: Wood 'N' Barnes Publishing, 2006), 25.

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awkward, forced, and unpleasant. One author describes the paradigm for debriefing in this way: "Participants will discover learning that is true for them, not a predetermined outcome decided for them by the facilitator."[5] The last reason is that debriefing is not done individually: "People do not appear to reflect spontaneously on their learning and [researchers] suggest the skills required for reflection must be taught."[6]

The above reasons suggest that though debriefing makes sense, because it is not done easily, organically, or individually, it is often forgotten or underutilized. So, the concept is not redundant or so obvious as to be frivolous, rather: "Sometimes processing feels like a secondary component to the main attraction. It is the broccoli of [education]—vital to a well-balanced program, but except to those who are very process-oriented, not as interesting as the main course."[7]

In addition, debriefing can occur unconsciously or consciously, in a way that is unorganized and haphazard, or deliberate and facilitated. Matthew Bown, an experiential educator with fourteen years of experience says, "After [the election of 2016] there's a ton of people debriefing or processing, but it's not necessarily intentional, 'Let's sit down and talk about it.' It's people protesting in the streets or spilling everything out on Facebook, things like that."[8] Processing occurs every day for every person as they seek to make meaning out of their experiences, but most of it is this unintentional, unorganized debriefing, like a background application running on a computer. Processing can also be deliberate, such as in a debriefing session.

When the term debriefing or debrief is treated, it will describe deliberate and intentional debriefing. This means intentional setting aside of time in order to describe the reflection and ask and answer questions which facilitate processing.[9] Unintentional processing occurs frequently, often in an unknown way. The study of the unconscious systems involved therein are briefly

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[5] Micah Jacobson and Mari Ruddy, *Open to Outcome* (Oklahoma City: Wood 'N' Barnes Publishing, 2004), 2.

[6] Sugerman, Doherty, Garvey, Gass, 7.

[7] Simpson, Miller, and Bocher, 23.

[8] Matthew Bown (Program Director at Camp Phillip), in phone interview with author. November, 2016.

[9] The terms reflect, facilitate, and processing in this sentence are used according to their narrow senses.

described, but are outside of the focus of this paper. It should be noted that practicing deliberate debriefing will often lead to more organized and effective unintentional debriefing, and formal debriefs to better informal ones. The cumulative effect to debriefing overall only adds to an already valuable tool. Tyler Shinnick, a pastor in the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod experienced in debriefing, said: "I've found that the key to effective debriefing is to be intentional about doing it. It's important to take time to debrief regularly in order to maximize learning and growth opportunities. If it's not done regularly and intentionally, those opportunities for growth pass by."[10]

The terms, reflect, facilitate, and process, can also be considered in a narrow sense. Reflecting happens when describing what happened during an experience. For example, John Luckner, professor of education at the University of Northern Colorado, and Reldan Nadler, a psychologist and leadership consultant, say, "People have experienced an activity and time needs to be allocated for individuals to look back and examine what they saw, felt, and thought about during the event. Reflection may be an introspective act in which the learner alone integrates the new experience with the old, or it may be a group process whereby a sense is made of an experience by a discussion."[11] Reflection often serves as the first part of a debrief, and so by metonymy some use it to refer to the entirety.

Processing in a narrow sense refers to the natural faculty of a person's mind to convert abstract information into practical information, generalizing specific knowledge for other contexts. Processing, then, is happening throughout the experience and throughout the debrief. It is not one singular action. Michelle Cummings, a professional educator and author of experiential education manuals, describes it this way: "Processing helps learners make connections between their educational experiences and real life situations. […] They become more cognizant of their inner resources that can be used in future life situations."[12] Processing does not only occur during a debrief, but throughout the entirety of the experience, the debrief,

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[10] Tyler Shinnick (Pastor at Martin Luther Church in Neenah, WI) in written interview. February, 2017.

[11] John L. Luckner and Reldan S. Nadler, *Processing the Experience* (Dubuque: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company, 1997), 6.

[12] Michelle Cummings, "Effective Debriefing Tools and Techniques" (College Reading and Learning Association, Accessed on October 12, 2016); available from https://onlineteachingandlearning.wikispaces.com/file/view/Processing+Effective+Debriefing+Tools.pdf, 2.

and onwards. Processing can occur intentionally or unintentionally, as said above, but it is all still processing in the narrow sense.

Debriefing, in the narrow sense, refers to the specific time set aside for deliberate processing according to its narrow sense. This deliberate setting aside of time is growing in popularity in the business world, in schools, *et al*. Debriefing is usually done through a series of questions and answers: "The most common and arguably the most reliable method of processing is a question and answer session conducted immediately after the action portion of the learning experience. For some [educators], it is the only way that they process—and if they do it well, sticking with the tried and true is not a bad way to go."[13] The two ideas, setting aside time for processing and asking questions and receiving answers, are so tied together they usually are assumed to be the same thing. Each debrief will contain questions and answers, but variance in who asks the questions, who gives the answers, how many questions, and how many answers determines the type of debrief which will occur.

Facilitation, in its narrow sense, stresses the intentionality of processing. Debriefing is not the only thing that is facilitated. Anything that is overseen and directed by a person, who may or may not be part of the activity, is facilitated. Sports games are facilitated by referees, classrooms are facilitated by teachers, and worship services are facilitated by pastors. Debriefing is facilitated either by a group leader or the person debriefing themselves. Steven Simpson, a professor as the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse and international presenter on processing, writes: "Facilitation […] asks students to establish their own goals, identify their own problems, and know what it is they want to learn. […A facilitator] shares his or her wisdom, knowledge, and vision in selfless, creative, and subtle ways."[14] In debriefing, a facilitator is vital, but has an adjusted role. A facilitator will strive to remain undetected during processing by becoming part of the group: " Debriefing exposes the leader to questioning, to uncontrolled emotions, divergent and irrelevant ideas. Anything can happen. To take these risks the debriefer needs to have respect for the participants as co-learners, to allow them to share control of the process and trust that

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[13] Simpson, Miller, and Bocher, 102.

[14] Steven Simpson, *The Leader Who is Hardly Known* (Oklahoma City: Wood 'N' Barnes Publishing, 2003), 3, 5.

their participation is worthwhile in the long-term however difficult in the short term."[15] A facilitator will strive to avoid student admiration for the teacher, but also distaste between the students for learning from each other. Instead, the goal is cultivating for the student the recognition, desire, and appreciation for abstracting experiences with applications from a teacher source or a student source: "[Facilitation] requires a teacher who can be selfless, knowing, unconventional, and able to dramatically change students for the better, but who can accomplish the change in ways that the students see their own role in the change more than they see the teacher's."[16]

The History of Debriefing

Debriefing has a complex history, since it has existed as long as humans have. For example, Bown describes what God did after the fall as processing in the narrow sense: "God is talking to Adam and Eve in the garden, 'Here's what you did, and because of this, here's what's going to happen.'"[17] In addition, debriefing is often done and taught experientially, so writings about it are infrequent. Most authors credit John Dewey with bringing it to light as he developed his ideas about education. For example, Dewey writes:

> It is a mistake to suppose that the principle of the leading on of experience to something different is adequately satisfied simply by giving pupils some new experiences any more than it is by seeing to it that they have greater skill and ease in dealing with things with which they are already familiar. It is also essential that the new objects and events be related intellectually to those of earlier experiences, and this means that there be some advance made in conscious articulation of facts and ideas. It thus becomes the office of the educator to select those things within the range of existing experience that have the promise and potentiality of presenting new problems which by stimulating new ways of observation and judgment will expand the area of further experience. He must constantly regard what is already won not as a fixed possession but as an agency and instrumentality for opening new fields which make new demands upon existing powers of observation and of intelligent use of memory. Connectedness in growth must be his constant watchword.[18]

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[15] Margot Pearson and David Smith, "Debriefing in Experience-based Learning," *Reflection: Turning Experience into Learning* (Nichols Publishing: London, 1985), 78.

[16] Simpson, 5.

[17] Bown.

[18] John Dewey, *Experience & Education* (New York: Free Press, 1938), 75.

Dewey describes the role debriefing now serves and the need experiences create in order to generalize knowledge. Though Dewey wrote extensively, he did not leave behind a manual describing how he would lead experiential education. Rather, he is viewed as a foundational theorist and educational philosopher. Many authors engage in his work to set a foundation for their own discussions of experiential education and debriefing.

Dewey is considered the father of progressive or experiential education. The central focus of this field is the idea that "people can construct knowledge through their own experience."[19] Debriefing takes place often within an experiential education context. These contexts might include a wilderness expedition, a ropes course session, or service learning project. In experiential theory, these times are referred to as the action: "At its most basic, experiential education programs have two overall components. One is action, and the other is the reflection."[20] The action is deliberate, just like the debriefing. These programs set up intentional challenges, trips, and other unique experiences, so that they can be processed. The programs take place with larger companies such as Outward Bound, the Nicodemus Wilderness Project, and Honeyrock, but also at summer camps and retreat centers around the world.

Debriefing is often done within these contexts by people who are not together studying the concept or writing manuals. This fact creates a second difficulty in describing the history of debriefing. While people are practicing it, no one is writing about how they are practicing it to pass on their ideas, much less describing the theory behind it. Most leaders pass on what they have done by directly teaching it to the next leader, rather than writing about it, as is shown by the lack of literature produced by these organizations above and similar ones in their early days, though that had changed in later years.

While commercial programs featuring debriefing have been available since 1976, when the Outward Bound Process Model was introduced[21], the U.S. military was the first to develop and implement a debriefing curriculum. An early debriefing manual was released to the public which summarizes their efforts:

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[19] Jacobson and Ruddy, 9.

[20] Simpson, Miller, and Bocher, 17.

[21] Victor Walsh and Gerald Collins, "The Exploration of the Outward Bound Process," accessed on 3 November 2016, http://wilderdom.com/pdf/Walsh&Golins1976ExplorationOBProcess.pdf.

> Debriefing is a factual review of events […] and reactions to those events. It is an opportunity to sit down with fellow soldiers, reconsider what occurred, and draw lessons for the future. In the process of reviewing events, feelings may be expressed and problems may be defused. The main point of the Debriefing is to review the chronology of events, to give soldiers an opportunity to clear up any confusion, and to facilitate a healthy cognitive reframing and integration of their experiences.[22]

The military's practices became known to educators and theorists who began to develop the theory into models. The two who picked up Dewey's interest and led the way in experiential education were David Kolb and Robert Fry. During the late 1960s and early '70s, Kolb and Fry developed their Experiential Learning Model, composed of four elements which formed a circular understanding of learning.
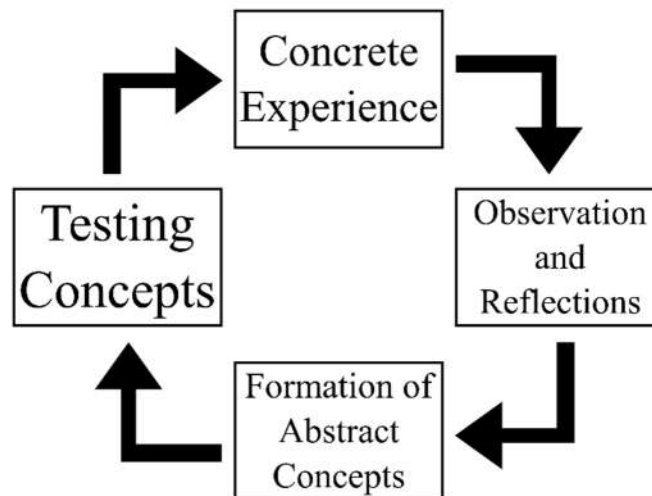
Kolb later explained his model according to four elements. These were concrete experience, observation and reflection, formation of abstract concepts, and then testing the new concepts.[23] Since Kolb's seminal work, one may observe an explosion of experiential resources has been made available at nearly every level, from the layman through the university. Programs designed to teach educators to teach experientially have been formalized at many institutions of higher learning in the form of single classes and as degrees.

