

ABSTRACT

COMFORT AND GUIDANCE FROM GOD: A STUDY OF THE USE OF DREAMS AS A MEANS TO SPIRITUAL GROWTH

by

James W. Stevens

The purpose of this study is to examine the dream experience of lay individuals within a framework of orthodox Christianity in order to discover God's acts of communicating comfort and guidance to his people through dreams in two United Methodist churches in western New York. The study consisted of an opening questionnaire filled out by each individual, a twelve-part seminar on dreams, participant dream journals, and a closing questionnaire to determine what changes occurred in the attitudes which the participants held toward dreams. The participants demonstrated a deeper theological understanding and personal ownership of dreams following the study.

DISSERTATION APPROVAL

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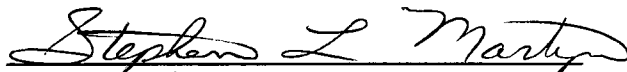
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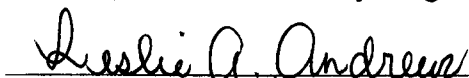
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**A Dissertation
Presented to the Faculty of
Asbury Theological Seminary**

**In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Ministry**

**by
James W. Stevens
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CHAPTER 1

OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

Background

I am a dreamer. I have always been a dreamer. What may well be my earliest memory focuses on a dream that I had prior to my third birthday. I have remembered many other dreams since that time.

Dreams continue to play an important part in my life, though initially I discounted them as simple night events and of little value. Over the years I have discovered that dreams are a method God uses to speak to me, a powerful tool for bringing me closer to him in my Christian walk. While I do not believe that all dreams are from the Lord, experience has demonstrated to me that some are.

I am presently involved in the Doctor of Ministry program at Asbury Theological Seminary as a direct result of a series of dreams, some of which occurred fifteen years prior to my entry into the program.

The laity of the churches that I have served as pastor have noticed my interest in dreams and dreaming. I have answered many questions and have done a fair amount of counseling regarding dreams that others have had, remembered, and felt were significant. The most profound event involving dreams and counseling occurred on a Good Friday morning. The night before, I had been thinking of the person I would counsel the next day and was praying for her. As I drifted into sleep, I saw a scene laid out before me. I was standing in a room. On the opposite wall was a walk-in closet filled with beautiful gowns. The gowns were colorful and sewn from rich material. They were obviously tailor made for royalty, and I knew that they had been made for the woman and her daughters. The thought struck me that this was appropriate. The reality of being born in Christ makes a person a child of the king. The clothes represented something far greater than mere garments. My last thought as I drifted fully into sleep was that I needed to share this story with the individual.

The next morning at the counseling session the person informed me that she had had a dream the night before. It was identical to my dream. The dream was part of a turning point in the life of this individual and has since served as a promise of God's continued action and preparation in her life and the lives of her daughters.

Problem Formulation

Seventeen years of pastoral ministry have led me to the conclusion that one of the biggest issues facing committed Christians is finding God's specific will for their lives. The Bible contains the fundamentals of the Christian faith. The nature of God is lifted up, the atoning work of Christ is explained, and the work of the Holy Spirit within the believer includes the interpretation of that Scripture. At times Christians are confronted by more than one option, all of which might seem equally valid and equally in keeping with biblical commands. How does the Christian choose the best, the correct option? The need for God's guidance, given in understandable ways, not only serves to inform a specific life decision but also affirms the presence and action of God in the life of a Christian.

A second issue that consistently comes to light is the need for comfort and healing. The need might be physical, mental, or emotional, and often the foundation of the problem is deeper than we can reach easily, if at all. How does God convey that need and the answer to that need to the consciousness of a disciple?

The Holy Spirit is God present with us for guidance, comfort, and strength. A modern affirmation says, "We believe in the Holy Spirit as the divine presence in our lives, whereby we are kept in perpetual remembrance of the truth of Christ, and find strength and help in time of need" (United Methodist Hymnal 885). If the Holy Spirit is an active intermediary in the life of the believer, how then does the Holy Spirit convey God's truth to the heart and mind of a Christian?

The biblical narrative describes many ways in which God speaks to his people. One of the most direct methods is through dreams and visions. This technique was

prevalent throughout the Old Testament and the New Testament, even after the coming of the Holy Spirit. Many Christians believe that God still speaks to his people through dreams.

In my experience, few people have a well thought-out theology of dreams. Most are unwilling to acknowledge any theology of dreams at all. Without an understanding of how to view dream experiences, their possible source, and their potential and meaning from a theological perspective, dreamers are bereft of one of the most important and exciting possibilities in dream analysis: a word of God spoken to them to help guide and comfort them in the complex issues of life.

Counseling leads me to believe that many individuals have an uneasy feeling that dreams can be more than just a sleep experience. They recognize powerful significance in some of their own dreams. Often these are dreams that people clearly remember, while most of their dreams are gone with the sun. Other times, dreams keep nibbling at the back of their minds until they eat their way through to the forefront. Occasionally, these dreams are so profound that they fill the dreamer with emotions that remain for days, weeks, months, and even years after the dream itself has ended. Yet these same people have often approached me apologetically, sometimes even fearfully, when they want to discuss a dream they had and believed was significant. This has occurred even after contact and discussion with the same individual over a previous dream. They have expressed a fear of looking foolish, a fear of sharing something as personal as a dream, and in some cases, even the fear that the dream might have no real value.

This fear is often expressed as a result of a modicum of dream understanding, couched in a psychological framework. Freudian issues complicate the possibility of any examination of the dream experience from a spiritual standpoint. The theory that sexual dysfunction serves as the primary foundation of dream analysis leaves the dreamer with a distrust of the dream and a greater fear of sharing it with anyone. I have heard more than one dream discussion start with the phrase, "Well, this probably proves that I'm a pervert,

but.”

Spiritual growth demands attentiveness to God. This has been true throughout history. Had Adam and Eve been attentive to God’s commands prior to their removal from Eden, humanity might well be in a different place today. God communicated directly with them prior to the fall, as well as afterwards. Throughout the Bible, God continued to speak to his people, often through the medium of dreams. Christian history reflects a continued interest in the dream experience.

Individuals still seek contact with the living, active God. They still seek guidance from and understanding of God in their lives. They still seek the comfort and encouragement that comes from God. If dreams, biblically a standard method that God used to convey that guidance, comfort, or a word of prophecy, are denied in the Christian experience, a powerful tool has been lost to the Christian.

Supporting Literature

Historical attitudes toward dreams as a means of communication from God are a part of nearly every culture. Kelly Bulkeley suggests, “Dreams have, throughout history, been primarily the province of religion. People in virtually every religious and spiritual tradition we know of have looked to dreams as a source of divine revelation and insight” (“Gods” 349-50). An examination of the biblical account of dreams and dreaming serves as a primary source for our understanding of the dream from a Christian perspective.

Observations of dream activity are often seen in the lives of the patriarchs. Jacob is a dreamer (Gen. 28:12-17) as is his favorite son Joseph (Gen. 37:5-10). Joseph not only dreams but serves as an interpreter of dreams (Gen. 41:15-32).

The prophet Samuel, one could argue, was first called in a dream as he heard the voice of God while sleeping in the temple. The day was one in which, we are told, “there was no frequent vision” (1 Sam. 3:1). The time had come for God to speak his message, and Samuel was there to listen and serve as his prophet.

Not all godly dreams in the Old Testament were given to the Jews. Pharaoh

received God's warning in a dream interpreted by Joseph (Gen. 41:1-32).

Nebuchadnezzar had two dreams which were attributed to God's inspiration (Dan. 39:2; 40:4).

The New Testament contains many dream experiences that form critical parts of the faith and history of Christianity. Joseph's dream which led to his marriage to Mary in spite of her mysterious pregnancy is one such instance (Matt. 1:20-24). The wise men returned home by another route due to a dream and thus foiled Herod's plan to kill the infant Jesus (Matt. 2:12). Dreams directed Joseph to escape to Egypt and then, after Herod had died, to return again to Israel (Matt. 2:13-21).

The early Christian Church continued to view dreams as potential messages from God, but as the years passed it began to encounter issues that it found difficult to resolve. One was the nature of sexual dreams (Nienkirchen), and another was the problem of diviners which was often mentioned and warned against by the Church fathers in their writings (Roberts and Donaldson 1: 190; 4: 538). The most difficult issue they had to resolve was simply determining the source of the dream as God, human, or demonic.

Formal attention to dreams diminished somewhat following the early days of the Western church. It came again to the forefront through the psychological work of Sigmund Freud. He believed that dreams had their basis in the subconscious and served as an avenue of release for socially unacceptable urges through the fantasy of a dream (181). Freud viewed the dream as a repression of these unacceptable urges and believed that the basis of the repression was sexual in nature, leading him to state that most dreams demonstrated "the mark of the beast" (183). While dreams themselves were being examined once again, Freud's hermeneutic interpretation left dreams with the stigma of expressing primarily the sinful nature of humanity, especially in the sexual venue. He allowed for no spiritual interpretation.

Dream interpretation began to take a turn that gave it spiritual implications through the work of Carl Jung. Jung began his examination of dreams as a student of

Freud. Despite many similarities in theory, Jung's understanding of the source of the repressive mechanism divided the two (Memories 147). Jung's approach was much broader though still based largely in the subconscious mind. Freud viewed dreams as an attempt to continue to conceal something in the unconscious mind through internal censorship, while Jung felt that the dream experience was an attempt by the subconscious mind to communicate to the conscious mind. This view of dreams as communication at least hints at an earlier day in Christian history when some dreams were seen as a means of communication with God. Jung's understanding of the spiritual as a part of nature rather than reflecting the divine still stood as a barrier to the possibility of divine revelation in dreams (161).

More recently the physiological discovery of Rapid Eye Movement (REM) sleep in 1953 brought about a resurgence in dream study. Physiological study along these lines have led to biochemical discoveries that impact the physical processes of dreaming but that have had little implications in terms of the understanding of dreams themselves relative to the nature of their content (Gackenbach 145).

Spiritual interest in dreaming has also grown, though much of it has taken place outside of a Christian perspective. A few minutes on the Internet show a plethora of sites devoted to the interpretation of dreams (most often for a fee). This is nothing new. Diviners in biblical and post-biblical times have been a part of the dream culture. The extreme divining work of Edgar Cayce in the first part of the last century gained a following and notoriety and provoked much thought that is still prevalent today (Hartzell).

This neo-pagan resurgence in dream interest has not bypassed the Christian community entirely. People like Morton Kelsey, Russ Parker, and John Sanford have all spent time exploring the dream from a Christian vantage point, though from a decidedly Jungian base. Bulkeley also delves into the issue of dreaming in great depth, though from a Unitarian perspective. He does include Christian perspectives as a part of a broader

view. Further exploration of these perspectives will occur in Chapter 2.

Theological Perspective

The primary theological perspective of this paper is the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. Within the context of interpreting dreams, the spiritual gift of discernment is a critical area. Kenneth Kinghorn describes the spiritual gift of discernment as “the ability to read or hear a teaching or to consider a proposed course of action and then determine whether the source behind the teaching or action is divine, human, or satanic” (11). Charles Bryant states that the gift of discernment is “the extraordinary ability to know good and evil, right and wrong, and what is either human nature or divine grace; the knowledge is not merely for condemnation but also for the protection and health of the body of Christ” (68).

The early Church fathers believed that dreams had their source in either God, demons, or the human soul (Roberts and Donaldson 3: 221-22). The correlation between the purpose of discernment and the need for discernment in interpreting dreams is unremarkable. If God speaks to his people in dreams, he will prepare a way to determine their validity. Some dreams, like Joseph’s call to marry a woman already with child, appear to be clear and precise (Matt. 1:20-21). Others are veiled in imagery, like Pharaoh’s fourteen cows and fourteen heads of grain (Gen. 41:1-7). Those dreams which are not clear in their meaning require interpretation. The spiritual gift of discernment offers interpretation within a context of God’s blessing. Other biblical examples of dreams have been mentioned in the previous section and will be more fully explored in Chapter 2.

The concept of dreams as a tool for spiritual growth through provisions of divine comfort and guidance comes directly out of the understanding of the dream as a potential work of the Holy Spirit within the believer. Russ Parker suggests four areas of healing that can be impacted by dreams: forgiveness, bereavement, emotional healing, and deliverance (49-69).

Jesus states a need to forgive and to receive forgiveness in Matthew 6:12 as well as in other places. James 5:16 commands the reader to confess sins to each other in order to find forgiveness and through that healing. Parker goes on to give examples of instances where dreams lead people to seek or give forgiveness and to benefit from the healing that this process brings (Parker 51-52).

I have personally experienced and as a pastor have seen other people experience comfort and healing from bereavement through dreams. Parker indicates that feelings of grief are often hidden to the point that the individual cannot directly deal with them. He says, “So the dream picture helps us to focus on where the hurt feelings are located, and this can be for some the turning point from merely knowing something must be done to actually doing it!” (53).