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[22] U.S. Department of Defense, "Event-Oriented Debriefing Following Military Operations," Accessed on 5 May 2016, http://handle.dtic.mil/100.2/ADA300953.

[23] David Kolb, *Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1984), 94.

Debriefing in Theory

A complete explanation of the theories behind experiential education and debriefing is outside the scope of this paper. Such a topic is recommended for future researchers. But, a brief overview of the theoretical assumptions of this paper relevant for seeing the harmony between debriefing and experiential education will be helpful. Human beings do not all learn in the exact same way, or even learn the same things in the same way. One possible explanation for this is that humans possess more than one type of intelligence, which are developed in distinct ways. This theory is called multiple intelligence theory: "The theory of multiple intelligences […] posits that individuals possess eight or more relatively autonomous intelligences. Individuals draw on these intelligences, individually and corporately, to create products and solve problems that are relevant to the societies in which they live."[24] This theory suggests there is not just one type of intelligence, such as could be measured by a test, but rather it seeks to pluralize intelligences into "a computational capacity—a capacity to process a certain kind of information—that is founded on human biology and human psychology. […] An intelligence entails the ability to solve problems or fashion products that are of consequence in a particular cultural setting or community."[25,26]

Educators who understand multiple intelligence theory believe that there is more to teaching than uploading information into a student's head. Teaching students to remember facts or concepts involves one type of intelligence, but playing music, molding clay, rapping words, and goal setting involve other intelligences. The theory of multiple intelligences suggests that educators acknowledge the need for flexibility in the classroom in order to teach each student in the best possible way. Debriefing engages multiple intelligences within the individual and across

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[24] Katie Davis, Joanna Christodoulou, Scott Seider, and Howard Gardner, "The Theory of Multiple Intelligences," (Harvard Graduate School of Education, Accessed on 21 October 2016), available from http://www.pz.harvard.edu/sites/default/files/Theory%20of%20MI.pdf, 2.

[25] Howard Gardner, "Multiple Intelligences in a Nutshell," (Harvard Graduate School of Education, Accessed on 21 October 2016), Available from http://www.pz.harvard.edu/sites/default/files/MI%20In%20a%20Nutshell.pdf, 9.

[26] The eight intelligences proposed are logical-mathematical, bodily-kinesthetic, visual-spatial, linguistic, musical, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and natural-environmental. Others have been proposed and evaluated, but not accepted with unanimity, such as emotional-intelligence, humor, mechanical, and spiritual. The former eight generally are agreed upon.

the group in order to create meaning in the strongest possible way for the individual. Certain elements of the debrief will engage students in lesser or greater ways, but the cumulative effect is greatest following a debrief.

A second education theory at work behind debriefing is the concept of constructivism.[27] Constructivism is a theory which began with Jean Piaget, the philosopher, but finds its experiential basis with Dewey: "The fundamental unity of the newer philosophy is found in the idea that there is an intimate and necessary relation between the processes of actual experience and education."[28] That people can construct meaning and learn from their experiences is the base reason for debriefing. Debriefing facilitates learning:

> Learning takes place when the brain sorts out patterns by using past experiences to help make sense out of the input that the brain receives. Recognition of patterns facilitates transfer of learning to new situations. Understanding concepts, behaviors, procedures, or skills result from perceiving relationships and linking what is being learned to the individuals past knowledge, current experience, and future needs and aspirations. […] Consequently, learning is viewed as an organic process of invention, rather than a mechanical process of accumulation. […] [Educators] help individuals put their own reasoning into words by raising questions and inviting them to share their opinions, solutions, reflections, and strategies with others.[29]

Every person is always a learner. From their experiences, consciously or unconsciously, they are creating meaning through processing, in the narrow sense. Since educators are helping individuals put their own reasoning into words and useable concepts, the quality of knowledge constructed is directly connected to the organization and intentionality of their debriefing— organized and intentional debriefing allows for knowledge to be constructed more effectively.

A third educational theory behind debriefing is the idea of praxis. Praxis is a multi-faceted philosophy which recurs in some form throughout history in Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, Dostoyevsky, Marx, etc. John Losey, a veteran experiential educator and program creator, defines praxis thus: "Praxis is a way of understanding the world, when, through reflection, what

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[27] It should be noted that there is a difference between constructivism and what may be called crass constructivism. The former asserts that students discover truth by building on what they know and experience. Crass constructivism asserts that, in the absence of truth, a person constructs whatever they want as truth, even if that knowledge is not logically consistent.

[28] Dewey, 20.

[29] Luckner and Nadler, 11, 14.

you do impacts how you think and how you think impacts what you do."[30] So, praxis is the cycle of the deliberate application of constructed knowledge after debriefing, and the debrief of the application of that knowledge which is then applied. Or, as Bown describes it: "Debrief until you puke, and then debrief that."[31] So, praxis is a cyclical theory, but not necessarily a cycle. An educator who understands praxis who will lead a group to reflect after an action, so that they can take another action. Kolb's four stage model, concrete experience, observation and reflection, formation of abstract concepts, and then testing the new concepts, is an example of praxis, where there is no beginning or end, but rather each previous action leads into the next action.

A modern example of praxis connected to debriefing is the Co-Constructed Developmental Teaching Theory[32], developed by two professors of education, Jeb Schenck and Jessie Cruickshank. The model proposes what they call a fractal spiral: "Similar patterns repeat at scales large and small but never repeat exactly. The patterns may appear to be cyclic, but actually oscillate and change phases. Slight changes in initial conditions can produce large changes later, the so-called 'butterfly effect'. These relationships can be visually expressed as fractal patterns."[33] Schenck and Cruickshank seek to update Kolb's model, which is over fifty years old, and bring the idea of praxis into congruence with modern science and psychology. In doing so they propose a six-stage model for debriefing that cycles through the same model without touching the same topics: framing, action, debriefing, pause, transference, and assimilation.[34] This model integrates into multiple intelligence and constructivist theory in this way:

> Learning is embodied, en-cultured, contextual, conscious as well as nonconscious, developmentally dependent, and dynamic. CDTT continues in the same vein of [constructivism]. It relies heavily on past and current life experiences of all participants (including the teacher) to facilitate instruction through the learning event. Those experiences are the foundation for the inherent feedback loops, which manifest both neurobiologically and psychologically. We conceive of learning as based on

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[30] John Losey, *Experiential Youth Ministry Handbook* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 18.

[31] Bown.

[32] This model serves as the primary basis for the Biblical Debriefing model discussed in the section of this paper called, The Harmony of Debriefing and Spiritual Growth, and demonstrated in Appendix A.

[33] Jeb Schenck and Jessie Cruickshank, "Evolving Kolb: Experiential Education in the Age of Neuroscience." *Journal of Experiential Education* 38 (Vol. I: 2015), 83.

[34] Ibid., 84.

relationships: between all parties in the room, the individual's relationship with themselves, the environment, with the context of learning, and relationships with the content.[35, 36]
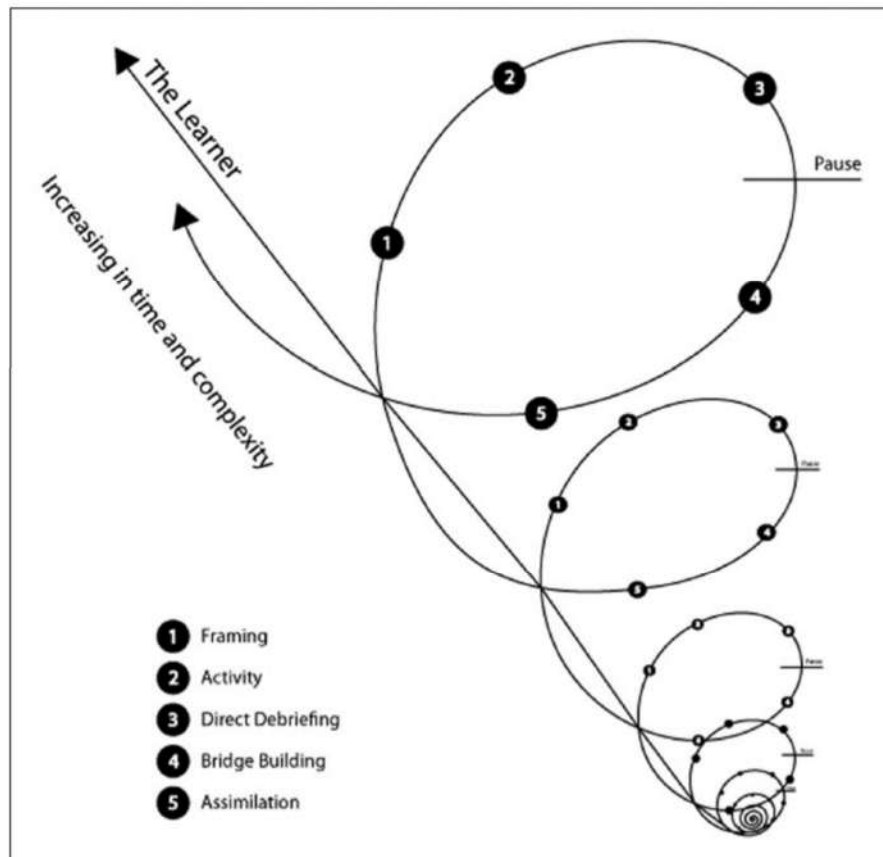
"Co-Constructed Developmental Teaching Theory." Schenck and Cruickshank, 84.

A fourth theory behind debriefing is educator disinvolvement. This theory proposes that the best way for learners to construct knowledge and apply praxis in their various contexts is by having progressively less facilitator involvement—shifting from authoritarian teaching to independent teaching. Simpson, Miller, and Bocher write: "The purpose of processing shifts away from making explicit predetermined goals and toward teaching people the skills for independent reflection, so when left to their own devices, they will process on their own."[37] The premise is, that because learners can construct their own knowledge from experience, an

[35] Ibid., 82.

[36] (Following Image) Ibid., 84.