Dreams impact emotional healing. Parker states, “All dreams deal with the way we really see our world of experience” (54). Finding a sense of harmony within oneself is enhanced by recognizing the validity of what we see and correlating it with the greater reality of Jesus Christ; hence, even nightmares may serve as an indicator of need (66).

Parker categorizes a need for spiritual deliverance very precisely and suggests that dreams may serve as a prime source indication of that need (67). He also stresses the need for a commitment to Jesus as a part of the healing process. Though the dreams themselves may be influenced demonically, they can still point the way to Christ as the source of healing.

Each of the preceding paragraphs evidence the potential nature of dreams as a source of divine guidance and of spiritual comfort and encouragement. The role of the Holy Spirit in the life of a believer is indicated and cannot be overstressed.

Context

The subjects of this study will be the parishioners of the Dansville and Sparta Center United Methodist churches, a two-point charge in the Genesee Valley of Western New York. The two churches have been yoked for many years and are two of the oldest

churches in the Western New York Conference of the United Methodist Church. They are presently the products of twenty-five years of continuous ministry from one individual who retired in June 1997. I have served as their pastor since that time.

The congregation is comprised primarily of middle income families who are generally well educated. About half of the adults are college graduates. The membership is primarily Caucasian, though several Hispanic members and one black individual attend.

Within the congregation are four retired clergy couples including the most recently-retired pastor and his wife, two other United Methodist pastors and wives who also served this two point charge in years past, and a Presbyterian pastor and wife who retired from the local Presbyterian church in Dansville approximately twenty years ago.

The laity in the two churches come from many walks of life and include professionals, teachers, doctors, and individuals who work in business, construction, farming, nursing, and law enforcement. Many work in the nearby prison system, a complex of three separate units housed on one site.

Dansville is a town of about five thousand, yet it still possesses a strong sense of being a family village. Sparta Center is less a town than it is a crossroad. It is situated about five miles out of Dansville. The church is largely populated by people who presently live in Dansville. Membership figures for Dansville are 450. Sparta Center's membership stands at 160. Worship attendance for the two churches average 160 and eighty-five respectively. Both churches demonstrate a broad age range in attendance.

The general attitude of the two churches is positive. Both are capable of great outreach to the community around them. Though eight churches are in the village of Dansville, after twenty-five years under the previous pastor, the town church is considered at deep levels to be the chapel for the unchurched in the community. Weddings, funerals, and much counseling are provided for the community. The church has a vision for this kind of ministry from me.

The Sparta Center church, while much more rural, is no less outreach oriented. The reception that newcomers receive is warm and encouraging and promotes the return of visitors. Fellowship and ownership of the church by the congregation are obvious strengths.

Other issues affect the subjects of the study. The most critical of these may be the belief that we are on the verge of a revival. An amazing number of individuals, some of whom have no knowledge of Dansville, have spoken a word of prophecy relative to this revival. The area is the southern end of the “burned over” district of New York, a place of historical spiritual upheaval and in many respects a spiritual battlefield. Schisms in the Methodist Church have occurred in this region. The Free Methodist Church was created in 1860 as a result of the expelling of B. T. Roberts from the Methodist Episcopal Church’s Genesee Conference (Kinghorn and Priset). The events leading to the formation of the Mormon Church also occurred in the northern reaches of this area. Dansville presently occupies the location of what was once called “The Gateway to the Iroquois Confederacy,” an extremely powerful political joining of native Americans prior to the American Revolution.

The spiritual development of the congregation by their own observation has grown in the recent past. This is not a matter of the pastoral change but rather a move of the Holy Spirit. The excitement level has grown with the spiritual growth, and we anticipate that greater things will come.

Purpose

The attitude toward dreams that the congregations possess is varied. It ranges from vaguely suspicious to very interested. Understanding is also varied from spiritual to psychological to physiological. In most cases I have experienced, people are not sure what they believe, if anything. This is particularly true of viewing dreams as a potential source of divine guidance and comfort in their lives. Therefore, the purpose of the proposed research is to examine the dream experience of lay individuals within a

framework of orthodox Christianity in order to discover God's acts of communicating comfort and guidance to his people through dreams.

Research Questions

Four questions are examined in the study.

Research Question #1

What perceptions do subjects hold toward dreams as a means of listening to and discerning the voice of God relative to divine guidance and comfort in their lives?

Research Question #2

Do the attitudes of the subjects toward dreaming change as a result of the study?

Research Question #3

What evidence indicates that God speaks through dreams to subjects participating in a twelve-week seminar on listening to God through dreams?

Research Question #4

What aspects of the seminar seem to contribute to the subjects' experiences of God giving guidance or comfort through dreams?

Methodology

This is an evaluative study conducted in the descriptive mode. Initial information was gathered in a pre-seminar, researcher-designed questionnaire and filled out in the first seminar session. Self-selected individuals then went through a series of twelve seminars consisting of two parts in each seminar session. Sessions opened with a teaching segment on dreams (see Appendix D) and then moved to a discussion of individual dreams that were shared by members of the group. These dreams were drawn from dream journals that the participants were required to keep, as well as from past dream experiences. During the last seminar session, a post-seminar questionnaire was given, designed to determine changes in attitudes and understanding of dreams as a potential source of divine guidance and comfort. Initially, I sought fifteen to eighteen individuals with a final goal of at least twelve who would ultimately complete the whole study.

The twelve-part teaching portion of the seminar series consisted of the following:

Week 1: Introduction—Preface the whole seminar, distribute and discuss notebooks, hand out and complete pre-seminar questionnaires;

Week 2: God and Communication;

Week 3: God’s Messages Continued, The Dream Journal;

Week 4: Dreams in the Bible Part 1: Their Nature and Purpose in the Old Testament;

Week 5: Dreams in the Bible Part 2: Their Nature and Purpose in the New Testament;

Week 6: The Holy Spirit and Dreams;

Week 7: Dreams in Christian History;

Week 8: Popular Psychology and the Christian View of Dreams;

Week 9: Physiology and the Christian View of Dreams;

Week 10: Putting It Together;

Week 11: Finding God in the Dream; and,

Week 12: Summation: Review, Questions, Post-Seminar Questionnaires (see Appendix D).

Operationalization

Dreams are difficult to define in precise terms. From a philosophical perspective, Norman Malcolm suggests, “Perhaps there is not enough regularity in one’s application of the word ‘dreaming’ for it to even qualify as a word!” (54).

The Old Testament Hebrew contains six terms translated as either dream or vision (Nienkirchen). Further, the Hebrew does not specifically define a difference between dreams and visions.

The New Testament Greek uses several words that are translated as dream or vision (see Appendix F). Each term bears with it a specific meaning. They deal with particular types of dreams or visions. The differences range from subtle to profound. As

Malcolm suggests above, the English language does not define the terminology for dreaming with the same precision. This study will focus its observations to those dreams experienced during sleep that the dreamer remembers when awakened.

I believe that God can and does have particular desires for the lives of individual Christians. These desires might be for particular actions in a given set of circumstances as are often stated clearly in the biblical narrative. General principles of Christian living are well defined, yet circumstances often allow for a number of possible options all of which appear to comply with the biblical directives. Job selection serves as an excellent example. Most people recognize the nature of a “call” to ministry—a divine nudge of sorts—but wonder how the nudge is delivered. Likewise, dealing with issues in child rearing, purchases such as homes or cars, and a myriad of other issues confront the Christian and lead to prayer for guidance from God. Dreams serve biblically as one possible source of such guidance.

Here the guidance of God is a word imparted to dreamers through which they feel confidence in a decision that is not only in keeping with the desires God holds for all Christians but is imparted directly to believers by God himself through the avenue of a dream. The dream in which Joseph received instruction to wed Mary in spite of her untimely pregnancy serves as an excellent example. God clearly revealed his desire for Joseph’s life. Joseph’s decision to follow that guidance has impacted the whole world.

The same dream example serves to illustrate the conveyance of divine comfort. Joseph not only received guidance as to a course of action but also an explanation that reassured his faith in Mary. Dreams often serve as a comfort in the loss of a loved one or an explanation of situations the dreamer might encounter in life. Sometimes dreams convey a promise sufficient to see the dreamer through a difficult time in his or her life. At other times a dream may serve to point out a need for healing in the life of the dreamer. Once the dreamer recognizes this need, he or she can begin to address it.

The premise of this study is that dreams can and do convey these kinds of divine

guidance and comfort in the lives of Christians. Such guidance and comfort is not limited exclusively to dreams of course. Dreams serve as only one source, biblically exemplified, in the lives of those who seek to follow Christ.

The theology of the dream experience becomes a profoundly important issue. What do people believe about dreams? Do they believe that God does use dreams still, or not? The potential that the dream possesses as a spiritual resource makes a defined theology critical for the examination of dreams, and from that theology comes a need for spiritual discernment.

The nature and need for spiritual discernment in the life of Christians who are examining their dreams is critical. Charles Bryant describes the spiritual gift of discerning of the spirits as “the power to estimate, judge, separate, withdraw from, hesitate, discriminate, oppose, dispute or be free from doubt” (68). Most sources recognize that not all dreams are of divine origin. Further, not all dreams that may have a spiritual source are from God. Dreamers who take their dreams seriously as potential divine guidance or comfort must recognize the difference.

The sinful nature that is such an integral part of the human condition leaves dreamers with a strong potential to be misled either by spiritual forces not of God or even by the wandering of their own mind. If dreamers are to approach dreams with real hope of interpretation, they must first seek the wisdom and guidance of the Holy Spirit and be certain of the continuity of the interpretation with biblical teaching. This issue will be stressed in the instructional portion of the project.

The following criteria served as an initial resource for the identification of dreams that may be from God.

1. The message of a dream that is God-given will not be in conflict with solid orthodox Christian principles, though the content of the dream might seem to be initially. A reasonable example might be that God is not going to call an individual to go on a murder spree. On the other hand, a dream of killing might be symbolic of some other

message that God is conveying to a dreamer.

2. The dream must be remembered. While this is obvious, the memory of a dream can come at various times in my experience. Sometimes the dream is recalled upon waking up, sometimes later in the day, and occasionally, God may bring a long forgotten dream to mind for further examination with immediate or future relevance.

3. The dream must be perceived as significant by the dreamer. Again, this might seem obvious, but without the impact of the perception of importance, provided by the Holy Spirit, the dream will be ignored or quickly forgotten.

4. The dream will typically persist in the mind of the dreamer. This persistence is usually more than merely remembering the dream.

5. People in the dream may represent someone else. They may represent the dreamer or some aspect of his or her life.

6. Some dreams are pizza, and some dreams are God. Some dreams can be easily dismissed as unimportant under examination (the “pizza” dreams), while others are harder to release, even though the interpretation may not be obvious.

Dream interpretation, therefore, may take several avenues. Within the context of the study, dream analysis included a personal consideration of the dream by the individual and the discussion of those dreams presented by participants to the group. The purpose of this discussion was not the interpretation of the dream per se. Instead, discussion led the dreamer along various avenues of thought. These included an examination of the content of the dream: actions, objects, and feelings within the dream. The dreamer was ultimately responsible to determine any meaning that might be available from the dream.

Subjects

The population for this study is the total number of people who regularly attend worship services in either the Dansville or Sparta Center United Methodist Churches. A total average attendance for the two services is 245 individuals. This would include all

ages from infants to elderly adults.

The concept of a regular attender for the purposes of the study would constitute a larger number of people. Not all people attend every Sunday, nor do they all attend throughout the year. The total number for those individuals who attend more than once a month is closer to 325. This number includes both formal members and constituent members. Constituent members are those individuals who have not formally joined the church but have a connection through baptism, attendance, or some other activity.

The requirements of this study excluded young children from participation. For the sake of confidentiality for participants, youth prior to high school graduation were also excluded. The twenty-four week time period in which the study took place also excluded those who winter in warmer climates.

The subjects were self-selected individuals who regularly attend one of the churches in question, were of at least post-high school graduation age, and were not out of the area for the winter months. The population, within the confines of these delimitations, would be approximately 175 to two hundred individuals. From this population, twenty subjects initially self-selected to participate in the study on a first-come, inclusionary basis. Fourteen individuals completed the study.

Variables

The dependent variable in this study was the change that occurred in the participants' view of the nature of dreams. The independent variables were the seminar experiences, the dream journaling, and the discussion of the dreams. The intervening variables included the age and gender of the participants as well as their level of participation in the discussions, keeping their journals, and attendance in the seminar sessions.

Instrumentation

Instruments used in the study included two researcher-designed questionnaires

found in Appendixes A and B. The questionnaires were administered during the first and last seminar sessions in order to determine the attitudes of the participants toward dreams and dreaming. Comparison of the pre- and post-seminar questionnaires helped inform any changes which occur as a result of the seminar sessions and dream journaling. No pre-study reliability exists for the instruments.