[37] Simpson, Miller, and Bocher, 76.

educator is redundant. Though the quality and quantity of knowledge constructed is directly connected to the organization and intentionality of debriefing, that does not assume that the learner and facilitator can't be the same person. Though debriefing is usually a session of questions and answers between participants and a leader, that does not does not mean the participant cannot lead themselves with questions and answers. Simpson writes: "The ultimate goal of [facilitation] is to have the educator become unnecessary. […] In a perfect world, educators work themselves out of a job."[38]

For this reason, the purest form of debriefing, in terms of educator disinvolvement, is deliberate, independent reflection. Through independent reflection, a learner debriefs on their own, experiencing praxis by asking their own questions and determining their own applications, perfectly connecting their multiple intelligences with the constructed knowledge needed for the context. Susan Wise Bauer, professor at the College of William and Mary in Virginia, ties these thoughts together: "The goal of self-education is this: not merely to 'stuff' facts into your head, but to understand them. Incorporate them into your mental framework. Reflect on their meaning for the internal life. The 'external things' […] make us more conscious of our own reality and shape. This, not the mere accumulation, is the goal of self-education."[39]

A final piece of theory behind debriefing is a distinction between soft and hard thinking. The terms were coined by Roger von Oech who writes:

> Soft thinking […] is metaphorical, approximate, diffuse, humorous, playful, and capable of dealing with contradiction. Hard thinking, on the other hand, tends to be more logical, precise, exact, specific and consistent. We might say that hard thinking is like a spotlight. It is bright, clear, and intense, but the focus is narrow. Soft thinking is like a flood-light. It is more diffuse, not as intense, but covers a wider area.[40]

One could demonstrate the distinction with a session of brainstorming. When a person brainstorms, the first step is to collect ideas without evaluation. The ideas are written down and it is never asked if the idea is good or bad, worthy or unworthy, or even if it fits. That description fits the idea of soft thinking. The idea is simply to make connections, whatever they may be, without any restrictions. The next step in a brainstorm is hard thinking. The person will go back

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[38] Simpson, 42.

[39] Susan Wise Bauer, *The Well-Educated Mind* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2003), 36.

[40] Roger von Oech, *A Whack on the Side of the Head* (New York: Warner, 1990), 30.

through the thoughts they collected during soft thinking, and then eliminate and cull. During hard thinking, evaluation occurs. This distinction is difficult, but important. During a debrief, the thinking is usually soft, so that openness is maintained between members of the group, and so that ideas are not missed due to apprehension or evaluating too soon. A balance between soft thinking and hard thinking also allows the facilitator to orient his educator disinvolvement appropriately. More soft thinking allows the learners to lead where they need to go, and more hard thinking allows the facilitator to control what he needs to.

Debriefing in Practice

A debriefing session will take many forms, and they depend on three primary variables: the context, the facilitator, and the learners. A debriefing session on the side of a cliff will be different than a debriefing session in a classroom. A debriefing session on a cliff with a crowd of kindergarteners will be different than one with a church's lady's aid group. A debriefing session on a cliff side led by a kindergartener for a group of lady's aid members will be different still. All three variables will determine what sort of praxis takes place. Each and every effect of the variables pertaining to debriefing is too extensive for a paper of this nature, but a brief look into how debriefing is modeled will help the unfamiliar reader visualize how the history and theory discussed above is practiced.

Two debriefing models have been discussed above: the four-stage model of Kolb, and the six-stage model of Schenck and Cruickshank. The latter is an attempt to update Kolb's work and still engage with it. The most well-known models, which are discussed below, are based on the four-stage one Kolb instituted in some way. These common models are two examples a facilitator may follow when conducting a debrief. In addition to these models, a three-stage model is proposed by Jim Schoel, Dick Prouty, and Paul Radcliffe, authors of one of the most famous experiential education books, *Islands of Healing*. Their model involves the three tiers: The what? The so what? And the now what?[41,42] An analyzation of this model will see at its

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[41] Jim Schoel, Dick Prouty, and Paul Radcliffe, *Islands of Healing* (Hamilton, MA: Project Adventure, Inc., 1988), 170.

[42] This model seems to be mentioned earliest in *Islands of Healing*, but other authors use the same model without accrediting it to anyone, and still other authors say it was developed by Terri Borton, Kolb, Outward Bound, or others. Research indicates that this is the earliest reference, but it seems likely the model was developed and

foundation, reflection (in the narrow sense), the abstraction of concepts, and application, revealing a model very similar to Kolb's, but easier to remember. The model uses open questions to prevent answerers from becoming discouraged.

In a traditional debrief, after some sort of action, the facilitator would ask the participant or group, "What happened?" The idea is to begin reflection in the narrow sense. The action participants would describe what happened using soft thinking. This enables everyone in the group to be a part, since each experience is valid and unique. One group member may have seen something another hadn't. But, this time is primarily for reflection. The next question is not asked into a vacuum, but either the facilitator or the participants will choose something that happened and ask why it happened: "It is here that group members are abstracting and generalizing what they are learning from the experience."[43]

This approach takes the learner from the concrete, to the abstract, and then back to the concrete with the last tier. In the final stage, the group will apply the generalized knowledge, which is hopefully new, to their own context. Due to this model's simplicity, it is well known in the educational world.

Jacobson and Ruddy provide contrast to the models listed above and others:

Highly conceptual models […are] difficult for some to understand and challenging to master in a short period of time. The simplicity of Outward Bound's "What? So What? Now What?" and James Neill's "Do, Review, Plan" is appealing, but it is difficult to achieve a consistent application of the process by a variety of facilitators. Although they are easy to remember, the challenge remains of really addressing each learning stage involved in processing the experience. Often simple models fail to adequately address what we see as the critical interpretation stage, i.e., asking "What" then "Why" before moving to "So What?"[44]

To remedy the difficulties which they saw in the above systems, of being too complex and not engaging necessary areas of interpretation, they proposed their Five-Question Model: "1. Did

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spread prior to any of these writings, which is why so many make use of the model and no one really knows where it began.

[43] Ibid., 172.

[44] Jacobson and Ruddy, 17-18.

you notice…? 2. Why did that happen? 3. Does that happen in life? 4. Why does that happen? 5. How can you use that?"[45,46]

The model begins with and contains two closed questions which the authors see as forcing the learner into accountability: "Often, the opening questions in a debriefing process does not provide for or create the space for powerful learning. It can, in fact, be too big a question for the group to tackle first thing after an intensive experiential activity. […A closed-ended question] is easier for participants to answer than an open-ended, broader question."[47] The second question[48] is based on the initial commitment of the learner, and it asks them to interpret what they noticed and give the reasons something specifically happened. Up to this point, hard thinking has happened, but here soft thinking is engaged. This stage is easier because of the closed-ended, first question: "No matter how challenging the group, participants can barely resist trying to find meaning once they have committed to an observation."[49] The third question[48] is another closed-ended question that serves as the transition to question four, but also begins the process of abstraction and generalization. Question four[48] functions similarly to question two, but brings the interpretation into the context of the learner's life. The fifth question[48] requires the learner to apply their new knowledge to their life and soft think of ways to use the knowledge they have required.

The theory of multiple intelligences suggests that a standard question and answer period is not always adequate for every student. The debriefing model above and others also allow for activities, games, and forms of motion to be involved in place of any questions or tier.[50] In addition, many different models exist for debriefing, but the most popular ones have been discussed above as a helpful microcosm.

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[45] Ibid., 42.

[46] This model serves as the secondary basis for the Biblical Debriefing Model.

[47] Ibid., 48.

[48] 1. Did you notice…? 2. Why did that happen? 3. Does that happen in life? 4. Why does that happen? 5. How can you use that?

[49] Ibid., 52.

[50] Demonstrating these activities is outside the scope of this paper, but for the interested person, look into a human continuum, the memory go-round, a gestalt debrief, the whip, Chiji cards, modeling clay, portmanteaus, etc. An internet search for debrief activities would yield valuable variety for a debrief.

A final section should be used to describe independent reflection. It has been said above that in terms of educator disinvolvement that independent reflection is the purest form of debriefing. While most forms of debriefing include, at the least, a facilitator and a participant or group of participants, this does not preclude a person's ability to take on both those roles and debrief themselves in independent reflection.

The most common way this occurs is in the form of a journal. Journaling is covered in nearly every experiential education text book and is experimented with by nearly every educator. Luckner and Nadler write:

> Because of its active and personal nature, cognitive demands, and feedback characteristics writing makes possible unequaled forms of extended and involved thought. Journal writing creates situations that encourage reflection and explicitness, which often leads to a renewed awareness of a person's knowledge. Journal writing also promotes an awareness and possible clarification of feelings and emotions.[51]

Bauer describes keeping a journal as the first, true step of constructivism: "The first step toward understanding is to grasp exactly what is being said, and the oldest and most reliable way of grasping information is to put it into your own words. […] The journal is the place where this learning happens."[52] Another educator, Ramona Czer, describes praxis in her journaling: "To help me understand all of my thoughts and feelings, I turn to my journals. I pre-think what I mean. I confront issues I have strong feelings on, especially so that when time comes, I have something clearly thought out to express."[53] Journaling connects the theories of debriefing in a convenient way that anyone can use. The method comes very highly recommended by experiential educators, many of whom consider it a lost art, without which an educator is incomplete.[54]

A Biblical Perspective on Debriefing

To this point, the paper has discussed the history, theory and practice of debriefing in connection with the secular world. The study of debriefing and most of its implementation

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[51] Luckner and Nadler, 118.

[52] Bauer, 36-37.

[53] Ramona Czer, *The Tablet of My Heart* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1991), 17.

[54] Simpson, Miller, and Bocher, 125.

happens in universities by educators who are not Christians. As a result, some of the basic premises upon which experiential education theory are built carry baggage. This baggage can be described as humanist tendencies which are untenable to a Christian, so care must be taken. But, like many things which originate from the secular world, the entirety of the practice should not be thrown out. There are plenty of areas to find agreement.

Within the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, debriefing occurs at nearly every level from preschool to seminary. It happens at summer camps and youth rallies.[55] Since it is happening, and since it is some Lutherans value it, those elements of theory in dissonance with biblical doctrine should be examined. In addition, potential examples of debriefing from the Scriptures can also be analyzed in order to understand which principles are useable from a divine perspective. The opinion of the author is that debriefing is a neutral model that Christians can use, but the inherent baggage should not go unstudied.

Two main apparent contradictions exist between secular theory and biblical doctrine in connection with debriefing. Although finer distinctions may be made, acknowledging these two will clear up most discrepancies within the scope of this paper. The first issue is difference in belief about the nature of man, the second about truth and how a person can know it. As would be expected, there is some degree of difference in the main theorists concerning the nature of man, but this paper will explore the most common underlying principles. Dewey maintained that humans were neutral creatures who developed based on their experiences, abstracting knowledge which became habits, and from this the nature of an individual is demonstrated:

> Conflict of habits releases impulsive activities which in their manifestation require a modification of habit, of custom and convention. That which was at first the individualized color or quality of habitual activity is abstracted, and becomes a center of activity aiming to reconstruct customs in accord with some desire which is rejected by the immediate situation and which therefore is felt to belong to one's self, to be the mark and possession of an individual in partial and temporary opposition to his environment.[56]

A later proponent of critical pedagogy, a praxis-oriented education field, which may be called a cousin to experiential education, Paolo Freire describes this same concept in the context of

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[55] The author has personally experienced deliberate debriefing done at each of these examples and more.