The participants were required to keep dream journals for the duration of the study. These were collected at the end of the seminar session and provided another instrument for study (see Appendix C). Unfortunately, the participants did not fill out the dream journals fully. The results offered little substance for study.

Delimitations and Generalizability

Attitudes toward dreaming vary greatly. A quick look at the Internet discloses a multitude of dream sites designed to interpret and share dream experiences. They reflect the nature of dream research in all its variety and biases. People came into the study with a variety of experiences in dreaming and interpretation. Some recalled dreams regularly, some rarely. Some had done a fair amount of dream research, and some had done little. Their particular attitudes also varied with training and understanding of dreams relative to spiritual issues, psychological, and physiological understandings.

The preceding information made developing a filtration system for dream understanding critical. The primary filter or point of view that Christians must use in examining their dreams is a spiritual one, based on biblical principles, theological understandings, and, most importantly, spiritual discernment (see Figure 1.1, Filter 1). Some dreams are insignificant, or even ungodly, and as such have little or nothing to offer in terms of spiritual growth or comfort. Tertullian claimed three sources for dreams, and most of the church fathers who spoke of dreams at all agreed in principle. Some dreams were from God, some were from the soul or a human source, and some were from Satanic or demonic influence. In the life of Christians, that influence would be considered spiritual harassment. An examination of the dream with spiritual discernment would help

remove such dreams from Christian consideration.

Those dreams that remain and are understood may benefit from an examination or filtration through the secondary foci of psychological and/or physiological perspectives. These viewpoints are probably most helpful in pointing out some of the reasons for the images in the dream or even why God may have chosen the avenue of a dream to convey his message. Again, these are secondary to an examination within the Christian context that includes discernment provided by the Holy Spirit.

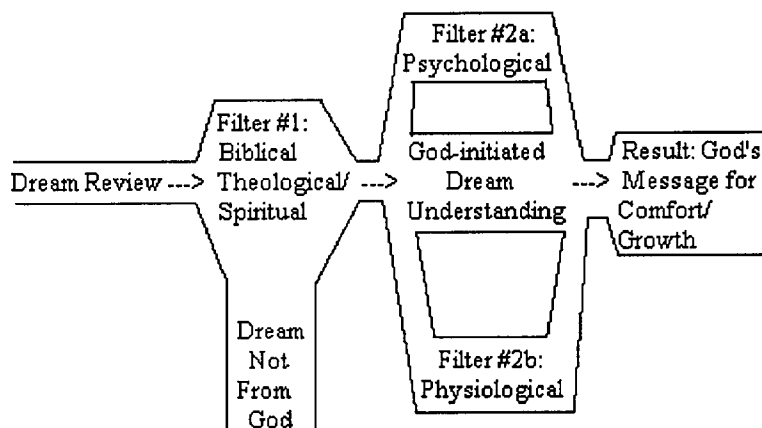


Figure 1.1

A Filtration System for Dream Interpretation

The self-selected participants were individuals who had a particular interest in dreams. This may not accurately reflect the overall view of dreams that members of the two congregations may have. Still, by drawing subjects from the congregation, both official and constituent members, they represent a cross section of spiritual maturity and preconceptions of the nature of dreams. I hope that this study will offer other pastors an opportunity and format to engage themselves and their congregations in the study and understanding of dreams as a means of spiritual growth through God's guidance and

comfort.

The instruments used in the study are researcher designed and therefore have no external validity. The questionnaires seek the answers to the questions that the research seeks and as such contain face validity.

Overview of the Dissertation

The remainder of the dissertation will attempt to build on the first chapter. Chapter 2 is designed around four fundamental issues: the biblical and historical Christian approach to an understanding of dreams, a psychological approach to an understanding of dreams, a physiological approach to an understanding of dreams, and a connection of the three in order to examine the potential work of the Holy Spirit in offering the guidance and comfort of God to Christian dreamers.

The third chapter is an in-depth look at the instrumentation, seminar topics, and techniques used in the research study and the reasoning behind their use. The fourth and fifth chapters will contain the actual findings of the research and their interpretation.

CHAPTER 2

PRECEDENTS IN THE LITERATURE

One of the most powerful books I have ever read is a simple children's story entitled Love You Forever by Robert Munsch. It is, as are most children's books, a fanciful tale built on a ridiculous premise. The story centers around the ages and stages of growing up in the life of a boy from infancy to fatherhood and the life of his mother. Problems abound, but each mini-story of the boy's adventures ends with his mother waiting until he is asleep, whereupon she sneaks into his bedroom, picks up the sleeping infant, child, teenager, and man, and, gently rocking him, sings to him that she loves him forever.

By the time the man attains fatherhood himself, the mother is elderly, sick, and unable to come to him anymore with her words of love. Instead, though he has always been asleep while his mother visited, he goes to her, picks her up, rocks her, and sings the same song of love. After returning to his own home, he enters his new baby's room, picks her up and sings the age-old song of love, though she too is sound asleep.

The reaction that people have to this story is remarkable. Something beyond the sentimentalism strikes at the reader's heart. The message of the song cuts through the bonds of sleep and is imprinted on the heart. The potential nature of dreams in the lives of Christians demonstrates the same power.

A Theological Anthropology Relative to Dreams as Communication

A Christian approach to dreams must begin in an understanding of the nature of humanity. A Christian approach to an understanding of humanity must begin biblically. A look at the story of creation suffices to demonstrate two essential purposes for the creation of human life.

The first purpose is directly stated in Genesis 1:28. Here God speaks to the first of humanity and places upon them the responsibility to fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over it. From a perfect position, the reader must assume that God is not calling

on humanity to beat creation into submission. Rather, God calls the beings created in his own image to rule over the rest of creation in the same manner that pleases God throughout the remainder of the Bible—as a good shepherd, tender, loving, and protecting.

The second purpose of creation is one that is not stated directly but can be assumed by example. God created humanity for communion with himself. This is amply demonstrated throughout the rest of Scripture by God's consistent interaction in human history. It reaches its ultimate profession in the person of Jesus Christ.

The Christian must also examine the concept of the fall of humanity in order to develop a theological anthropology. The breakdown of the initial perfection of communion and communication between God and humanity produced the need for God's intervention. It also prescribed the specifics of that intervention. Ray Anderson suggests that "the cross reveals the interconnection between the Word of God, sin, and human creatureliness" (17). He further states, "by beginning with the crucified humanity of Christ, we find the true order of humanity as disclosed through the resurrection of Jesus from the dead" (17). The crucifixion demonstrates both the destructive nature of sin and the judgment of God upon it. It also demonstrates God's intervention in sinful human nature and the way through which humanity can be delivered from that nature.

In understanding the depth of need that required such a radical response we find the true nature of humanity as well as the true nature of God. Not only is humanity dependent on God, but God consistently seeks to reveal himself to human beings, bringing their salvation. Wolfhart Pannenberg suggests that imagination plays a large role in human behavior. He also indicates that God is the source of such inspiration, all the while being the goal toward which human imagination reaches (27). As David Benner says, "To be human is to face the inescapable challenge of working out our existence in relation to God" (88).

The human condition is not one of duality, body and soul in battle with each

other. The whole person is in need of God's redemption. Death is, however, reality and does separate the soul and body for a period of time. For Christians, anticipating the resurrection of the body, this separation is not permanent. Further, as Benner points out, both the Greek of the New Testament and the Hebrew of the Old Testament use terminologies for the soul that connote wholeness, the entirety of the individual—his or her “self” (21). He concludes that the terms body, mind, and spirit are all different ways of looking at the same thing. Thus, it is not so much a matter of human beings possessing a spirit as being spirit. Similarly, soul and body are all parts of one whole.

Benner quotes Clebsch and Jaikle in qualifying four elements of Christian soul care:

1. Healing—moving toward wholeness (31);
2. Sustaining—helping to endure and transcend (31);
3. Reconciling—restoring broken relationships (31); and,
4. Guiding—helping make wise choices (32);

Each of these elements is a critical part of moving a person toward a wholeness, which is perhaps best described by Brenner's term “somatopsychospiritual” (51), encompassing as it does the totality of the person—body, mind and spirit. While much of Brenner's purpose is descriptive of a human position as a caretaker for other humans' soul conditions, these four elements are primarily seen in the acts of God. Within each individual is a void exactly the size and shape of God that cannot be filled by anything else. Life itself is a constant search to fill that void. Without this filling humanity is incomplete, unable to fulfill the purpose inherent in its creation. Filling that void requires a surrender of individual attempts to live outside God's grasp (126). In turn, the elements of Christian soul care fall into place, both in human relationships based on Christ-like principles of living and in divine intervention in the life that has been surrendered to God. The progression from sinful disobedience and lostness to growth and understanding in God is the real movement of humanity toward wholeness. It is a progression from disease

to health, from emptiness to fullness, from brokenness to becoming a somatopsychospiritual whole.

Again, this progression is the result both of accountability in Christian relationship and in divine relationship. The Bible is nothing if not an account of the intervention of God's salvific acts in human history. Therefore, since God clearly seeks his people to bring them into a state of wholeness, the possibility that he would use techniques to reach people today that have proven effective in the past is unsurprising. The dream as a word from God is present in abundance in the biblical account. Though danger exists in approaching all dreams as communication from God, danger also exists in ignoring dreams out of hand. To do so in some cases could well be a rejection of the God who seeks his broken people in an effort to lead them back to himself, toward wholeness of self, body, mind, and spirit.

Present Theories of the Dream

The present mindset toward dreams, at least outwardly, is profoundly influenced by scientific theory. Two aspects of scientific endeavor specifically apply. One is psychology; the other is physiology.

Dreams—The Psychological Approach

While some spiritual mentors or individuals pondered their own dreams or even the dreams of others, the antipathy that the church progressively evidenced toward the dream experience as a genuine revelation of the divine effectively ended serious and pervasive examination of the dreams in the Christian world. The next real growth in dream examination began with the work of Sigmund Freud.

Sigmund Freud. Freud is the father of modern dream analysis and brought the study of dreams to the forefront of psychological thought. He believed that the general characteristics included in the dream experience came from a waking influence. Dreams, in his theory, had their basis in reality. He believed, however, that dreams might draw from internal material that was not available to the conscious mind. Further, he believed

that external stimuli might help create the nature of a specific dream. The four specified stimuli were external sensory stimuli, internal sensory stimuli, internal physical stimuli, and psychic sources of excitation (166).

The external sensory stimuli were represented by heat, light levels, and colors introduced by light to the room, among others. Internal sensory stimuli were more subjective. Internal physical stimuli were seen as organic. The biblical account from Ecclesiastes mentioned previously fits this concept. If one is hungry, one dreams of eating. Finally, the psychic sources of excitation represented a bond between dream life and reality (Freud 166). The word “psychic” as used by Freud does not contain the same meaning as found in the popular use of the word today where it implies some sort of prophetic power or a connection with the spiritual world that allows direct communication with the dead or some other spiritual source.

Freud’s understanding of dream sources left no room for God to inspire or affect a dream. No spiritual source was involved in his theory, either good or bad. Instead, he believed that the dreamer manufactured the dream in his or her own subconscious mind. He stated,

If I now consult my own experience with regard to the origin of the elements appearing in the dream-content, I must in the first place express the opinion that in every dream we may find some reference to the experiences of the preceding day. This experience is always confirmed.
(167)

The source then of the content of the dream, not to be confused with its actual meaning, was some event or experience the dreamer had encountered in the day before the dream occurred. Freud was dogmatic about his theories. The possibility that God might have exerted some influence was summarily dismissed. The following list describes the sources he felt might be responsible for the dreamscape:

1. A recent and psychologically significant event that was directly represented in the dream;

2. Several recent and significant events that were combined by the dream into a single whole;
3. One or more recent and significant events that were represented in the dream content by allusion to a contemporary but indifferent event; and,
4. A subjectively significant experience (recollection, train of thought) which was constantly represented in the dream by allusion to a recent but indifferent impression (181).

Freud believed that most dreams had their primary source in “4” above. Carrying this a bit further, Freud stated, “I assert that there are no indifferent dream stimuli and therefore no guileless dreams” (183). The following comment confirms Freud’s overall attitude toward dreams:

This I absolutely and unconditionally believe to be the case, apart from the dreams of children, and perhaps the brief dream reactions to nocturnal sensations. Apart from these exceptions, whatever one dreams is either plainly recognizable as being psychically significant, or it is distorted, and can be judged only after complete interpretation, when it proves after all to be of psychic significance. The dream never concerns itself with trifles; we do not allow sleep to be disturbed by trivialities. Dreams which are apparently guileless turn out to be the reverse of innocent if one takes the trouble to interpret them; if I may be permitted the expression, they all show “the mark of the beast.” (183)

Freud might be commended for his overall view of the significance of dreams, even from a Christian perspective, but he reveals his concept of the specific nature of dreams in his “mark of the beast” comment. He was unwilling to even potentially give God credit for some dreams and instead perceived that the dreams people experienced generally demonstrated the darker side of human nature.

A focus on the comment that the dream could only be judged correctly after “complete interpretation” demonstrates the control that Freud desired to exert on the dream experience. Who could interpret the dream completely? Only Freud himself or

someone else trained in his methodology.

Freud's leap from the source of a dream to its interpreted meaning was dramatic. Based on the assumptions that were stated relative to the nature of guilt that he believed existed in every dream experience, the interpretations given for the dream typically moved to the sexual venue. This was in keeping with his proposed thesis that mental illness was rooted in sexual issues.

Based on these assumptions, the characters and events visualized in dreams become mechanisms of disguise for their real nature in Freud's analysis. Thus, for example, younger siblings in the dream become coded descriptions for genitalia (Garma 74, 95). Reading the work of self-proclaimed Freudian psychoanalyst Angel Garma in The Psychoanalysis of Dreams is like reading a text that describes how to turn any situation, person, or item from a dream into a synonym for sexual issues.

The Freudian view of dreams and dreaming leaves no room for literal interpretation nor for any interpretation outside of dysfunctional, hindered, or unaccepted behavior. Freud believed that nearly all dreams should be considered sexual in nature, disguised by the dreamer's subconscious through an internal censorship. This censorship was designed to allow the dreamer to continue to sleep, unawakened by the emotional stress that would prevail if the true nature of the dream came through directly.

A number of Freud's issues need to be examined. The most questionable part of his theory that prevails overall interprets the dream before it is even dreamed. Assumptions that feed Freud's prevailing theory include the beastly nature of human beings. People are little more than animals driven by base desires in his view. A second, more subtle assumption defines dreams as a reflection of poor mental health. The subjects that Freud dealt with were, in fact, mentally and emotionally disturbed. This certainly had an impact on his theories.

Viewed from a Christian perspective, Freud's assumptions leave no room for God's action. They certainly do not reflect the biblical accounts of dreaming. The typical

lay understanding of Freud's theories also creates problems for those who would like to share dreams. More than once, parishioners have come to me to discuss a dream in fear and trembling from sexual paranoia. They begin by suggesting that they are perhaps perverts, assuming that their dream has sexual significance where none is apparent.

Freud viewed the dream as deception. It was self-deception, veiled by the subconscious of the dreamer, but it was still deception. Jung even referred to Freud's view of this facade as truth being maliciously withheld from consciousness (Memories 161). The biblical concept of a dream that was given by God is that such a dream was revelation of some sort. It served to instruct dreamers relative to some action they should take or to warn dreamers of some upcoming event. In that respect Freud's view of dreaming is antithetical to the view of a godly dream. Still, for some aspects of the overall dream experience, Freud offers helpful insights.

First and foremost, Freud brought the dream back into focus as a potentially important event. Second, Freud recognized that the dream source might well come from deep inside the dreamer. While he did not acknowledge the presence of Christ within, attempting to place Freud's theories within the framework of Christianity naturally points to the possibility of God's inspiration of the dream from deep within. Freud's theories of dream sources, colored with a Christian perspective, point out the possibility of natural, Godly, and demonic influence in the dream formation and content.

The conclusions drawn from these initial theories cause the Christian to take issue with Freud. God is the measure of all things, not humanity. Further, as shall be seen in an examination of the dream experience from a physiological perspective, much of the mechanism of dream formation as theorized by Freud has been proven impossible.

Carl Jung. Jung and Freud were contemporaries and, for a time, good friends. Much of Freud's theory was accepted by Jung as demonstrated by Jung's own words: "My reading of Freud's The Interpretation of Dreams showed me that the mechanism was at work here, and that the facts I had observed were consonant with his theory. Thus

I was able to corroborate Freud's line of argument" (Memories 147).

Jung did not, however, give unequivocal support to Freud's theories. He added, "The situation was different when it came to the content of the repression. Here I could not agree with Freud" (Memories 147).

The content of the repression was based, according to Freud's insistence, on the primacy of sexual dysfunction (Jung, Memories 147). Jung disagreed, and this discrepancy would lead ultimately to a breakdown of the friendship (158). Jung believed that dreams had two purposes in the dreamer's life. First, he saw them as compensatory. Dreams created an internal balance in the dreamer. The dreamscape played out an aspect of the dreamer's personality that was lacking or stymied by their nature (Nienkirchen).

The second purpose a dream might serve in Jung's analysis was that of assisting the dreamer in the process of individuation by providing images of the future. This might be a real or imagined future. Jung claimed premonitions in his own dreams. An example of this was a dream that foreshadowed his future break with Freud (Memories 163).

Freud dismissed spirituality in any form (Jung, Memories 149). Jung attempted to differentiate between his spiritual beliefs and scientific theories. He said, "To me, dreams are a part of nature, which harbors no intention to deceive but expresses something as best it can, just as a plant grows or an animal seeks its food as best it can" (161). Jung's statement offers a perspective from which a modern spiritual view of dreams can begin to form.

Jung once stated that the single issue that brought patients into therapy in the second half of their lives was religious in nature (Modern 265). Through the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer, the dream can express something as gently or as strongly as might be indicated by the nature, maturity, and state of mind of the dreamer. The "as best it can" could reflect the ability of God at work in life to reach the dreamer in the most appropriate manner. Rather than intending to veil the truth, the dream message is simply encased in an image familiar to the dreamer. It might reflect an image from the

past day or week or a deeper image that is more significant in the life of the dreamer.

Russ Parker and John Sanford are two psychologists from the Jungian school who have written books that attempt to correlate Jung's theories with a Christian context. Parker says about Healing Dreams, "This book has been written to provide both biblical and practical guide to the whole experience of dreaming" (1). Sanford states, "All of us dream, and our dreams have a meaningful message" (14).

Sanford's focus throughout his book is finding healing at a spiritual and even physical level through the reconciliation of the two halves of the person: the "dark" side and the "light" side, the gender and its anima or animus, the conscious and unconscious self. He tends to view a great deal of dreaming and spirituality as paradoxical in form and states, "The reconciliation of opposites, and the acceptance of the unconscious as a psychic principle of equal importance with consciousness is the basic Christian problem" (167). He comes to the conclusion that wholeness in Christian life derives itself from the internal reconciliation of evil and good, the conscious and unconscious mind.

Parker's focus seems less didactic in the psychological sense, as it is aimed more directly at helping the reader to use the dream experience as a spiritual growth and health-producing phenomenon. He encourages the self-examination of dreams by the dreamer. In his view dreams are primarily created by the dreamer (46) and serve as an avenue for God to work in the life of the dreamer (9). They contain messages that the dreamer has missed in his or her waking life; they reflect unfinished business and reveal hidden truths.

Both authors create a relationship between a Jungian psychological school of thought and a theological structure. The theological structure is drawn more as a result of psychological opinions than used as a foundation itself. Both assume that the sources of the dreams are the dreamers themselves. Parker states categorically, "The dreamer is the sole architect of his or her dreams" (16). He contrasts this with a view of waking visions as being orchestrated by God (9).

God's interaction in the dream is not so much a control, then, as a using of what is already present as a tool. The one exception that Parker allows is that of a special spiritual dream (97-98). Biblical dreams with direct words from God fit in this category, but dreams of this sort are not limited to the Bible and its characters. As he says,

Our own dreams tap into our capacity to be really sensitive to our inner lives and spirit; how much more then should the Holy Spirit make us sensitive to God's word as we dream and enjoy his gift of sleep! (98)

His reliance on the Holy Spirit as the dispenser of God's word and work comes through in this statement.

Sanford does not put the same limits on God's ability to interact directly in dreams. He refers to God as the "unseen commentator of our soul" (48). Still, Sanford stresses that a psychological understanding needs to precede an attempt to locate God's place in the dream.

Both Parker and Sanford illustrate healing experienced through dream analysis with personal examples. Though the mechanism of such healing was vague, the divine nature and action of God are more precisely identified as the source.

They also address the issue of precognitive dreams. Parker deals with it primarily from a psychological level. He attempted to demystify the experience in some cases as simply unconscious observation and intuition, though he recognized that at times such dreams were genuine messages from God (89-90).

These texts attempt to combine the psychological aspects of dreaming (mind) with the spiritual aspects of dreaming (spirit) in order to lead to a more holistic approach than would be otherwise possible. We find the primary problem with the Jungian school from a Christian perspective in the understanding of the blending or reconciliation of the dark side of the human personality with the light or good side. Christianity is not about reconciling darkness and light or good and evil. Rather, the goal of Christianity is the destruction of the dark side, the sinful propensity, and a complete replacement with the

presence and perspective of Jesus Christ.

Dreams then that hold up the dark side of human nature to the dreamer serve as a warning or at least a reminder of our condition and our need for Christ. In their simplest form then, they are worthwhile to examine. The depth of meaning may not be fully reflected with such a simple approach however.

Dreams—The Physiological Approach

The discovery of rapid eye movement sleep (REM) by Eugene Aserinsky changed the scientific community's view of sleep and dreaming (Strauch and Meier 13).

Experiments in REM sleep and dreaming have called many of Freud's theories into question. Biologists have in many cases begun to see dreams as simply random nonsense, inaccurately interpreted after the fact, or simply as mental garbage, being thrown out of the human computer (Hartmann 64).

REM sleep occurs cyclically throughout the night, interspersed with slow wave sleep, also called deep sleep (Neimark 31). REM periods in the sleep cycle occur four to six times per night. The mean duration for a REM period is twenty minutes, with periods lasting between three and fifty minutes (Malcolm 71). Typically the first REM phase lasts ten minutes and increases in duration for each subsequent event (Neimark 31). REM dreams are characterized by a bizarreness of character and a vividness that increases with each REM cycle. Slow wave sleep cycles precede and intersperse the REM cycles and have a ninety-minute duration in most cases (31).

Clinical observation of subjects awakened from both REM and non-REM sleep periods demonstrates that dream activity occurs in both parts of the sleep cycle. Dream recall is, however, much more limited when awakening from non-REM sleep. Nine subjects artificially awakened 191 times from REM sleep phases recalled 152 dream sequences. The same subjects upon waking from non-REM sleep 160 times recalled only eleven dreams (Malcolm 71).

Dream recall is not the only difference between REM and non-REM sleep

periods. Physical signals of REM sleep are far greater than the rapid eye movement that initially served as an indication that something different was occurring. Heart rate and brain temperature both increase during this phase of sleep. Additionally a general physiological arousal occurs (Neimark 31).

Chemical stimulation also occurs in the brain during REM sleep. The controlling neurotransmitters for the brain while awake are norepinephrine and serotonin. REM brain activity is controlled by acetylcholine (Kopecky 78). Acetylcholine levels in the brain increase dramatically during the REM sleep phase, stimulating nerve cells and stripping muscles of tone and tension, essentially paralyzing the dreamer from the neck down. Serotonin levels drop as well (79).

Brain scans during dream sequences indicate that the frontal lobes of the brain that integrate information no longer function during REM sleep. Freud's assertion that the dream serves as an expression of unconscious wishes being actively repressed and disguised comes under attack as a result of this knowledge. How can dream content be monitored by the frontal lobes and visual cortex, when the frontal lobes and visual cortex are not functioning (Neimark 33)? Further, the portions of the brain that deal with emotion are also the areas that drive the brain during dreaming (33).

The physiological findings have explained in many ways what happens to and in the body during dream sequences. Studies have demonstrated that standard chemical and physical changes occur during sleep that appear to have direct implications for dreaming, but this information does little to explain either the content or impact of the dream itself in the dreamer's life.

Freud saw the dream itself in terms of being the "manifest dream" that had little value. The "latent dream" held the underlying wish that could only be discovered by analysis. This analysis needed to be done by someone schooled in Freud's own techniques and opinions. Many biologists are inclined to take the new information and disregard Freud altogether. Some perceive dreams as random nonsense, interpreted after

the fact. If the dream is nothing but nonsense, then any interpretation of such worthless material is equally nonsensical. Some even refer to dreaming as “unlearning behavior,” a tossing out of the garbage of the mind (Hartmann 64).

The prevalent attitude that the discovery of REM sleep and further study would decipher the dream then has proven incorrect. Like Freud’s theories and the work of Jung, it pointed in some new directions and has some value worth examination but does not answer all the questions. In fact, it may have raised as many or more than it answered.

Dreams most clearly remembered occur at a time when the conscious mind is at its lowest level of control. In effect, the dreamer’s mind is open at a far greater level than any other point during the day. This is especially significant for the Christian. The reality of Christian life is that we are, at all points in time, servants of Christ. Much of our servanthood is easily defined in biblical terms, in the same way that a servant might know the normal work of a given day in the house of his or her master. Specific issues do, however, arise occasionally. These situations require specific responses. How then does Jesus impart the knowledge of his desire in the life of his servants? How does he convey the sense of peace promised in John 14:27? The point of greatest openness in the believer’s life may offer the greatest opportunity. The results of physiological study could easily be construed to point to the dream as an avenue for God’s work in the lives of his servants.