[56] John Dewey, "Habit and Social Psychology," *Human Nature and Conduct: An Introduction to Social Psychology* (New York: Modern Library, 1922), 87.

racism: "The perversity of racism is not inherent to the nature of human beings. We *are* not racist; we *become* racist just as we may stop being that way."[57]

The idea inherent in the theories of constructivism, praxis, educator disinvolvement, and multiple intelligences to some degree is that humans have no orientation toward good or evil, and that actions themselves have no orientation. What matters is the results of a person's actions. A further difficulty is that these theories are couched within humanism which asserts that human beings are basically good. What a person learns and does is morally neutral or good in a vacuum. A person then is a combination of their genetics and environment, none of which can be asserted as intrinsically good or bad too dogmatically. But, a person and their actions can be said to become good or bad, depending on the context. This latter view is the basis of education according to Dewey: "If human nature is unchangeable, then there is no such thing as education and all our efforts to educate are doomed to failure. For the very meaning of education is modification of native human nature in formation of those new ways of thinking, of feeling, of desiring, and of believing that are foreign to raw human nature."[58]

These ideas are seen inherent in the theories that make up secular debriefing. For example, constructivism, in teaching that humans are able to create knowledge out of their experiences, also asserts that the knowledge created has no inherent goodness or evil outside of a societal context: "The holistic nature of the learning process means that it operates at all levels of human society from the individual, to the group, to organizations and to society as a whole."[59] It is that whole which determines the moral value.

Praxis teaches that human beings begin neutral, but through constructed knowledge lean toward goodness: "[Change for the better] is achieved with neither verbalism nor activism, but rather with praxis, that is, with reflection and action directed at the structures to be transformed."[60] Educator disinvolvement theory suggests that humans should create their own

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[57] Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Heart* (New York: Continuum Publishing Company, 1997), 85. Emphasis original.

[58] John Dewey, *Problems of Men* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1946) 394.

[59] Angela Passareli and David Kolb, "The Learning Way—Learning from Experience as the Path to Lifelong Learning and Development," *The Oxford Handbook of Lifelong Learning* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 74.

[60] Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy for the Oppressed* (New York: Continuum Publishing Company, 1970), 126.

structures for learning independent of each other in order to meet their immediate context: "With predetermined outcomes, parameters, and standardization, there is less of a chance of experiential education affecting no change, but there is also less of a chance that life-altering change will occur."[61] None of these quotes stands out as immediately and obviously objectionable from a human standpoint. But, each of these theories presumes that humans are neutral, that their knowledge and actions are neutral, and that it is likely they will seek improvement in their lives as opposed to destruction.

The Bible takes a definite stance on the state of man in this world. It teaches that natural human beings are not neutral, with an inclination for good, but rather that humans have original sin and concupiscence. Original sin is taught when King David writes: "Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me" (Ps 51:5).[62] This original sin infects their entire nature and controls their actions and thoughts: "All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath" (Eph 2:3). This means that the thoughts and actions of natural humans are sinful and evil, that they are inclined toward evil. This is called concupiscence: "The LORD saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time" (Ge 6:5). This distinction between secular theory and Biblical doctrine is helpful for the Christian who defines what is good and evil according the Bible. A secular theorist will care little for the designation.

The main importance of this distinction is a proper understanding of the presuppositions of the differences in goal between secular and Christian debriefing. This distinction does not deny the fact that order and civilization exist in the world, but rather predicates the existence of those things on sinful desires within man, rather than a desire for innate goodness. Man cannot know or do good apart from God: "Without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him" (He 11:6). There exists a different understanding of what is good between secular theorists and the Scriptures. This difference has been called the distinction between civic righteousness and spiritual righteousness:

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[61] Simpson, 47.

[62] All Scripture passages are taken from the NIV 2011 unless otherwise noted.

Because human nature has been left with reason and judgment about objects subjected to the sense, choice between these things, the liberty and power to produce [civil] righteousness are also left. Scripture calls this the righteousness of the flesh, which the carnal nature (that is, reason) produces by itself, without the Holy Spirit. However, the power of [concupiscence] is such that people more often obey evil inclinations than sound judgment.[63]

What secular theorists describe as "good" is civic righteousness, a righteousness that is worked apart from God, and is not inherently good, but bears the appearance of good without its essence: "They did not know the righteousness of God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness" (Ro 10:3). This civic righteousness is the goal secular facilitators will strive to attain in debriefing. Christians can agree that civic righteousness is preferable to chaos and anarchy, but it is not the primary righteousness they strive for.

This difference is the first one to be noted between biblical doctrine and the theories of the secularists, that the secularists strive for civic righteousness, which they believe is possible for humans to exhibit because of their supposedly original neutral state. Christians are declared righteous and do righteous acts which flow from faith in Christ. This realization does not negate the benefits of debriefing for the Christian, but rather this apparent inconsistency can be reconciled. A secular debriefer will lead learners to grasp how they may improve their community, bring about social justice, or improve their own state. A Christian debriefer will lead learners to grasp why they can trust Christ more, how they can grow in the knowledge of the Scriptures, and use Scripture to motivate them to fruits of faith. The distinction between civic and spiritual righteousness will lead the debriefer to acknowledge a change in purpose—a Christian facilitator strives for spiritual growth in sanctification, rather than civic righteousness.[64] A proper understanding for the Christian of the difference between how the view of natural man and its result in educational theory intimates a different goal will lead the Christian to see the continual benefit of debriefing.

A second inconsistency exists which is a basic tenet of constructivism. The theory asserts that humans can construct knowledge from their own experiences, as examined above. Christian

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[63] Ap XVII:70-71, Paul Timothy McCain, ed. *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006).

[64] This is not to say that those things accomplished as civic righteousness should be avoided by Christians. Christians can partake in those things which help their community, bring about social justice, and improve their own state, but these are seen as fruits of faith flowing from love for God and neighbor.

will be cautious with such a thought, though, since knowledge exists which cannot be constructed from human experiences. Another distinction is helpful here, the distinction between the natural and revealed knowledge of God. Some knowledge of God can be constructed through observation of creation: "The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they reveal knowledge. They have no speech, they use no words; no sound is heard from them" (Ps 19:1-3).[65] Reflection, in the narrow sense, on creation can lead a person to understand that there is a God who created everything and that he is powerful. As humans reflect on thoughts, words, and actions, the man's conscience can lead a person to understand that there is a God who is perfect and demands the same from them: "Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them" (Ro 1:32). The natural knowledge of God cannot convert a person, instead it will always leave them in despair: "Since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse" (Ro 1:20).

This is as far as constructed knowledge can take natural man. A Christian should be aware of this limit when they debrief, because spiritual growth only comes through the revealed knowledge of God.[66] In addition, God cannot be fully known in creation because he is a hidden God: "But if I go to the east, he is not there; if I go to the west, I do not find him. When he is at work in the north, I do not see him; when he turns to the south, I catch no glimpse of him" (Job 23:8-9). The revealed knowledge of God is his revelation given through the Scriptures which is the way he chooses to make himself known, especially through Jesus Christ: "In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son" (Heb 1:1-2). This revealed knowledge of God cannot be constructed, because God cannot be experienced outside of the means of grace: "In the Scriptures, God tells us things we don't know on our own, things we can't know on our own, and

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[65] This knowledge is especially helpful for experiential education which often takes place outdoors.

[66] This proposition will be examined in the next section.

things we must know."[67] The natural knowledge of God can lead to the realization that there is a God, but not the revelation of who God is.

There is some disagreement to this last point among Christians. Some Christians assert that God can be experienced and known outside of his creation. For example, one popular, Evangelical author, Michael Kaylor, writes about his own encounters: "[They are] experiences which literally brought you to a place in Heaven where God Himself spoke to you with a voice so pure it transformed."[68] In contrast, Bryan Wolfmueller, a pastor and regarded presenter, writes: "Mysticism is the religious practice that puts people in motion toward the internal and direct experience of the presence of God. [...] Mysticism assumes the capacity of the human soul to come into direct contact with divinity. The goal of mysticism is that mysterious direct contact: touching God."[69] But, a Christian cannot know objectively if they are experiencing God, or something else, for the devil "himself masquerades as an angel of light" (1 Co 11:14). Rightly, Martin Luther warns against this mysticism, since God's Word comes *extra nos*, from outside us: "We should and must insist that God does not want to deal with us human beings, except by means of his external Word and sacrament. Everything that boasts of being from the Spirit apart from such a Word and sacrament is of the devil."[70]

A tangential point to this inconsistency between secular theory and biblical doctrine is a recognition of where the knowledge of God comes from. Constructivism asserts that knowledge is created internally: "Learning is not simply the taking in of new information as it exists externally [....] Learning does not occur by transmission."[71] So, it follows that knowledge of God would be also constructed internally, even with the impossibility of experiencing God. Some Christians may see no problem with this assertion. This teaching has been called enthusiasm. For example, one Christian writer and educational trip leader writes: "I've never had

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[67] Bryan Wolfmueller, *Has American Christianity Failed?* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2016), 39.

[68] Michael Kaylor, *The Adventures in Supernatural Discovery: A Handbook on Receiving Divine Encounters* (Shinnesburg: Destiny Image, Inc., 2013), [Kindle Edition], Location 175.

[69] Wolfmueller, 18.

[70] SA XII:10.

[71] Luckner and Nadler, 13-14.

the desire to shave my head. God put the thought in my head this summer before my sister's wedding. […] God wanted it all gone."[72]

Some Christians believe that spiritual life is purely internal, excluding what happens outside of them: "We can think of such inner changes as 'spiritual' changes. By 'spiritual' I mean simply the nonphysical part of human life—our internal life."[73] It is an important recognition for Christians that God chooses to work through his means of grace to give them knowledge about him, and these are external features, rather than internal ones. God comes to people externally: "The Holy Spirit works through words. The Holy Spirit talks. And this talking is not inside of us. The Holy Spirit does not communicate through secrets. He teaches by the Word of God. We hear the words of the Holy Spirit when we hear the Scriptures read and preached."[74] That being said, the notable difference is that Christians in debrief will not seek to create their own meaning from God's Word, but the Spirit through the Word creates the meaning for them in a manner consistent with his Word.

The remedy to this apparent inconsistency is that a Christian will include the means of grace when they debrief. Most often, this will take the form of a Biblical truth, as is reflected in the Biblical Debriefing Model. But, the Lord's Supper can be debriefed. A baby's baptism can be debriefed (by the parents). A sermon can be debriefed, etc. A Christian will want to make their use of Scripture a deliberate part of their praxis. In addition to this, although constructivism usually relies on experiential learning, rather than transmissional learning, such as lectures, narratives, and readings, many experiential educators advocate including stories and quotations in debriefs: "Readings can also be used as part of the Debriefing process. Readings from […] famous people, writers, and the like, or from your own journal or those of former participants, aid in building a sense of value about the endeavor."[75]

These writings are the action, but not primary action. They are the action of experiential education through a lens—a secondary experience. These secondary experiences are not as

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[72] Elizabeth Nettleton, "More than a Mission Trip," *The World Race*, accessed on 30 November 2016. Available from http://elizabethnettleton.theworldrace.org/post/im-new-creationand-i-shaved-my-head-yeah-right.

[73] R. Robert Creech, "How Can I Grow Spirituall?" *Explore God*, accessed on 3 December 2016. Available from http://www.exploregod.com/how-can-i-grow-spiritually.

[74] Wolfmueller, 123.

[75] Schoel, Prouty and Radcliffe, 149.

powerful as primary ones, but can exist as experiential action. One research team in describing how lectures may be experiential writes:

> Experiential educators attempt to create a learning environment where the material under consideration is directly relevant to the learner. Students must be convinced that the question under investigation is important, meaningful, and real. *Something of value, to the students, must be at stake*. […] If lecturers were to consider the past experiences of their learners, make efforts to connect the lesson to the learners' present realities, and make obvious the relevancy of the topic to the learners' future, a lecture could be experiential in nature.[76]

An easy connection is made from readings and lectures to Bible passages and stories in debriefing. The Scriptures can be the prior action to construct knowledge through debriefing. Another author suggests: "Singing the music is a good way to experience the hopes and fear of a bygone era."[77] One could even assert an experiential component to the psalms and Lutheran hymns.

For example, one morning a group of teachers from a Lutheran elementary school came to morning devotion at Camp Phillip. Usually, this would happen just before breakfast in the dining hall, but today they came out and sat on the grass in front of a campfire. The campfire had bread and fish cooking on a rock next to it. The devotion was from the account when Jesus restores Peter. Near the beginning of the account, Peter and the other apostles find Jesus on the shore, cooking bread and fish. The teachers made the connection when the account was read from the setting in the Gospel to their own, and it made the debriefing after the text was read more meaningful. They considered the questions: "When had they, like Peter, struggled with denying the Lord in one part of their life, so that they could not effectively teach? Why did they need Christ to restore them, also?" The action that morning was secondary; all they did was sit and listen. But, the experience was still powerful, in an objective way because Christ was present through his Word, but also in a subjective way for each person who lived through Peter's eyes.

Other minor, apparent inconsistencies exist that can be easily harmonized. Yet, one aspect of the educational theory in connection with God's word deserves to be praised. Multiple

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[76] Sean Blenkinsop, Carrie Nolan, Jasper Hunt, Paul Stonehouse, and John Telford, "The Lecture as Experiential Education: The Cucumber in 17th-Century Flemish Art," *Journal of Experiential Education* 39 (Vol. 2:2016), 109. [Emphasis added.]

[77] Adolf Crew, James Brown, and Joyce Lackie, "Experiencing History," *Journal of Experiential Education* 29 (Vol. I: 1978), 30.

intelligence theory, constructivism, praxis, and educator disinvolvement theory, used as servants of God's Word, provide a powerful witness to the principle of *sola Scriptura,* the perspicuity of the Bible and the power of the Word: "Allowing opportunities for reflection requires faith that God is truly in control of learning. Reflection gives the Holy Spirit an opening to touch the lives of students. Reflection also encourages students to develop relationships with God independent of their relationships with […] pastors and peer groups."[78] Debriefing is an opportunity for Christian leaders to let others make God's Word their own, trusting that the Spirit will teach the learner how his Word applies to their context—unique lessons for unique action. Christian debriefing gives control of the praxis and constructivism to the Holy Spirit, so that a human facilitator is unneeded, since God is the best teacher.

It is possible to see elements of debriefing in the Bible. Several examples could be given, but the few examined below will suffice. During interviews with this paper's author, one example of debriefing stood out.[79,80,81,82] After David's sin with Bathsheba, the prophet Nathan comes and debriefs him:

> There were two men in a certain town, one rich and the other poor. The rich man had a very large number of sheep and cattle, but the poor man had nothing except one little ewe lamb he had bought. He raised it, and it grew up with him and his children. It shared his food, drank from his cup and even slept in his arms. It was like a daughter to him. Now a traveler came to the rich man, but the rich man refrained from taking one of his own sheep or cattle to prepare a meal for the traveler who had come to him. Instead, he took the ewe lamb that belonged to the poor man and prepared it for the one who had come to him. (2 Sa 12:1-4)

Nathan's debrief takes the form of an isomorphic metaphor. Stephen Bacon, a leader in Outward Bound, writes about this type of metaphor:

> Isomorphism means having the same structure. When all the major elements in one experience are represented by corresponding elements in another experience, and when the overall structure of the two experiences is highly similar, then the two experiences are metaphors for each other. This does not imply that the corresponding elements are

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[78] Losey, 24.

[79] Bown.

[80] Dan Teuteberg (Assistant Professor at the University of Washington), in interview with author. November 2016.

[81] Shinnick.

[82] This account was suggested by each of the mentioned interviewees.

literally identical; rather they must be symbolically identical. […] *In profoundly isomorphic metaphors, the student will be living two realities simultaneously*.[83]

Nathan's metaphor is highly isometric. Losey explains this way: "When Nathan reveals the deeds of the rich man, David explodes with anger. He has lost himself in his own childhood experience and allows his true self to come to the surface. David the Shepherd speaks to David the King. The shepherd felt the pain and loss of the poor man; the king had the power to do something about it."[84]

The underlying theories of debriefing are at work in this story. According to multiple intelligence theory, Nathan gave David a story that the poet king could connect with. According to constructivism, Nathan did not simply tell David what he should do, but rather let him construct his own realization. According to praxis, David's reflection led him to repentance. According to educator disinvolvement, Nathan's role was minimal after the story. He simply says, "You are the man." Not every Biblical example demonstrates every debriefing theory this well, but it is important to see the methods, and even some models, are not precluded by the Scriptures. In fact, a law and gospel debrief like this one is highly encouraged.

Jesus also used elements of debriefing during his ministry on earth. Again, there are numerous examples, but a prime one is found just before Peter confesses Jesus is the Christ:

> When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?" They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets." "But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?" Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." (Mt 16:13-16)

Jesus is recognized as the Christ and the Son of God by his disciples. In this case, the action was more general, the entire ministry of Christ to this point and all the disciples had seen. It's amazing that Jesus can debrief so much information with three simple questions. The first question asked the disciples to use soft thinking to collect what they had observed. The second question asked them to use hard thinking to generalize the information as God constructed the meaning through the Word. Jesus even points out this last fact: "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven" (Mt

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[83] Stephen Bacon, *The Conscious Use of Metaphor in Outward Bound* (Denver: The Type-Smith of Colorado, Inc., 1983), 4, 9. Emphasis original.

[84] Losey, 30.

16:17). In this case, Jesus provides the application for them as well: "he ordered his disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah" (Mt. 16:20).

Evidence of praxis is seen, too. Even though the disciples were instructed to remain silent before others, Jesus began to lead them to reflect on what he would do: "From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life" (Mt. 16:21).[85]

Biblical Description of Spiritual Growth

Because the term "spiritual growth" is a basic conceptual metaphor, it is a phrase that needs defining, but it is a slippery term to nail down. This occurs for three main reasons. First, the Bible never uses the term. Second, the term is not used with the same definition among Christians. Third, the term is not widely used by dogmaticians.

To the first point, it is more clear what is meant by "spiritual." Paul speaks about those who are not spiritual in this way: "The person without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God but considers them foolishness, and cannot understand them because they are discerned only through the Spirit" (1 Co 2:14). Conversely, those who are spiritual, those who have the Holy Spirit, understand those things that come from God. So, spiritual growth has something to do with the effect of the Holy Spirit on a believer.

In a similar fashion, the concept of a Christian growing in some way is demonstrated in the Scriptures. For example, Peter mentions types of growth: "Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind. Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good," (1 Pe 2:2) and, "Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Pe 3:18). Paul also speaks of growing in 2 Thessalonians 1:3. In addition to these explicit references, the Bible also speaks of a spiritual process of increase. For example, Luke quotes the apostles as saying, "Increase our faith" (Lu 17:5). Paul writes, "May the Lord

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[85] Read on in Mt 16 to see Peter's reaction to this knowledge as an example of why facilitator disinvolvement is crucial, but only to a certain point. Jesus knew that Peter needed more guiding after he rebukes him. That Peter eventually comes to more fully understand who Jesus is shows in the difference between this account compared with Peter's sermon on Pentecost.

make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you" (1 Th 3:12).

Scripture also speaks of believers reaching maturity. For example, Paul writes, "Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ" (Eph 4:11-13). The writer to the Hebrews and James mention similar concepts.[86],[87]

Lastly, the Scriptures speak of the strengthening of faith. Paul writes: "[Abraham] did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised" (Ro 4:20-21). A thorough, exegetical analysis of every passage using spiritual growth terminology is not included since it is outside the scope of this paper. Nevertheless, what the Scriptures mean when they describe the term is vital. A brief study of the passages will reveal that Scripture does not just use the concept of progressing, increasing, growing, etc. in a single way. But, Scripture describes growth in areas of increased faith in Christ, knowledge of Scripture and sanctification. Since these are areas in which the Holy Spirit works, they are certainly spiritual and describe spiritual growth. Based on the Scriptural descriptions, the paper will continue with this definition for spiritual growth (unless otherwise stated): Spiritual growth is the process in which the whole Christian or group of Christians is bettered, specifically regarding knowledge about God, trust in Christ, or fruits of faith.

To the second point, the term, "spiritual growth," though widely used, is not usually defined. Many using the phrase assume that the hearer understands the term implicitly, which can make speaking about the topic confusing (not to mention quoting it in a paper). One author writes: "Spiritual growth is a life-long process of manifesting the acts of the flesh less and less and producing the fruit of the Spirit more and more."[88] This use of the phrase here seems to

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[86] He 5:14

[87] Ja 1:4

[88] "Spiritual Growth," All About God. Accessed on 10 November 2016. URL:<http://www.allaboutgod.com/spiritual-growth.htm>

preclude an idea of trust or increasing knowledge while focusing on outward works produced by faith. Another use seems to exclude trust and works, but focuses on knowledge: "The expedition encouraged spiritual growth by drawing parallels between the informants' wilderness experiences, […] and the wilderness experiences portrayed in the Bible."[89]

Still other authors seem to imply that spiritual growth is primarily a matter of trust: "To turn to the Lord for help in times of pressure and to experience his power to help us leads to spiritual growth."[90] In addition to these single-faceted responses, some authors compound ideas from Scripture when they use the phrase. Nevertheless, because the term does not see use in Scripture, an author is free to use whatever definition seems best to them, so long as it is understood by their reader.[91] Lastly, to the third point, a reading of many dogmatic textbooks will reveal that the term "spiritual growth" is used in passing, but usually not at all.[92] For the above reasons, the term does not enjoy a common definition.

There are some ideas which the phrase "spiritual growth" may imply which are not meant when the term is used. The phrase can theoretically be understood to mean that a person's soul or spirit enlarges in some way. Yet, Scripture does not speak that way, and within Christendom that use is not found. In addition, it could be understood as meaning the sprouting of many souls, as a farmer sows a field and sprouts crops. While Scripture does use agricultural metaphors, the term is not meant to connect to that sort of growing, but rather to a metaphor of maturation.

The term also does not, and cannot describe progress or degrees of justification, as if a person can grow to be more justified. That idea is not true of the God of grace. Such an idea is inherently works-righteous, but some Christians teach it or something similar: "Once you have supernatural life, once sanctifying grace is in your soul, you can increase it by every supernaturally good action you do: receiving Communion, saying prayers, performing the

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[89] Brad Daniel, "The Life Significance of a Spiritually Oriented, Outward Bound-Type Wilderness Expedition," *Journal of Experiential Education* 29 (September, 2007): 388.

[90] Irwin Habeck, "Fostering Spiritual Growth for the Pastor and His Family." *Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Essay File*, accessed 10 November 2016, Available from http://essays.wls.wels.net/bitstream/handle/123456789/1960/HabeckGrowth.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y.

[91] This is not to say that the terms "spiritual" and "growth" can be redefined to mean something other than what Scripture means, but rather that a person can use the term, "spiritual growth," in a way that is as narrow or broad as they desire. Nevertheless, it is good practice to define most terms before using them.