Dreams in Today’s View

A new search for spirituality is quite prevalent in today’s society. Dreams play a part in this search, but, unfortunately, the dreams are not typically viewed from a Christian perspective. During the course of the seminars, one individual brought in a copy of an article taken from the Internet that exemplifies this move in examining dreams.

The article was entitled “Predictions Dream Dictionary.” It was an online dream dictionary that claimed to be able to turn a user into “a dream reader overnight with the

help of the dream dictionary (“Predictions”).” According to the instructions, the user simply typed in the keywords from his or her dream, and the interpretation of the dream would be fed back out. It claimed to be able to offer users insights into themselves and their future (“Predictions”).

The accompanying features from the “Predictions” source, which could be accessed from this site, included such subjects as fortune teller, love spells, karma and color, numerology, horoscopes, love, astrology, and Chinese astrology (“Predictions”). This sight promoted many spiritual resources, none of which fell within the confines of acceptable Christian practices.

This article reflects the mindset of the new spiritual quest. The mindset is the reflection of an attitude that looks to any source of spiritual help or focus as an offer with equal access to truth and true spiritual wisdom. From a Christian perspective, nothing could be farther from the truth. The Bible clearly admonishes its readers to avoid these things. The early Church fathers were nearly universal in their condemnation of divination through dreams, which this source, and so many others on the Internet and in the popular press, espouse.

The Nature and Theology of Dreams in Christian History

Biblical accounts throughout the Old and New Testaments depict the dream experience as a normal method for God to convey messages to his people. Dreams are not the only source, to be sure, but they are a very defined one. The visionary experience, waking dreams if you will, stands as the clearest method that God used. Biblical admonitions were also used from the time of Moses, as God’s word was recorded, taught, and read, but dreams were a standard. The early Christian Church continued to value dreams as a potential source of experiencing the presence, instruction, and comfort of God. As time passed, Christian leaders began to disregard dreams and the theology of dream interpretation. Today, Christians have, judging from the time and writing spent on dreams from a Christian perspective, a very low regard for and minimal understanding of

dreams.

The Old Testament

The Hebrew language contains no definite distinction between the dream and vision experience. The dream typically forms the expression, the vision the content. Dreams were a normal, though supernatural, experience (Kelsey 19).

Chalom, the Hebrew word that we translate “dream,” has connections to the Aramaic and Hebrew verb which means “to be made healthy or strong” (Kelsey 19). Through a consideration of the word *chalom* and the view of dreams, we gain an insight into the Old Testament understanding. Dreams were perceptions of reality, though outside the natural and purely physical. Further, they had the potential to be beneficial to dreamers or those around them. This benefit is seen in an examination of the dreams of the Old Testament.

Biblical accounts of dreams and visions generally contain one or more of three basic themes: they are calls to some sort of ministry or action and guide the action; they serve as prophetic warnings; or, they serve to convey or remind the dreamer of the promises of God, thus bringing comfort and encouragement to the dreamer. Two formats are used: a direct revelation of a situation or command that requires no interpretation and a veiled or coded message that does require interpretation.

Divine guidance that comes through dreams and visions in the Bible varies. It can be direction to move from one point to another or a call to ministry. While not specifically named as a dream or vision in Genesis 12, Abraham received God’s call to leave his home. “Leave your country, your people and your father’s household and go to the land I will show you” (Gen. 12:1).

Along with this call, came a promise of success and blessings, not only for Abraham but also for others who would be blessed through him. Again, though this is not specified as a dream or visionary experience, God made a clear call in Abraham’s life direct enough to be unmistakable. This in turn leads to the conclusion that the call was a

direct revelation by God. The interpretation of such a call was clear.

Less questionable in terminology is the subsequent vision that Abraham experienced in Genesis 15. This conversation with God was full of instruction and promise. As the story continued, however, Abraham fell asleep and, in what may safely be assumed to be a dream, received words of warning and prophecy of what would be coming in the lives of his descendants—slavery and mistreatment in a foreign land. A personal promise of old age followed, coupled with a promise that he would return to his fathers in peace upon his death.

The dream itself was culminated by a smoking fire pot and a blazing torch which passed between the sacrificial pieces which Abraham had prepared according to God's instruction. Morton Kelsey evaluates it: "For Abram this was the verification of the reality of his call from Ur, as genuine an experience of the Holy as one will find in religious literature" (23).

This vision/dream sequence reflects most aspects of the nature of dreams from a biblical perspective: a call to service with guidance as to what was required, promises that brought personal comfort and encouragement to Abraham, and warnings given in a prophetic mode. It also demonstrates God's desire for spiritual and emotional well-being for Abraham as the proof of the veracity of God's claims. It was a direct answer to Abraham's worry that all would not go as God had said.

God used the venue of a dream as a direct warning for an individual in Genesis 20. This passage recounts Abimelech's marriage to Sarah. Abraham relinquished his wife with a half-truth out of fear for his own life. The deception ended when God spoke to Abimelech in a dream and revealed that Sarah was actually married to Abraham: "You are as good as dead because of the woman you have taken; she is a married woman" (Gen. 20:3). Once again, this dream was a direct revelation by God. No interpretation was needed.

A conversation with God followed in which Abimelech proclaimed his innocence

and received instruction, promise, and warning from God in return. He was instructed to return Sarah to Abraham and promised that Abraham would pray for him and that he would live. The warning came in the form of a promise of destruction should he fail to obey. Abimelech was saved from certain death as a result of the dream and his compliance with the instruction it offered.

Dreams were one of the hallmark means of God's communication during the patriarchal period. Isaac received a promise of God's blessings through a dream (Gen. 26:24). Jacob gained the same comforting promise of blessing through a dream as he ran to escape from his brother's wrath (Gen. 28:10-15).

Both of these dreams elicited a response of worship. Isaac and Jacob rose up following their dreams, built altars from nearby rocks, and worshipped God. Jacob went a step further in his worship, however, promising that if God were faithful to him, one tenth of everything he had would be given to God (Gen. 28:22). Kelsey observes, "To Jacob this experience was no mere dream, but a religious experience of the most profound kind; one which had the extraordinary result of establishing the idea of tithing, a practice central to the very heart of Judaism" (24). A consideration of Jacob's nature before and after this event shows a marked change. The usurper became a servant. Prior to this point, Jacob dealt with his brother and father in an underhanded manner. After this experience Jacob chose to deal with God and all of life in a different way. A healing change of Jacob's character began at that point.

The two observations that I quoted from Kelsey are critical to the concept of dreams in the biblical sense. These dreams were seen by the dreamers as experiences of connection with God. They were not just pleasant dreams nor were they nightmares; they were conversation and contact with almighty God, initiated by him. The significance of the dreams was not lost on the dreamers, nor did they question the life-saving and life-changing effects thereof.

Jacob's son Joseph was a man whose life was formed and changed through the

realities of dreams. Genesis 37 includes two dreams that started Joseph on a path that would lead to the right hand of Pharaoh.

Joseph incurred his brothers' displeasure and even raised questions in his father's mind with the tale of two dreams in which he became the focus of attention and respect for his whole family. These dreams of promise and prophecy were veiled in the imagery of sheaves of grain and stars, the moon and the sun, and were not well received. Though they required interpretation, the numbers of the sheaves and stars made such interpretation simple. Furious that their younger brother would have the audacity to even tell them of his dream and its implication of authority over them, the elder brothers found an opportunity to rid themselves of the dreamer and sold him into slavery. To this point one might assume that the dreams were not particularly helpful or healing. Joseph later discovered that these dreams and the result of their interpretation would deliver his family from starvation and death.

Joseph found himself in prison later, and once again dreams come to the forefront, though his work in dreams in the prison was through interpretation. The culmination of Joseph's dream experiences came in his ability to interpret Pharaoh's twin dreams (Gen. 41). These dreams were veiled in their meaning, much more deeply than Joseph's had been, and were, therefore, much more difficult to interpret. Joseph attributed the interpretive ability to God (Gen. 41:16) and then, given God's wisdom, was able to warn Pharaoh of the upcoming famine that would strike most of the known world. These twin dreams and their interpretation are all attributed to God and served to save lives, including the life of Jacob, now called Israel, and the father of the twelve tribes of Israel. Like Abimelech's dream, Pharaoh's dream came from God, though neither were Hebrew. Pharaoh's dreams were a warning that Pharaoh took to heart, recognizing Joseph's wisdom and setting the stage for the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham. God's people were safe, though in time slavery overwhelmed them just as God had warned Abraham.

In Joseph's life and in the lives of his brothers, the ultimate results of the dreams offered a sense of blessing and comfort that could not be separated from the dream experiences. As Joseph stated in Genesis 50:20, "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives." The family was reunited and saved by the one most poorly treated. The primary means by which this miracle was delivered was a series of dreams.

Throughout the patriarchal period, dreams served as a direct connection with God. They were valued as a means of communication. Dreams and visions appear to serve as the primary means through which God made his desires directly known to his people. He led, instructed, warned, and promised through dreams.

Israel's kingdom period also included stories of dreams and visions, though with decreased frequency. When considering the nature of dreams at that point in the history of the people of God, one possibility for this reduction in frequency of dreams would be that God had revealed his will in many matters of life at Mount Sinai in the giving of the law. Still, the dream connection with God was far from over.

A look at the life of Samuel demonstrates that God still spoke in dreams. First Samuel 3:1 tells us, "In those days the word of the Lord was rare; there were not many visions." The dream/vision experience was rare but highly valued. No doubt Eli wondered when he realized that the voice that roused Samuel from sleep was that of God. Here we see the nature of God that is not confounded by the age of his children. He was able to speak truth to Samuel, who was merely a child, and through him to others, one of which was the primary spiritual leader of the nation God claimed as his own. This included the hard words that prophesied the downfall of Eli's house due to the sins of his sons and his inability to stop them. So begins the active ministry of the prophet Samuel. The message that God gave him was profound and greatly affected the whole nation. Most of the prophetic utterances were designed to bring the people back to God to bring healing in the nation.

The prominent authority of dreams was also demonstrated during the kingdom period when Saul was bereft of their help due to his sin. Upon inquiring of the Lord in his distress, “the Lord did not answer him by dreams or Urim or prophets” (1 Sam. 28:6).

Saul desired and expected some answer from the spiritual realm, and obviously included the possibility of a dream. Due to his inability to hear from the Lord through what were considered the normal means of communication, Saul compounded the sin that had caused God’s silence by seeking a spiritual answer through another source, the witch of Endor. God apparently permitted the medium’s summoning of Samuel, though the prophet had died. The ensuing conversation did not bring any sense of relief to Saul. He found only further condemnation. He had been cut off from God prior to that point, and one of the symbols of the chasm that then existed was the absence of God-given dreams in his life. A source of health and wholeness for the king of Israel was withheld from him.

The Old Testament speaks of dreams as a means of communication with God—direct and often conversational in nature, sometimes needing interpretation, but certainly expected by those who sought to live within the desires of God. This communication is not even limited to God’s own people but extends to others, such as Abimelech, Pharaoh, and Nebuchadnezzar. This fact points to God’s sovereignty and the all-inclusive nature of his plan.

Old Testament writers did not, however, believe that all dreams came from God. Leviticus 13:1-3 warned against prophets and dreamers whose dreams or prophecy by dreams led the people away from God. A line was drawn between false dreams or lies about dreams that never existed and those dreams that came from God. God warned that such an event was a test for his people, to prove their faithfulness to him.

Ecclesiastes 5:3 and 5:7 suggest that dreams are nonsense, equating them with the words of a fool—many and meaningless. While Ecclesiastes is cynical in many of its pronouncements, if all dreams were of God, they would not be so blithely discounted.

Many dreams are neither significant nor from God for the purposes mentioned heretofore.

Finally, the Old Testament demonstrated a varying measure of God-given dreams. While not stated powerfully, we know from Samuel's call to ministry that dreams were more prevalent and, conversely, more rare at specific points in Israel's history. This understanding is supported by the promise of God relative to dreams and visions that is found in Joel 2:28: "And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, and your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions."

The suggestion inherent in this promise is that dreams and visions as a means of communication with God will increase at a specific time in human history. The defining event that will usher in this day is the pouring out of God's Spirit. The day of Pentecost was a day in which God poured out his Spirit upon his people, and ushered in this new era and potential in dream life for the Christian through the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

The New Testament

The New Testament and Old Testament reflect a similar understanding in that at least some dreams have their source in God. The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament suggests some substantial differences. It concludes that less dreams are mentioned in the New Testament and that their interpretation is less critical in importance. It further concludes that allegorical dreams are absent. The interpretation comes with the dream; therefore, "there is no interpretation of dreams at all in the New Testament. This is a simplification far beyond that of the inspired interpretation of the O.T." (Kittel 235-36). This interpretation is based on the fact that when God speaks, he is unambiguous (236). The validity of certain dreams as the word of God to his people is absolute.