[92] The term is not treated in the WLS Dogmatics Notes, Pieper's *Christian Dogmatics*, Grudem's *Systematic Theology*, Brunner's *Christian Doctrine*, nor Braaten & Jensen's *Christian Dogmatics*.

corporal works of mercy."[93] In contrast, one author states the following: "While justification is complete and therefore admits of no degrees, sanctification, on account of the remaining sinfulness of the flesh is never complete, or perfect, in this life, but gradual and susceptible of constant growth."[94]

Since spiritual growth seeks to increase knowledge of God, trust in Christ, or fruits of faith, it can only come through the means of grace. The means of grace are the instruments by which God conveys his undeserved love to a person to create and sustain faith. Three items meet those criteria. First, the Word of God accomplishes this: "Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ" (Ro 10:17). One author sums up this fact in this way: "[God] interrupts the sinner with the gospel proclamation of forgiveness, life, and salvation by grace on account of the work of Christ, through faith alone. The Holy Spirit uses that message to convert."[95] Second, baptism saves and imparts regeneration and renewal: "He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit" (Ti 3:5). The grace offered in baptism is the same grace offered through the word of the gospel, and if that grace regenerates and renews, then it creates and sustains faith. Third, the Lord's Supper also imparts the forgiveness of sins: "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins." (Mt 26:28). Because it offers the forgiveness of sins, the Lord's Supper is also a means of grace.

The term, "means of grace," is a useful concept for teaching how God has chosen to work on earth, but it is another term that does not occur in the Bible. As with spiritual growth, a person may disagree about the definition, or use a different one, for both terms. But regardless, knowledge of God's will, trust in Christ, and fruits of faith, only occur through the Word of God, or in Baptism and the Lord's Supper, whether you call it spiritual growth or not, and whether you call them the means of grace or not.

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[93] Robert Brom, "Grace: What It Is and What It Does." *Catholic Answers*, accessed on 10 November 2016. URL: < http://www.catholic.com/tracts/grace-what-it-is-and-what-it-does>

[94] John Mueller, *Christian Dogmatics* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1934), 396.

[95] Daniel Deutschlander, *Grace Abounds* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 2015), 389.

First, knowledge of God's will is only increased through the means of grace because it is through the means of grace that God's revelation of the gospel comes to humans.[96] Apart from the Word, man cannot know anything of Christ's salvific work or many other mysteries God reveals therein. Instead they can only know God's power, glory, and wrath against sin: "For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen. […] Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things" (Ro 1:21,30). In the gospel, the knowledge of salvation, God's promises, and motivation to live a holy life are made known: "From infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness" (2 Ti 3:15-16). The sacraments also increase the knowledge of a Christian by retaining and applying God's promises.

Second, the means of grace bring about spiritual growth by strengthening a person's trust in Christ and his promises. The means of grace are not just information; the means of grace have inherent power: "For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart" (Heb 4:12). By this power, God creates and strengthens the trust of a Christian in his promises. The Word of God points a person to Christ their Savior somehow, every time they hear it, since these are the Scriptures that testify about him. Baptism is a daily source of power that gives God's grace. The Lord's Supper increases trust by personalizing the forgiveness of sins offered to the communicant. This trust in Christ can come through no other means than the ones above, and even when another way is suggested, it is usually the Word in some less obvious form: "Written or heard, spoken or sung, remembered in an instant or pondered in an hour, so long as the message is rooted, grounded, and in accord with the Scriptures, it is the same gospel."[97] Thus, it is God who "through the means of grace actually

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[96] The natural knowledge of God that comes through things such as creation and the conscience are forms of revelation given to man, but they do not create faith, since they do not communicate the gospel. They also may increase a person's knowledge, but only to a point. There is a terminal limit to the knowledge available through natural revelation.

[97] Deuschlander, 414.

works, strengthens, and preserves in the hearts of men a living faith in the gracious forgiveness of their sins, so that they are converted, justified, sanctified, and finally glorified."[98]

Third it is also only through the means of grace that fruits of faith are produced. This is primarily a matter of motivation. Fruits of faith can only be produced by those who have faith, and faith can only be produced by the means of grace. The power and motivation to produce the fruit comes only through grace. Consider how Paul motivates by pointing to God's mercy: "Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship" (Ro 12:1). The sacraments also give this motivation by applying God's mercy to the sinner. Baptism is a daily reminder that a person has been "buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life" (Ro 6:4). The Lord's Supper works similarly by giving the forgiveness of sins to the believer and leading them to lead a life of thanks.

Martin Luther once wrote: "This life is not righteousness, but growth in righteousness; not health, but healing; not being, but becoming; not rest, but exercise. We are not yet what we shall be, but we are growing toward it; the process is not yet finished, but it is going on; this is not the end, but it is the road; all does not yet gleam with glory, but all is being purified."[99] Luther comes very close to describing spiritual growth as it has been taught above, and his point is true. The life of a Christian is one of spiritual growth. As Christians study the Scriptures and increase their knowledge of what God says and of his promises, as they receive the means of grace, so that their trust in Christ grows and grows, they produce fruits of faith, good works done out of faith, motivated by the grace God gives. This is a process that will continue throughout a Christian's entire life until they reach perfection in heaven.

One helpful distinction to make is between what spiritual growth is and how it reveals itself in a Christian's life. The nature of spiritual growth as it is treated in this paper has been discussed above, but how it reveals itself is important to note. Often those who speak about spiritual growth describe it according to its results, rather than describing what they see as its essence. For example, Bown describes spiritual growth:

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[98] Mueller, 441.

[99] Quoted in Mueller, 389.

Spiritual growth ultimately boiled down would be becoming more like Christ. You can take someone who has been struggling with this certain sin, [like lying….] But now, they are taking steps in their lives to work at honesty, or something like that. That to me would be spiritual growth. They are doing it rooted in this belief that honesty is good and lying is bad. That God is good, and his commands to be honest to tell the truth, and not to lie, are good. They're stepping closer to being like Christ by working on being honest. So, that would be growth. Then, spiritual growth would also be in their faith. Jesus had faith in God the Father, praying to him, "Your will be done." […] We're striving to be like Jesus. Spiritual growth would also include growing in your faith, your knowledge of the Christ, your trust in him, your belief in him and in God. That's how I would simply define it—becoming more like Christ is spiritual growth.[100]

The connection from the elements of spiritual growth to being like Christ is also made in the Scriptures: "Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ" (1 Co 11:1 ESV). Paul advocates that Christians become more like Christ, just as he does. This concept does not reduce Christ to a mere example to follow, but recognizes that Christ does set an example for us by his perfect life. Perfection's paradigm is Christ, and Christians should strive for perfection: "Therefore, since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God" (2 Co 7:11).

Though this perfection is our goal, it is an unattainable goal outside of Christ: "If perfection could have been attained through the Levitical priesthood—and indeed the law given to the people established that priesthood—why was there still need for another priest to come, one in the order of Melchizedek, not in the order of Aaron?" (Heb 7:11). For this reason, another mark of spiritual growth is repentance, hating sin, and trusting Christ for forgiveness. Paul describes the struggle this creates in a Christian's life:

So I find this law at work: Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death? Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord! (Ro 7:21-24)

A Christian cannot attain perfection on their own, but by faith in Christ a Christian is counted as perfect for Jesus's sake. A Christian follows Christ's example, not in order to be saved, but in order to honor and thank Christ with their whole being: "Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be

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[100] Bown.

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transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will" (Ro 12:1-2). Prof. em. Forrest Bivens of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary summarizes this teaching thus: "Spiritual growth and training in righteousness is God's will for all his people, for all are reckoned to be like Christ in their justified state and all are called to behave like Christ in their accompanying sanctification."[101]

It is worth pointing out that spiritual growth comes only through the means of grace to avoid the errors mentioned above—mysticism and enthusiasm. Each of these errors assert that spiritual growth can come about in another way than in the means of grace, either by asserting that God gives grace in other ways, as mysticism does, or without the external word and sacraments, as enthusiasm does. The two errors tend to come together, so that true spiritual growth is hindered by seeking the power to grow from sources it does not come:

> God speaks to us directly from his Spirit to our spirit. The Holy Spirit is a vocal God. He longs for us to know his thoughts. He longs to direct us whether it be through words, a sense, a desire, an uneasiness, or a prompting. He is always speaking to us. […] Open your heart to hearing him through any and every way he is speaking that you might grow in your relationship with a good and loving God.[102]

The quoted writer, Craig Dennison, writes a popular devotional meant for the first fifteen minutes of every day. His words mean to guide the reader to spiritual growth, but he guides away from the objective, external Word of God and to the subjective, speculative internal workings of a person—the dangers of which are discussed above. A Christian eager to teach true spiritual growth will not, however, deny the importance of the inner life, but rather will understand the relationship between it and the external means of grace:

> It remained unshakably true that the more external the foundations of salvation, the more internal were its results. To the very degree that the objective promises of God in Christ were stressed, to that degree the subjective fruits of the gospel increase in the Christian life. […] Rather than deny the validity of religious feeling, however, Lutherans can show how these feelings are the natural outcome of a faith based on the objective promises of God.[103]

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[101] Forrest Bivens, "Spiritual Renewal As Expressed In The Christian's Life," *Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Essay File*, accessed 17 November 2016, available from http://essays.wls.wels.net/bitstream/handle/123456789/518/BivensSpiritual.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y.

[102] Craig Dennison, "The Experience of His Voice," *First 15*, accessed on 28 November 2016, available from https://www.first15.org/11/28/the-experience-of-his-voice/.

[103] Harold L. Senkbiel, *Sanctification: Christ in Action* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1989), 116-117.

Those seeking spiritual growth, especially to facilitate that growth through debriefing, will use the Word of God as an integral part of the process.

Debriefing and Spiritual Growth

Debriefing is when the cognitive mechanism by which a person discovers abstract principles from a concrete experience which can be applied to other situations in life is engaged through the deliberate asking of purposeful questions and answers. Debriefing does not happen in a vacuum, and the assumption of the theories behind it is that those who debrief grow, that the goal of debriefing is growth: "Processing enhances the richness of the experience, so it stands out and apart, like the important lines of a page underlined with a yellow highlighter. These unique learnings then can be used again and generalized to other settings. When a new experience is processed, integrated, and internalized, individuals grow."[104] Bown agrees: "[Debriefing is] taking an event or an activity and reflecting on it, connecting it with what people were thinking or feeling, as a means to help them grow in some capacity."[105]

Theories on human development postulate four areas a person may grow in: physical, cognitive, emotional, and social.[106] Secular facilitators will seek growth likely in one of the latter three areas. A Christian can add a fifth area of development, one unique to Christians, a new nature created by God: "Put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness" (Eph 4:24). The believer can grow and develop spiritually, as we have already seen. So, if what debriefing strives for is growth, what Biblical debriefing strives for is spiritual growth.

To serve as a model and paradigm for understanding debriefing from a biblical perspective, the Biblical Debriefing Model (BDM) has been created.[107] BDM seeks to accomplish three criteria: first, to reflect current and useful educational theory; second, to hold in high regard the work of the Holy Spirit through the Word of God; third, to provide complexity without complication, and simplicity without being simplistic.

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[104] Luckner and Nadler, 10.

[105] Bown.

[106] Cf. Erik Erikson, *Childhood and Society* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1950).

[107] See appendix A.