The concept that fewer dreams exist in the New Testament is problematic, in that much of the ministry and reality of the New Testament is based on dreams and visions. The perspective of this study is based on night dreams, rather than waking visions, but

the New Testament contains numerous examples that will be examined in what follows.

The view that interpretation is less critical in importance is only true if the dreams are clear or interpreted immediately and directly by God. From that perspective, the comments of Kittel are supported by an examination of the dreams of the New Testament. However, drawing the conclusions as concretely as they are stated in The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament may be a mistake. The critical nature of the events of the New Testament relative to protecting the life of Jesus (Joseph's dreams) and the beginning of the church (Peter's dream on the rooftop) leave little room for mistaken interpretation. Further, Old Testament dreams which needed outside interpretation typically point non-Hebrews toward God and have, at their heart, a message that will protect and serve the Hebrew people within the plan of God. The whole series of dreams that Joseph interprets from the prison to the palace are a good example of this.

Another point to consider is the fact that the dreams lifted up in the New Testament are of such a significant nature for all of Christendom that they may not adequately reflect the more normal and personal dream of an individual Christian. This is not to say that such dreams do not impact others, simply that they make an impact at a different level than those dreams contained within the Bible, both Old and New Testaments.

The first chapter of the New Testament, Matthew 1:20-21, relates a critical dream for all Christianity. The dream encourages Joseph to wed Mary in spite of her untimely pregnancy. The dream was so powerful that it caused Joseph to rethink his decision to divorce his betrothed quietly, since she was found to be pregnant with a child he knew was not his own. Joseph's decision to follow the urging of the dream is especially significant in that he knew that the blame for the pregnancy would rest squarely on his shoulders should he go through with the marriage. In fact, marrying Mary was the worst thing that he could have done from the standpoint of attempting to appear righteous.

Still, Joseph received the command to wed Mary so clearly in his dream that he believed and followed God's guidance. The potential destruction of a relationship was averted, and, in spite of the difficulties, Joseph was strengthened enough to follow through with the marriage.

This dream visitation of an angel included a direct and clear call to action. It also included instructions and the promise that Mary would deliver a son, that he was to be named Jesus, and that he would save his people from their sins. In addition the angel explained that Mary was blameless. She was pregnant because of the will of God—miraculous and holy.

Later Joseph received another dream with a call and instructions as well as an explanation. Matthew 2:13-15 tells the story of Joseph's and Mary's call to flee to Egypt. The explanation was simple: Herod wanted to kill Jesus, and the search was soon to start. Travel at that point in time was different than today. Dangers present were greater and much more effort was required. The call required a real commitment. Mary and Joseph had to travel with an infant over a vast distance by foot or perhaps by donkey. The conviction of the plan presented in the dream must have been absolute.

Matthew 2:19-20 completed the dream sequence for Joseph as he once again received an angelic visitation through a dream, instructing him to return to Israel. Herod had died, and no one was seeking to kill Jesus. An interesting point about this dream is the precision with which God worked. Joseph might have heard of Herod's death eventually or simply returned when things had settled down. God's instructions, however, were timely and complete. Joseph and Mary were not left with any doubt as to exactly what they should do and when they should do it.

Joseph's dreams possess a common characteristic. Though they are all specified as dreams, an angel brought the news in each case, not unlike a visionary experience when awake. The news was given in direct and concrete terms, not in symbolic or veiled imagery. Guidance was conveyed with any explanation necessary to prevent confusion as

to God's will. God cared for the details of Mary and Joseph's life in a direct manner. No confusion was present. When they needed to know, they were told. God ensured their safety, the life of their child, and their relationship through difficult circumstances.

This series of dreams caused increased commitment and dependence on God in the lives of both Mary and Joseph. They obviously relied on God's word, spoken through dreams to instruct their actions. They no longer belonged to themselves. They were God's servants and responded accordingly. Their relationship is informed and healed by Joseph's dream instruction of marriage to a pregnant woman. The bond was not destroyed by a quiet divorce but strengthened through the message of a dream.

Another dream associated with the birth of Christ comes from God to the Magi in Matthew 2:12. Herod's plan to use them as tools to find the newborn king was foiled when God, through a dream, warned them not to return to Herod. Considering the breach of etiquette involved, the dream must have been powerful as this was not only a slap in Herod's face but, through him, Rome's as well. The Magi's obedience postponed the timing of Herod's attack on Bethlehem's children until Joseph and Mary could escape to Egypt.

Dream accounts in the New Testament, as in the Old, were not limited to Jews. During Jesus' trial, Pilate's wife contacted him with concern over how he should handle the case. She sent a message saying, "Don't have anything to do with that innocent man, for I have suffered a great deal today in a dream because of him" (Matt. 27:19). The dream conveyed the insight that Jesus was not only innocent but was more than he appeared to be. It was a powerful dream, one Pilate's wife could not get off her mind; hence, she suffered through the day.

The dreams of Joseph, the Magi, and Pilate's wife are all identified by the Greek word "ὄναρ. This is the common Greek word for dream, specifically a vision during sleep. The nature of these dreams is unquestioned. The account of the dream of the magi contains no such definition, nor does the dream of Pilate's wife. Still, the presence of God

was made known to them through the dream experience, and the message was absolutely clear (Kittel 235).

The apostle Paul also received dreams and night visions. The book of Acts contains four instances that reflect this connection with God. Acts 16:9 tells the story of Paul's vision of a Macedonian man begging him to come to Macedonia to help them, a different dream than most already mentioned from the New Testament. In this dream the call was clear but somewhat less obviously from God. No angel appeared, nor did Paul receive clear instruction as to how and why he was to go. In fact, God was not directly present in the dream at all. The dream contained a person. The call for help came from this dream individual, and Paul responded immediately. He believed that the dream was inspired by God and that it contained his call to move on in ministry. He went.

Paul's visit to Corinth in Acts 18 is punctuated by a night vision (Acts 18:9-10). This dream offered encouragement from God for Paul not to fear but to keep on working. It promised the presence and protection of God. God also claimed many Corinthian followers from that city in the vision, surely an encouragement to Paul in his ministry there. Instead of being a call to go somewhere for God, this was a call to stay for God. Again in an important time in his ministry, Paul received direct word from God relative to what he was to do.

The Greek word used to describe the experience of Paul is based on *οραμα* from *οραω*, which implies something more than merely a normal dream. It was not a visual dream; rather, it conveyed a more prophetic word as in the dreams/visions of the Old Testament (Kittel 350). Still, it was a night experience, and presumably Paul was asleep.

A similar event occurs in Acts 23:11. This passage conveys another night vision in which the presence of the Lord came to Paul as an encouragement with a word of instruction included. Paul was to testify to the reality of Jesus Christ in Rome just as he had in Jerusalem. Whether the presence of the Lord with Paul was perceived to be a real, physical presence or a sense of the presence of Christ accompanied by a word of

encouragement and instruction is unclear. Once more, however, Paul received guidance from God at a crucial juncture in his journey. Paul is never left in question. When God needed to reveal his will or purpose, it came through a dream or vision.

The preceding two events might be called into question as to whether or not they were actually dreams. Still, the fact that the term *οραμα* is used in conjunction with the fact that Paul experienced the visions/dreams at night points to a significant event during sleep.

Peter's dream or trance while asleep on a rooftop is similar (Acts 10:9-20). Though the dream is veiled initially, its message is so critical that God interprets it immediately, lest its point be lost on Peter. The unclean animals were a veiled image for the Gentiles, no longer to be thought of as unclean because God was now claiming them as well. The spiritual healing of the nations began in earnest at that moment as God revealed a new message regarding non-Jewish people who might become believers.

Here, we again see the use of the term *οραμα*. In this case it appears to more clearly define a trance-like, visionary experience than a dream experienced in sleep.

A consideration of the combined view of the New and Old Testament on dreaming demonstrates that God was not shy about clarifying his word and desires to his people. This was especially prevalent at critical times in their lives and ministries. God's revelation of his will through dreams to place a call in people's lives, to instruct them, to warn them, or to make promises to them are prolific. The number of accounts the Bible contains implies that many similar instances may not have been recorded. God used dreams as a standard method to convey his messages to his people.

An examination of the biblical implications applied to the present day is worthwhile, especially in the light of Pentecost and Peter's sermon. He quoted the prophet Joel: "In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams" (Acts 2:17). Peter attributes the passage to the events of that day. We live

in the aftermath of Pentecost as the Christian Church, with the presence of the Holy Spirit a constant witness to God's work within us. Biblical sources show that God desired his servants to not only know but understand what he desired. Should Christians expect less today? With the presence of the Holy Spirit to guide, instruct and comfort, the Christian might assume that God's use of the dream experience would be even more prevalent.

The Church Fathers

The early Church fathers believed that dreams potentially came from a number of different sources. At its most basic level, the source was perceived to be either internal or external. Dreams from an internal source were considered natural, or human, while dreams from an external source were supernatural. If positive, then the source of the supernatural dream was God. If the dream were negative or evil, the source of the dream was typically considered to be demonic.

The Church fathers discouraged the practice of dream incubation, common in the Roman Hellenistic world at the time. A vast numbers of sites were dedicated to the practice of dream incubation in the early Christian world. Epiduros and Pergamum were chief among them (Nienkirchen). Throughout history, many cultures used the practice of dream incubation to enhance a rite of passage, such as coming into manhood. This was quickly condemned in the Christian church though dreams themselves were often regarded highly.

Individual Christian leaders recorded many dreams during this time period. Examples include the story of the shepherd of Hermas from The Apostolic Fathers (Lake 9ff) and the writings of Jerome from Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, (Schaff and Wace 3: 498; 6: 35-36) both of which describe a dream call to repentance and deeper conversion into their walk with Christ.

The Shepherd of Hermas (Lake 2) is a particularly interesting dream account. It begins with an account of a physical event that serves as a core issue from which the dream and its interpretation develop. Hermas, while walking, saw a woman bathing and

helped her from the river when she exited. He knew and admired her as a fine Christian woman and expressed thoughts of desire as a wish that he might have a wife like her. No defined sexual desire is expressed in his account of the encounter. His statements indicate that he had thought of her as a sister (335).

Later, while walking, he stated that he fell into a dream and was carried by the spirit of God into a trackless place where, in the dream, he began to pray. Immediately, the woman appeared to him and accused him of sin against her. He made a claim of innocence but was convicted all the same (Lake 335-36). The woman disappeared, but the dream continued as she returned. Her appearance and attitude was much gentler this time, revealing to Hermas that his thoughts could, indeed, lead to sin. She also interpreted the real message of the dream as a warning to Hermas that he must convert his family. The children had become corrupt due to his leniency (356).

One year later, while walking through the same area, Hermas was thinking of his first dream, and was once again carried away to the trackless waste, this time in what he described as a vision (Lake 336). Again the woman appeared, this time older, and began to interpret the previous dream further. The children were described as the people of the Church that had become corrupt and must be corrected (336-45).

Later, Hermas had a third vision in which the woman reappeared and explained more. Again, she had aged further, though he realized that she was the same woman. Afterwards, an angel, appearing as a young man, informed Hermas that the woman in the dream represented for him the ages of the Church and the needs and sin that would arise over the course of history (Lake 365).

This fascinating sequence of dreams and visions demonstrates interpretation at a number of levels, all of which are correct and important. Some focus purely on Hermas, assuring him that his thought process was indeed an avenue for sin and must be addressed in his life. Other interpretations reached to people within his family, calling on Hermas to be accountable as a spiritual director in his own family. Still more pointed to the Church

of his day and beyond that to the Church of all the ages prophesying rebellion and the need to call for repentance.

God provided both the dream and the interpretations over a period of years as Hermas was open and able to comprehend them. This supports the concept that with the dream God will provide interpretation. Further, it stresses the potential depth of the dream experience in the life of the Christian. God offered Hermas, and indeed the whole Church, eternal truth conveyed by a dream. The message was a personal and universal call to repentance and responsibility.

Justin Martyr, living and writing in the second century, believed that spirits sent dreams. He believed that the primary spiritual source for dreams was evil, at least for non-believers (Roberts and Donaldson 1: 167), and used this as an argument in his writings to the emperor on behalf of Christians. He condemned diviners and dream senders as evil, and subject to eternal punishment (169). He acknowledged that God did send some dreams, asserting that God could not be seen with the eyes but only the mind (190).