To the first criterion, the model is derived from three primary sources, "Evolving Kolb: Experiential Education in the Age of Neuroscience," by Schenck and Cruickshank[29], *Open to Outcome* by Jacobsen and Ruddy,[4] and the debriefing experiences of the author. Each of the written resources present a modern and updated model for debriefing. To the second criterion, and since neither of the aforementioned models make use of God's Word, BDM includes using the concept of a Biblical truth. The Biblical truth can come in a number of forms. It can be a passage taken from the Scriptures, a Biblical story, a doctrine, Bible history, etc. This allows the experience and knowledge of each Christian involved in the debrief to be shared and used. To the third criterion, the model has five phases which represent themselves in five steps. These five steps enable it for ready us, easy memorization, and effective use that grows with practice and experience.

The five phases of the model are anchored in orthodox, Biblical teaching, and current educational theory. They are spiritual framing, penitential interpretation, theocentric bridging, sanctified assimilation, and independent mediation. These phases can also be summarized in a five-step model: Look here, look back, look out, look ahead, and look into, as seen in the graphic below. This model can be visualized as a person looking at the action and reflecting on it as a person might look at a work of art.

Look Here

Look Back

Look Out

Look Ahead

Look Into
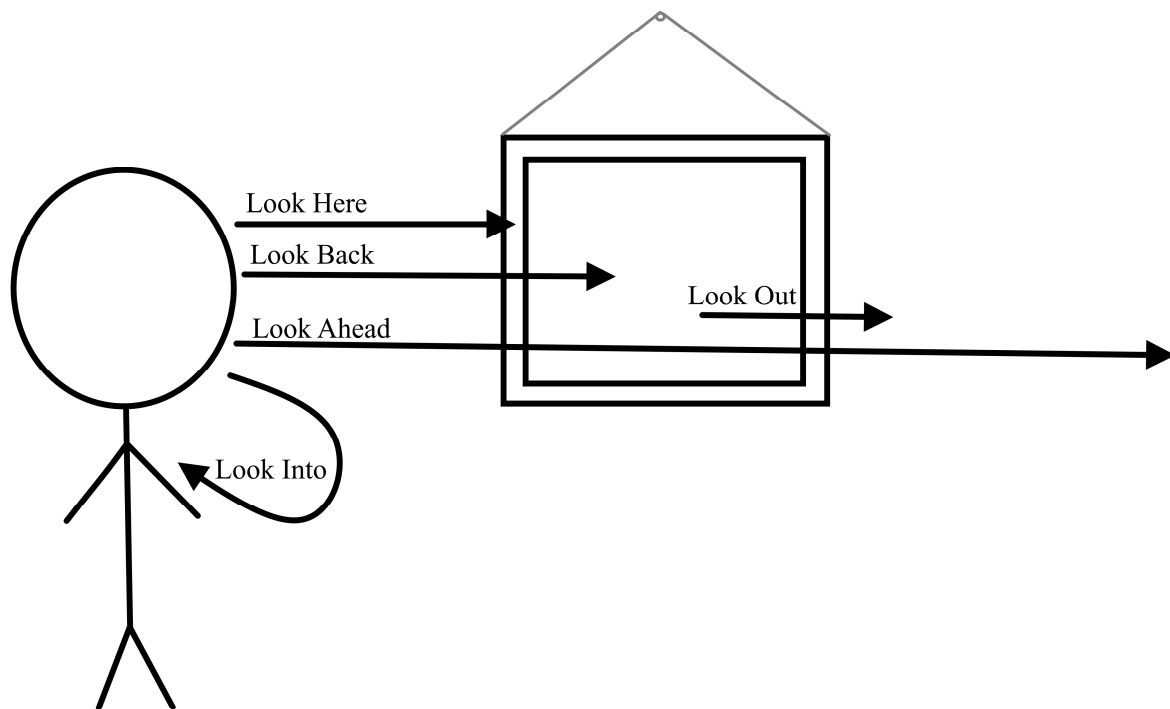
The first phase, spiritual framing, sets the tone or goal for the debriefing session. "[Framing] draws from research in neuroscience, cognitive psychology and education on priming, framing, and frontloading, respectively. [Framing is] targeted at stewarding non-conscious and psychological processes."[108] For example, Greg Robinson, president of Challenge Quest, a Christian experiential education company, describes a debrief that he framed. He began by reading Mark 4:35-41, the account of Jesus calming the storm. Then, he went on to say:

> One thing that I have learned in life is that people rarely speak what is truly on their minds. Most of us are afraid to be totally honest with any except those closest to us, and then it is often a struggle. Most of the answers we get are what people think we want to hear. […] I think it was the same with Jesus and his disciples. They asked him questions. They watched him perform numerous signs. They listened to his stories. In the end, however, they did not speak of their deepest doubts.[109]

Robinson goes on to describe how his framing opened up a group to each other, when before they had avoided criticism to a fault. This example shows the cumulative effect framing has

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[108] Schenck and Cruickshank, 85.

[109] Greg Robinson, *Adventure and the Way of Jesus* (Oklahoma City: Wood 'N' Barnes Publishing, 2009) 56.

within the debriefing model. It becomes the realm within which the action is viewed so that connections can be made from it.

Processing in the narrow sense will be engaged during BDM in two ways, one conscious and another unconscious. The conscious process is the one constructing knowledge in the more well-known way. Unconscious processing occurs simultaneous to conscious processing, but its effects largely go unnoticed. The brain constructs meaning even when a person is unawares: "The back-end of learning is more challenging in that while non-conscious systems still need to be considered and stewarded, this second part of the process happens above the level of consciousness. In it, new connections are being made."[110] Framing shepherds an unconscious level of processing which will continue throughout the debrief and shines especially in the fifth phase, independent meditation. This framing is spiritual in nature, oriented toward understanding how experience comes from God, as events he brings into their lives, and toward a desire for the Holy Spirit to be present and active in his Word.

The second phase is penitential interpretation. Interpretation is an important phase, which may be overlooked in some models, because it comes naturally to most facilitators who are adults: "A great number of learning cycle models leave this stage out entirely. In part this is because many adult groups interpret on their own, moving swiftly from describing their action to interpreting their actions."[111] Interpretation comes easily to some learners, as well, but deliberately interpreting experiences allows learners to be on the same level, and for some, to go deeper than usual. This interpretation is not just a matter of subjectively finding meaning, but is based on the objective assertions of Scripture—namely, the sinful nature of human beings and revealed knowledge of God—mentioned above. Penitential interpretation views experience through the lens of repentance, recognizing the effects of sin and the need for God's mercy, so that the interpretations of the experience produced reflect the sinful nature of man and a desire to turn from it to God because of the forgiveness won in Christ. Penitence in this instance does not mean only contrition over sin, but primarily the worldview a Christian has knowing the depravity of sin and saving grace. A Christian interprets all action through the lens of sin and grace, even if a specific sin is not in the picture at the time.

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[110] Schenck and Cruickshank, 85.

[111] Jacobson and Ruddy, 52.

The third phase is theocentric bridging. Bridging brings the abstract interpretation out of the context of the action and into the general realm of life, making connections between different parts of the person:

> Overt connections are made with concepts encountered during the activity and extended to new situations during [bridging]. As students look for patterns through their newly acquired lens […] they begin to connect their prior experience to these patterns. […] The new attitude (which is really a newly established memory network) and memories of the learning event continue to stabilize as they are retrieved, discussed, explored, and used.[112]

In addition to creating connections within the person, relationships are established between the inner thoughts and the outward happenings in the life of a person: "This phase of questioning opens up the abstract conceptualization phase of learning. At this point the task is to bring the participants out of the specific experience and into an observation of the patterns at work in themselves or other places."[113] The bridging phase operates with an understanding of who God is. Theocentric bridging acknowledges that all the happenings of life are centered around God's will, and that Christians want their doings in life to please him.

The fourth phase is sanctified assimilation. Assimilation involves application, but is not limited to it. It also includes experimentation, reflection, etc., so that the learner uses soft thinking to connect contextualized knowledge to emotions, Christian living, future actions, and memories: "The person and learning are connected through multiple systems, and learning becomes part of their autobiographical memory. These different but overlapping memory networks [are] comprised of procedures, knowledge sets, and emotions, which affect future thoughts and actions."[114] Assimilation will also narrow soft thinking with hard thinking to specify the focus of the learner and give concrete direction from the abstracted concept, even in the cases of appropriation: "The goal of the learning event is tied to a person's life and future when the individual chooses what and how they are going to do things differently because of their new experience. It should be a personal application of skill or knowledge."[115] This assimilation is not merely practical or socially applicable, but sanctified. Sanctified assimilation

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[112] Schenck and Cruickshank, 88.

[113] Jacobson and Ruddy, 60.

[114] Schenck and Cruickshank, 89.

[115] Ibid., 89.

recognizes that Christians will direct their lives according to God's Word and that decisions they make will honor him. This does not necessarily mean an immediate change will occur in behavior or cognition, but even a reminder of grace is powerful.

The final phase is independent meditation, which makes use of independent reflection, recognizing also the unconscious processes which also constitute learning. Independent meditation, then, "refers to a significant break […] that allows for internal reflective states to consider and personalize the learning experience. […] Research has demonstrated that it takes time for the memory of the learning event to stabilize."[116] The participant may journal, pray, produce poetry, etc., during this time, which need not be facilitated. This time is also meditation, so the learner is considering not only what they learned, but how it connects with God's Word. Independent meditation[117] assumes that the Holy Spirit is active through his Word and will miraculously work within an individual to enlighten, sanctify, and preserve them.

An observant person will notice that none of the steps involve an explicit use of Scripture. None of the steps say, "Quote Scripture, Insert Bible Story, Quote August Pieper, etc." This fact does not exclude the use of God's Word, but rather BDM builds the Word into the model in order to be organic and flexible.[118] The use of Biblical truth can occur in any and every phase of the model. For example, a facilitator could start with a prayer, asking God to help them grow spiritually through his Word, to set the tone for a group debrief during framing. A facilitator could share the story of Ananias and Sapphira while debriefing a class caught in a lie during penitential interpretation. A facilitator could lead an individual to see the effects of original sin on Y during theocentric bridging and how it connects to Christ's meritorious work. A facilitator could share the details of the Christian *diaspora* with a high schooler struggling with persecution during Sanctified assimilation. A facilitator could leave a grieving family with the pastoral greeting from the liturgy as he departs after giving instructions for independent meditation. The facilitator has a responsibility to include the means of grace because the students

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[116] Ibid., 88.

[117] Mediation is here used in a Biblical sense that is distinct from Eastern mediation. This is not thinking about one's own thoughts, but here assumes God's Word is the object and connection of thoughts. Meditation in a Biblical sense employs the Word of God in prayerful and humble consideration.

[118] This is not to say that the Word of God is not universally applicable or clear, but rather that connections to the Bible can at times seem wooden and artificial. Using God's Word with finesse, rather than force, is an art, but BDM attempts to give the facilitator a built-in advantage.

may not include it. This isn't a burden, since the Gospel is what makes the Biblical debriefing model worth know. Debriefing according to BDM provides a multitude of opportunities for the gospel to be brought up.