Justin Martyr's comments are worth examination in a day in which dreams are viewed in an increasingly pagan culture. The assumption that all dreams are equal and of worth for people, either as a reflection of internal issues or some spiritual blessing from a source that is studiously *not* called God, is not a problem exclusive to Justin Martyr's world. Spurious interpretations based purely on dream encyclopedias or pop psychology leave the dreamer open to spiritual deception. Justin Martyr stated that false prophets were filled with a lying, unclean spirit, while true prophets got their information from God (Roberts and Donaldson 1: 198).

Clement, an Alexandrian theologian, wrote that sleep was a time of particular receptivity to spiritual things due to its nature as he perceived it. He believed that in sleep, the soul and body separated in a manner "as real, though not as absolutely as death" (Roberts and Donaldson 1: 257).

Clement, in his discourse on sleep, suggested that simple sleeping arrangements were best, pointing out that Jacob was deemed worthy of receiving his great vision of the entrance to Heaven as a result of sleeping on the ground with a stone for a pillow (Roberts and Donaldson 1: 258). He further suggested that the sleeper should wake often to bless God and that he or she should sleep in a manner that would promote sleep interruption (258). Interestingly enough, though modern physicians might decry his idea on the basis of the body's need for uninterrupted sleep, Clement's suggestion would promote a higher level of dream memory according to modern physiological information. Studies have demonstrated that dreams are remembered when interrupted by waking. This will be discussed later in the chapter.

Clement's understanding of the never-slowng, never-ending activity of the soul led him to call the Christian to live constantly in moderation and attentiveness to God. Thus dreams, for the Christian, became an extension of consciousness and connection to God, to the point that a person might rise to a nearly angelic state and thus grasp "the eternity of life" (Roberts and Donaldson 1: 259).

The total of Clement's comments lead to the conclusion that he perceived dreams as a potential area in which the dreamer could continue his or her spiritual growth in profound ways. Unencumbered as the soul was by the body during sleep but directed by a mindset that was focused entirely and constantly on God, the Heavenly Father could speak directly or indirectly to the dreamer. For Clement, dreams could serve a powerful guiding or comforting function. Not all dreams were considered to be true, but the process of Christian maturation would lead the believer to dreams that would be true in increasing percentage.

Origen, another Alexandrian theologian, believed that dreams were a normal part of the conversion experience and reflected a divine revelation. He believed that the dream itself was symbolic in its language and depicted the spiritual world (Roberts and Donaldson 4: 416). As Clement drew a line between true dreams and false dreams, so

Origen felt that not all dreams were of the same value. Still, he believed in the ability and even normalcy of God's use of dreams as a means of communicating with his people. He stated the following:

we nevertheless, so far as we can, shall support our position, maintaining that in a dream impressions have been brought to the minds of many, some relative to divine things, and others to future events of this life, and in this either with clearness or in an enigmatic manner, a fact which is manifest to all who accept the doctrine of providence. (qtd. in Roberts and Donaldson 4: 416)

Origen acknowledged the two methods of divinely inspired dreams. He recognized that some were clear in their implications and that some were veiled. He also acknowledged the precognitive dream as a godly sign and that other forms of divine knowledge were conveyed through dreams. Origen affirmed the theory that God still communicated with his people through dreams.

He was, however, adamant about the practice of divination. In his opinion, divination was either ludicrous or demonic (Roberts and Donaldson 4: 538). If the predictions of divination proved false, the practitioner was a fool. If they proved to be true, however, demons were responsible (539).

The life and mind of a Christian were different things. He encouraged believers to keep their hearts clean, diligently guarding against spiritual attack as well as any other adversaries. This practice allowed the Holy Spirit to dwell within the believer's imagination, causing him or her to contemplate the things of God. In turn, this might lead to divine foreknowledge in some circumstances (Roberts and Donaldson 4: 539), though it did not guarantee it. The key element was the work of the Holy Spirit in the life and mind of the believer.

Origen made the point that any study of dreaming from a Christian perspective must deal with the reality of the Holy Spirit. The critical nature of spiritual discernment was the focus of most of his comments. In as much as God allowed the work of demonic

forces in the world (not encouraged but allowed) the nature of Christian diligence was always important, but it was even more important in dreams. To take the seeming message of a dream at face value, especially if in direct contrast to the standards of Christian conduct as demonstrated biblically and historically as orthodox, is hazardous. Origen likened the dreams of believers to the visions and dreams of the prophets (Roberts and Donaldson 4: 286). He obviously held such dreams in high regard but also recognized the danger of unguided analysis of such dreams and spoke to that danger consistently.

Tertullian, a third Alexandrian theologian, developed a deeper theology of dreams than anyone before him. He described the nature of dreams as a point between sleep and death, depending on the movement of the soul in sleep for their character. He believed that in sleep the soul was released from the external world and was free to move in directions of its own choosing though it was not separated from the body in the way that Clement perceived (Roberts and Donaldson 3: 223). He believed that the proof of the soul's state of consciousness was the emotions experienced by the dreamer from his or her dreams (223). The memory of dreams then was a gift of the ecstatic state—in which the soul moves through specific acts without effects (223). These acts carried with them no condemnation if out of keeping with Christian life and principles, nor did they offer any reward if they were within the realm of Christian expectation (224).

Tertullian joined the previous Church fathers then in his understanding of the unencumbered soul, though not quite so unencumbered as Clement's perceptions. Therefore, he believed that the faculties of the dreamer were at their highest point, while our power to exercise those faculties might be at their lowest, resulting in the dream's ability to "bring before us images of a sound mind and of wisdom, even as it does those of aberration" (qtd. in Roberts and Donaldson 3:224). Tertullian saw and lifted up the potential of the dream experience to offer wisdom from and connection with God beyond that of the normal state of consciousness but also saw the danger of aberrations as well.

The critical elements were the source of the dream and the mindset of the dreamer.

The source of the dream experienced was based on one of three things: God, demons, or the soul itself (Roberts and Donaldson 3: 224-26). Tertullian agreed with Origen in the critical nature of the Holy Spirit in being the deliverer of true and godly dreams, even to the unbeliever at times (226). On the other hand, he stated that demonic influence was also a very real possibility in dreams, as the evil one chose any avenue to assault the Christian, even sleep. Finally, Tertullian also believed that the soul itself was responsible for the creation of some dreams under special circumstances, though the soul was not at fault as such (226). Like Origen then, acts in dreams did not, in and of themselves, impugn the heart of the believer if they were out of keeping with the highest calling of Christianity.

Tertullian's approach to dreams is consistent in nature with the other Church fathers for the most part. Once again the threefold source of dreams was lifted up, and warnings were issued relative to Satan's potential attack through dreams. Encouragement was offered to dreamers as well. The critical nature of the work of the Holy Spirit is lifted up both as the source of godly dreams as well as the defining interpreter.

Finally, Tertullian believed that other external factors could help dictate the conditions of the dream and define those factors. First, he stated that dreams occurred primarily at the end of the night when the vigor of the soul emerged once again as sleep began to dissipate (Roberts and Donaldson 3: 226). Present research demonstrates the same conscious reality because REM (rapid eye movement) cycles get progressively longer throughout the night and produce progressively more vivid dreams (Neimark 31). The net effect is that upon waking in the morning, individuals would be much more likely to remember their dreams, being in the midst of them when they awakened. This is not to say that dreams do not occur throughout the night. It simply suggests that the dreams most likely to be remembered are typically from the morning.

Second, Tertullian believed that the time of year could affect dreams, and he

detailed his thoughts as to why that might be. Third, he felt that the position of the body had its own effects, though he also stated that the effects of position might just be chance (Roberts and Donaldson 3: 226). He also stated that the dreamer should avoid following opinion or superstition and gave examples. He condemned fasting as a superstitious element if by fasting the dreamer sought to insure a dream. However, Tertullian suggested sobriety and fasting as favorable to dreaming. Fasting served not to twist God's arm to insure a dream but rather to demonstrate the believer's desire to please God and receive from him anything that he desired to give (226). Again, a dependence on the interaction and interpretation of the Holy Spirit is thus stressed. We cannot force a dream, and superstition or dream encyclopedias do not offer us the answers to the content of dreams. Dreams are not interpreted by scientific analysis; rather, those dreams with spiritual meaning must be spiritually discerned.

This may seem a fine line of definition, but it typifies Tertullian's view of dreaming. It was a gift from God in the life of a believer or anyone else to whom God might give it. Tertullian condemned restrictions of incubation as a necessity for valid dreams. He did not so much condemn the practice of incubation as he believed that it was unnecessary. He believed that true dreams were available anywhere, rather than at a particular shrine or only after a process of preparation (Roberts and Donaldson 3: 226).

Jerome, a contemporary of Augustine, experienced a call to repentance in a dream. It was associated with his love for secular literature. The dream caused him to quit reading secular material for a period of time and focus on Scripture instead (Schalff and Wace 3: 498).

Later in his life, Jerome once more began reading Gentile literature. He then dreamed of being caught up to judgment where he was once again condemned for the practice. He was accused of being a follower of Cicero rather than Christ, since this was a source of study for him. Further, he was shown that he treasured this writing and thought process, and therefore, it possessed his heart. This brought about a permanent change in

his source of study (Schallf and Wace 6: 35).

Jerome's writings, like most of the church fathers, warned against diviners. He condemned the practice and encouraged Christians to a specific course of action against them. If the diviners were slaves, believers were to "chastise them with blows and torment" (qtd. in Schallf and Wace 3: 17-18) until they repented. If the diviners were freemen, they were to be directed to penitence by confining them (18).

The Church fathers mentioned above demonstrated several similar characteristics in their attitudes toward dreams. First, they believed that dreams came from multiple sources, and God was a possible source. Second, professional interpreters (diviners) of dreams, especially those outside of the Church, were to be avoided at least and perhaps even punished. Rather, interpretation was the sole venue of the Holy Spirit, whether within the life of the dreamer him or herself or through the external conversation with a fellow believer who possessed the spiritual gift of discernment. Finally, the dreams that they claimed as personal examples often reflected the characteristics of biblical dreams: a call to ministry, or in Jerome's case repentance, or a prophetic word about a future event.

Jerome's dreams mentioned above both reflect a call to repentance from a fascination with things not of God. At one level, Jerome's interest appears to have approached idolatry. His dreams called him back to God and, as such, constituted spiritual growth and even spiritual healing as he heard God's command and realized the significance of what he had done. Note that God dealt with him in a similar manner on two separate occasions.

Augustine, a contemporary of Jerome, also considered dreams important enough in the life of a believer to warrant attesting to his understanding of them through the written word. His understanding of the appearance of dead individuals in dreams is particularly interesting (Schallf and Wace 3: 545). Throughout human history individuals have attempted to reach and converse with the dead. They have attempted to converse with the dead for a number of reasons. Sometimes people have sought information about

the future, or the past. Occasionally contact is sought in order to locate something hidden by the person who has died. In my experience as a pastor, people who have sought to contact dead individuals have usually been attempting to reach family members. Children who have died seem to be a particularly prevalent goal for contact. A major spiritualist (non-Christian) center in the midst of the geographical area in which I serve as a pastor draws many people to attempt such contact. I have more than once discovered that individuals from my parishes over the years have visited the center, usually to reach a lost loved one. Augustine's statements address this issue. This does go beyond the realm of the dream concept; however, it reflects a mindset that desires and places importance on contact with the dead, one which came through clearly in the study itself and pertains to the dream experience.

Augustine believed that though the dead appeared in dreams, they themselves were not there but merely an image of them, without their knowledge or direct involvement. He likened it to dreaming of a living person whose likeness was present, again, without their knowledge, consent, or any reality (Schalff and Wace 3: 545).

A friend wrote Augustine a letter relative to this subject suggesting that some sense of reality must be present, since he himself had experienced dreams with the image of a dead friend present who prophesied the future accurately (Schalff and Wace 3: 512). Augustine's response was simply that some things were beyond the understanding of the human mind, and that in all probability God was the source of the information, not the dead friend (514). An appropriate response to those who seek contact with deceased loved ones might follow the same avenue. They should seek God.

Augustine followed the example of most of the apostolic fathers in rejecting not only the need for diviners but outright rejecting the possibility that such individuals could actually have anything of God to say. At best, they did not know what they were talking about, at worst they reflected a "baleful fellowship between men and devils, and are to be utterly repudiated and avoided by the Christian as the covenants of a false and

treacherous friendship” (qtd. in Schalff and Wace 12: 547).

Again, we find Augustine supporting the possibility of God providing divine knowledge through dreams. We also see that he recognized the possibility of demonic impact as well.

Gregory of Nyssa believed that an individual’s dreams typically were merely a reflection of his or her state of mind or character (Schalff and Wace 5: 402). Thus brave men dreamed dreams that reflected their bravery, cowards of their cowardice, etc.

Dreams might also reflect the physical state, or bodily condition. Here, thirsty dreamers might dream of water, or sick dreamers might dream of something that reflected their physical issue (Schalff and Wace 5: 402). Only occasionally and very specifically in the life of those few deemed worthy by God of divine communication, did a dream carry with it some specific message of divine manifestation (402). Gregory thus reflected an attitude toward dreams that came from two sources—the dreamers themselves or God—though, once again, God’s input only occurred in rare cases with rare individuals in Gregory’s views. He made no mention of direct demonic influence in dreams.