For example, sometimes a debrief will take you by surprise. Just before bed, a senior in high school approached me asking for some advice. He went a public high school and he was well-known for being a Christian there. He wanted to know how to handle those who were antagonizing him and pulling him into confrontations. While we were debriefing one particularly bad time, it became evident that he was also struggling with his pride. He had let his Christian witness turn into an opportunity to showboat his Biblical knowledge and put others in their place. That fact would not have come out as easily without debriefing, and it afforded an opportunity for repentance and the gospel. He also came to an example of assimilation I could never have given him by myself. When I asked him, "What did the people who were persecuted in the Bible do?" He said that they fled. I asked if he thought that was a good thing. He thought about it and came to the conclusion that it wasn't always bad, since it led to the spread of the gospel throughout the world.

Nathan's confrontation of David from 2 Samuel 12 has been examined above as a prime example demonstrating some elements of debriefing theory from the Scriptures. That account can also be examined according to BDM, not to say that Nathan was using BDM, but again elements of it can be seen demonstrated. For example, Nathan frames his session by telling the story of the stolen, pet lamb. Isomorphically, he has set a goal for a king who is used to acting in authority. He engages the unconscious processes in David's mind with his story. He sets the tone and David knows this isn't a social visit. David interprets the metaphor correctly, understanding the reason the rich man acted in the metaphor as an act of selfishness and sin. Nathan provides bridging for David with simple language, "You are the man," and David contextualizes his interpretation in his own life. David, through assimilation, understands the correct sanctified response, contrition and repentance. He sees how this experience has affected his entire life and what it will mean in the future, that his child will die. David has ample time, then for independent meditation. This leads him to pray for his child before the Lord, pleading for mercy. It also leads him to write Psalm 51 and likely 32, showing that David has internalized his newly constructed knowledge: "For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight; so you are right in your verdict

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and justified when you judge. Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow" (Ps 51:3-4, 7).

Pastoral Applications of Debriefing

BDM is a flexible model developed by practice and scholarly research. It is useful for pastors. It can be used in counseling sessions, after a teen group outing, with a grieving family, after a unique activity in Bible study, in plain conversation with members, as a homiletical outline, and even more. The applications are as varied as the nature of people's experiences, and nearly every experience can be debriefed:

> I do fully believe that everything can be debriefed. You know certainly some things would lend themselves better. I'd say if you start from the top, major events—a death that happens, for example, a sickness that happens, or a wedding that happens, or anything like that—big events could be debriefed. In my line of work, we are regularly debriefing team building activities. […] I've done it after people are done playing games, be it board games, or active games, or something like that. I had one person tell me it was their highlight.[119, 120]

Pastors will want to take advantage of organic and deliberate experiences in order to facilitate spiritual growth. They will also want to pass debriefing on to their members as a discipline so that they can make use of it through personal reflection. Shinnick adds an additional benefit of debriefing for the pastor, reflection on his own action with others in his church and by himself:

> Imagine trying to bake a cake without ever being able to taste the finished product. How would you ever know if you've gotten the recipe right? How would you know what to change? In leadership, especially in a church setting where you're not necessarily dealing with tangible results, the leader must intentionally seek out this feedback. Too often a pastor receives no more feedback than, "Good sermon." In order to get more meaningful feedback about any number of things, a leader needs to ask draw more thorough responses out of people by asking good questions. This is an important component of personal growth for church leaders.[121]

There are three main challenges that the author sees which stand between pastors and debriefing: first, lack of familiarity with the methods; second, lack of time to gain the experience

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[119] Bown.

[120] There is some disagreement about what things can and cannot be debriefed, but that discussion is not happening in the educative field, but rather in the realm of psychology. There is some overlap between the pastoral ministry and psychiatry, but in most cases when debriefing should be avoided, the person should be deferred to a psychiatrist or professional counselor.

[121] Shinnick.

to feel comfortable debriefing; third, debriefing is counter-cultural. These three challenges can be remedied through experimentation with BDM. Such an action breeds familiarity and comfort, and will convince the pastor that debriefing is a vital, missing component in the culture.

There are elements of education that are not on the pastor's radar and may only now be breaching the education system of the WELS. Experiential education is one of these fields, of which debriefing is a part. There is ample room for further study in this area. The author would recommend for future research how initiatives, challenge courses, and adventure-wilderness experiences can be used to apply Biblical knowledge and shape sanctification. The author would recommend looking into how journaling can be implemented further into the ministry as a means of independent reflection. The author recommends a comprehensive study of the experiential teaching techniques modeled in the Scriptures. The author recommends also recorded field usage of the Biblical Debriefing Model for further development. The author recommends a study into how Christian Summer Camps with WELS are using experiential education and the benefits of Camps for congregation members. Finally, the author recommends a curricular study at WELS institutions for areas in which experiential education could be implemented.

Conclusion

Debriefing is a powerful tool for spiritual growth. It is based upon five main education theories: multiple intelligences theory, constructivism, praxis, educator disinvolvement, and the distinction between soft and hard thinking. These theories, though secular in nature, can be used to serve Biblical doctrine, showing that debriefing is a neutral method of learning. The goal of debriefing is growth, and for the Christian facilitator, spiritual growth. Spiritual growth comes through the means of grace in the form of knowledge of God's will, trust in Christ, and fruits of faith. A Christian facilitator will therefore include the means of grace in debriefing, especially the Word of God. The Biblical Debriefing Model is a paradigm for Christian facilitators built around solid theory and Biblical teaching, the implementation of which can be used a powerful tool for spiritual growth.

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Appendix A

Academic Briefing on the Biblical Debriefing Model

The Biblical Debriefing Model (BDM) intends to be a practical tool for pastors and teachers in the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod. For this reason, the model seeks to accomplish three criteria: first, to reflect current and useful educational theory; second, to hold in high regard the work of the Holy Spirit through the Word of God; third, to provide complexity without complication, and simplicity without being simplistic. To the first criterion, the model is derived from two primary sources mentioned in this paper, "Evolving Kolb: Experiential Education in the Age of Neuroscience," by Schenck and Cruickshank[29], and *Open to Outcome* by Jacobsen and Ruddy[4]. Each of these resources present a modern and updated model for debriefing. To the second criterion, and since neither of the aforementioned models make use of God's Word, the BDM includes using the concept of a Biblical truth. The Biblical truth can come in a number of forms. It can be a passage taken from the Scriptures, a Biblical story, a doctrine, Bible history, etc. This allows the experience and knowledge of each Christian involved in the debrief to be shared and used. To the third criterion, the model has five phases which represent themselves in five steps. These five steps enable it for immediate use, easy memorization, and effective use that grows with practice and experience.

The five phases of the Biblical Debriefing Model:

0. **Action:** BDM assumes an action has happened or is happening.
1. **Spiritual Framing**: The facilitator sets the tone or goal for the debrief.
2. **Penitential Interpretation**: The facilitator transitions with a closed question and asks the learner to interpret the reason(s) behind the observation using soft thinking.
3. **Theocentric Bridging**: The facilitator transitions with a closed question and ask the learner to contextualize the interpreted reason to their life with soft thinking.
4. **Sanctified Assimilation**: The facilitator transitions with a closed question, and then the facilitator and learner use soft thinking to connect contextualized knowledge to emotions, Christian living, future actions, and memories.
5. **Independent Meditation**: The facilitator allows time for learner to reflect on the action and debriefing in order to internalize constructed knowledge.

The five can be construed as a five-step model:

0. **Action.**
1. **Look Here (Spiritual Framing):** The facilitator will finish one of the following sentences: "Here is how I want us to proceed…" or "I want us to accomplish…" or "Before we get started listen to this…"

2. **Look Back (Penitential Interpretation):** The facilitator will transition by asking this closed question: "Did you notice X?"[122] Then follow up with the question, "Why did X happen?"
3. **Look Out (Theocentric Bridging):** The facilitator will transition by asking this closed question: "Does Y happen in life?"[123] and then follow with the question, "Why does Y happen?"
4. **Look Ahead (Sanctified Assimilation):** The facilitator will transition with a closed question: "Can you use Z?"[124] Then follow up with some or all of the following questions: "How does Z make you feel?" or "What does God say about Z?" or "What does Z lead you to do?" or "When has Z impacted you in the past?"
5. **Look Into (Independent Meditation):** The facilitator concludes with the sentence: "I want you to think about how Z impacted you today and how it will impact you in the future as you leave." Or, the facilitator may include time for an independently reflective activity, such as journaling using the same sentence as a basis.

An observant person will notice that none of the steps involve an explicit use of Scripture. None of the steps say, "Quote Scripture, Insert Bible Story, Quote August Pieper, etc." This fact does not exclude the use of God's Word, but rather BDM builds the Word into the model in order to be organic and flexible. The use of Biblical truth can occur in any and every phase of the model. For example, a facilitator could start with a prayer to set the tone for a group debrief during framing. A facilitator could share the story of Ananias and Sapphira while debriefing a class caught a lie during penitential interpretation. A facilitator could lead an individual to see the effects of original sin on Y during theocentric bridging and how it connects to Christ's meritorious work. A facilitator could share the details of the Christian *diaspora* with a high schooler struggling with persecution during Sanctified assimilation. A facilitator could leave a grieving family with the pastoral greeting from the liturgy as he departs: "The Lord be with you."[125]

Not only can Biblical truth be included organically in every part, but each phase is also oriented to encourage spiritual growth. Spiritual framing acknowledges that the debriefing will not be secular, but oriented toward understanding how God brings events into a person's life and

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[122] X represents a variable, and when interpreted produces the variable Y.

[123] Variable Y represents the interpreted reasons behind variable X, and after bridging constructs variable Z.

[124] Variable Z represents the constructed knowledge from bridging variable Y, and is the knowledge that will be assimilated.

[125] Perhaps, they will even respond, "And also with you," or "And with your spirit."

toward a desire for the Holy Spirit to be present and active in his Word. Penitential interpretation views experience through the lens of repentance, recognizing the effects of sin and the need for God's mercy, so that the interpretations of the experience produced reflect the sinful nature of man and a desire to turn from it to God because of the forgiveness won in Christ. Theocentric bridging acknowledges that all the happenings of life are centered around God's will, and that Christians want their doings in life to please him. Sanctified assimilation recognizes that Christians will direct their lives according to God's Word and that decisions they make will honor him. Independent meditation assumes that the Holy Spirit is active through his Word and will miraculously work within an individual to enlighten, sanctify, and preserve them.

Appendix B

Interview Questions on Debriefing and Spiritual Growth

1. What is your current field or profession?

2. What experience do you have as an educator?

3. What is processing or debriefing?

4. What is the goal of debriefing or processing?

5. What, in your opinion, is the key to the most effective debriefing or processing?

6. What sort of events/experiences/etc. should be followed or interspersed with debriefings?

7. How have you used debriefing or processing?

8. What does debriefing or processing look like in a group?

9. What does debriefing or processing look like one on one?

10. What does debriefing or processing look like in your own life?

11. Where do you see debriefing, processing, or something similar occurring in the Scriptures?

12. How do you define spiritual growth?

13. What does a Christian who has undergone spiritual growth look like?

14. How does spiritual growth come about?

15. How, if you have, has debriefing helped facilitate spiritual growth in your ministry?

16. How have you brought God's Word into debriefing or processing?

17. When have you seen spiritual growth facilitated through processing?

18. What potential benefit(s) do you see from spiritual leaders who understand and make use of debriefing or processing?

19. What resources/books/media/etc. have you used to understand and implement processing in your ministry?

20. What Bible passages have you found useful for debriefing or processing?