The Middle Ages

Dreams continued to have a defined place in Christianity during the Middle Ages, but the problem of interpretation grew. The question of which dreams were true or real and which were false became an increasingly divisive issue. Eventually, professional dream interpretation was abolished as those who claimed to be able to do this work were more commonly classified as diviners. The polarization of views regarding dream sources added to the issue. Were good dreams from God and bad dreams from Satan? Coupled with the nature of the pagan practices in dream interpretation and divination, these issues led to a progressively increasing mistrust of the dream experience in the Christian world, at least by those in religious authority (Nienkirchen).

The Middle Ages combined the death of the Roman world with the barbarian conversion to Christianity which brought about a new spiritual vision. This new vision,

combining as it did Christian and pagan practices, helped keep a theology of dreams alive. Gregory the Great (AD 540-604) was the first medieval pope. He affirmed the validity of dreams but cautioned wariness as well (Nienkirchen).

The deepening of the dark ages and rapid loss of literacy coincided with a rapid drop in dream literature in what had been the Roman world. Thomas Aquinas was born and lived in the 1200s. A foremost theologian of the Roman Catholic Church, he established the Christian worldview toward dreams for the Western world. Impacted powerfully by Aristotle, he looked for empirical evidence in dreams that would prove the presence of God. Most dreams lacked this evidence by their very nature. He did not believe that the human psyche could communicate with the spiritual world and even perceived prayer as largely a cognitive act (Nienkirchen). Aquinas did believe that spiritual agents such as God, angels, or Satan could impact a dream. He suggested that external agents such as atmospheric conditions or the disposition of the sleeper were much more likely contributors (Knight and Nehil). This ambivalence, coupled with the direct sexual nature of many dreams, led him to the conclusion that dreams were primarily a sensual experience at night (Nienkirchen).

Aquinas, as one of the foremost theologians in the Western church, set the pace for many centuries. His stated distrust of dreams in general forced Christian dreamers to look at their dreams in a suspicious manner and encouraged silence rather than sharing.

Present Christian Views

Today few denominations have an expressed theology of dreams. The Catholic Encyclopedia states that supernatural impact in dreams is possible but rare (Knight and Nehil). It further contends that even supernatural dreams are of minimal impact and not in need of restriction or authorization of the interpretation of such dreams. While this stance admirably discourages divination, and especially diviners, it also discourages taking dreams seriously under most circumstances and casts doubt on the possibility of divine intervention in the dream.

Contemporary Christian writing in some cases suggests that the assumption that dreams are rare and of minimal impact is not correct. A growing awareness among Christian authors that dreams are indeed an avenue through which God can and does choose to speak to his people, often in very direct terms, is becoming known. Ann Spangler recorded a number of God-inspired dreams that have been shared with her over the years. Her accounts of these dreams are broken down into a number of categories, or types, of dreams. She points to dreams of prophecy, guidance, healing, wisdom (or instruction), dreams that are a saying goodbye to someone or something, and what she refers to as beckoning dreams (7-8). Most of these categories fit well into the nature of God's dreams as evidenced in the Bible.

Unique Types of Dreams

Dreams vary greatly, but some fit into categories. The following types of dreams stand in opposition to a either a purely biological or psychological foundation.

Dreams of Discovery

Dreams that lead to great discoveries have served a part in human history. They are not easily explained and may point to God's intervention at some level.

Auguste Kekule was a French chemist famous for the discovery of the circular nature of the benzene molecule. This discovery came in the wake of a dream in which Kekule saw snakes forming circles by biting their tails. Upon waking he applied the circular image to his study and solved the puzzle (Hartmann 66).

Elias Howe, the inventor of the sewing machine, dreamed of cannibals with long spears, dancing. The spears were moving up and down with the rhythm of the dance, and the image created in Howe's mind answered the question of where and how to place the needle in the machine in order to make it work (Hartmann 66; Kopecky 80).

Vladimir Horowitz, the great concert pianist, discovered a new fingering for a musical passage as a result of a dream. Prior to the dream, playing the passage had seemed an insurmountable problem (Kopecky 66). Another popular composer, singer,

and pianist, Billy Joel, claims to receive the ideas for much of his music in dreams (Neinkirchen).

Far from garbage and nonsense, these dreams demonstrate the creative genius potentially at work in the dream experience, though they do not necessarily point to God's direct intervention. Some might claim that the answers to the problems or the idea itself were fully perceived in the subconscious, and then, through the dream work, came into the conscious mind of the dreamer. Other dreams are harder to explain.

Precognitive Dreams

People throughout history have claimed to experience precognitive dreams. Jung himself dreamed of his break with Freud well before it happened (Memories 163). At the time of the dream, the two were still close friends and colleagues. Abraham Lincoln's dream of his own death, complete with its cause and details that later proved true, is forever imprinted in American history (Von Kreisler 144). Precognitive dreams may not be extremely rare. David Ryback, a clinical psychologist in Atlanta, surveyed 433 college students and found that 67 percent of them claimed to have had a psychic dream. Subsequent study revealed that only 8 percent of them met his criteria for a correlation of accuracy between the dream and the actual event of between 80 and 90 percent (Kopecky 80). While it is far from a majority, 8 percent is not an inconsequential number either. The Bible contains many other examples of precognitive dreams that are directly attributed to God's revelation. A recollection of Parker's analysis is worthwhile here. He attributed some precognitive dreams to observation and subconscious assimilation. Others he attributed to divine intervention by God (89-90).

Conversion Dreams

Dreams that lead individuals to a conversion experience also suggest God's direct intervention. Evangelist Luis Palau claims,

Every Arabic Christian I have talked to who converted to Christ from a non-Christian background relates a dream or vision in which Jesus,

dressed in white as in the Transfiguration, speaks directly to them, telling them he is the Savior of the world. A woman whose father is a top leader in her nation—a nation where there are no church buildings—was converted through a dream in which Jesus revealed himself. The first five years of her Christian life she didn't even have a Bible. (10)

Kelly Bulkeley makes a similar claim in Spiritual Dreaming. He describes an instance in which an African man is converted to Christianity as a result of a dream battle with a giant in which he is saved from certain death by remembering and reciting a smattering of Psalm 121. This in turn caused him to give himself wholeheartedly to God, since if only a bit of Psalm 121 could save him from a demonic giant, how much could be done by being completely committed to God (143)?

Cindy Jacobs recounts a similar tale that occurred in the nation of Iran. At a Muslim study of the Koran, the group noticed that Jesus' name was frequently mentioned though no one knew anything about him. Subsequently, one of the members of the group had a dream offering instruction on how to find out who Jesus is. It involved a journey to a mountain bridge. The man followed the instructions, and through a number of unusual circumstances, met some missionaries on the bridge who gave him literature about Jesus. Jacobs attributes this incident and dream to the difficulty that many remote and non-Christian areas have in discovering Christ. The need was met miraculously because only a miracle would suffice (220).

Factors in Dream Recall

Age appears to have an impact in dream recall if not in actual dream activity. Individuals under the age of eighteen have more frequent dream recall than those that are in their third decade of life (Strauch and Meier 54). While the factors causing this are unknown, some speculate that it is due to the increased process of individuation that occurs in the second decade of life. Young people in this process are more apt to pay attention to their dreams (55). This speculation, if true, would underscore some of Jung's contentions about dreams. I would also add that paying attention to dreams as required by participation in this study opened the door to greater dream memory according to several

subjects.

The point of awakening is also a critical factor in dream recall. Physiological studies have been helpful in defining not only when dreams occur but also how we recall them. An individual who awakens in the midst of a REM cycle is much more likely to recall a dream than someone who is awakened from any other stage of sleep. Nine subjects awakened 191 times from REM sleep recalled 152 dreams as opposed to eleven recollections from 160 awakenings from non-REM sleep (Malcolm 71). This may account for most of the dream recall that people experience. Awakening in the morning is a normal part of the sleep process. At this point the REM sleep cycle is in its longest, most graphic and bizarre period (Neimark 31). Waking up during this phase would give the dreamer the greatest possibility of recalling a dream.

Modern Dream Research

Kelly Bulkeley is presently doing a great deal of writing and study on dreams, approaching them from a religious perspective. A Unitarian, Bulkeley puts dreams from all cultures and religions on the same plane but does not exclude the Christian experience. He points out, "Dreams have, throughout history, been primarily the province of religion. People in virtually every religious and spiritual tradition we know of have looked to dreams as a source of divine revelation and insight" ("Gods" 349-50).

He goes on to point out that serious dream research has diminished dramatically in recent years brought about primarily by the physiological studies from the sleep laboratories. These studies have demonstrated predictable patterns of sleep and dreaming that are common to all mammals (Bulkeley, "Gods" 350). This reality is even demonstrated in the most primitive of mammals like the platypus (Travis 298).

A demystifying of the physiology of the dream experience has also diminished interest on the part of researchers in the field of the psychology of religion (Bulkeley, "Gods" 350). Bulkeley goes on in his article to lift up the results of several relatively-recent studies that demonstrate research is still valuable.

The first work cited is that of J. Allan Hobson. In Hobson's activation-synthesis model, the seemingly random firing of neural systems that occurs in the brain during REM sleep produces a conglomeration of images synthesized by higher mental functions, adding meaning (217). Because of this, even though the origin of the images may be random, the dream still has meaning. It is "the transparent and directly legible product of an unusual mode of information processing" (217). In order to synthesize the dream, Hobson suggests that the brain may need to resort to its deepest myths to construct a framework (214).

Bulkeley uses these results to point back to two characteristics he feels are significant in religiously meaningful dreams. The first characteristic is that such dreams frequently involve traditional religious symbols and themes. The second characteristic he cites is that such dreams often involve original religious imagery that might even be heretical ("Gods" 352).

Bulkeley also points to Stephen LaBerge's work on lucid dreaming. LaBerge dispelled the old hypothesis that lucid dreaming was a logical impossibility and therefore represented a partial arousal from sleep. He performed particular specified eye movement during a REM phase (70), thus demonstrating some level of control over the dream even in sleep.

Bulkeley's final analysis demonstrates three issues that pointed to the viability of new research. First, modern dream research has become much more interdisciplinary than it had been in the past ("Gods" 356). Second, he states that "dream study provides an excellent resource for exploring questions of language, meaning, and interpretation," suggesting that dream interpretation is the "world's oldest hermeneutic art" (356). Finally he feels that dream study offers a great opportunity for "cross cultural examination of religious experience" (356).

The dream, within a Christian context, can benefit from these three points. The interdisciplinary interaction reflects a more holistic approach to the dream experience.

We know that the body is involved in the physiological aspects, the mind in the psychological aspects, and the spirit in the religious aspects. When one considers God's work in the life of a Christian, all three aspects are affected. The dream experience may prove to be one of the defining moments in human wholeness, in spite of the fact that all mammals and even birds dream.

The exploration of language, meaning, and interpretation may point directly back to a deeper sense of the presence of God in an individual's life. Jung's assertion that all patients that came to him in the second half of their lives were suffering from a religious identity crisis (Parker 20) may reflect a deeper need for an ability to see and understand the presence of God. Exploring the dream from a broader spectrum than simply a psychological one is a vital link toward spiritual understanding.

The observation by Luis Palau, previously cited, indicates that God is using the dream experience to share the truth of his love and salvation across cultural and linguistic barriers (10). The dream experience demonstrates profound potential for God to engage the lives of his people. It speaks the language of the heart, especially considering that the emotional center in the brain is the primary functional portion during the dreaming process (Neimark 31).

Comfort, Healing, Spiritual Growth, and Guidance

Donald Demaray states, "To develop spiritually is to grow in mental, emotional and often physical health" (117). The holistic nature of the dream coincides with the nature of spiritual growth and development.

Comfort, Healing, and Dreams

Recent church movement has directed itself toward healing as a part of its ministry. Demaray quotes a survey reviewed by the American Academy of Family Physicians that indicated that 99 percent of people surveyed viewed religious belief as healing power (12). He further contends that healing ministry is impossible within the church unless an authority exists on which to base its understanding of the supernatural

acts of God (13). He contends that that authority is contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as written, miracles and all.

An examination of this mindset within the context of Jung's assertion that he had never encountered a patient in the second half of his or her life whose problem was not primarily a religious one is worthwhile. It highlights both the need of and possibility of genuine action on God's part. Jung's contention reflects the need for relationship between the human creation and the creator. The Bible reflects the actions that God has taken historically with his people. Dreams serve as a point of direct contact with God throughout the biblical accounts.

Frank B. Stanger quotes E. Stanley Jones' seven point summation of God's methods of healing. The seventh type of healing Jones claims is the final one, the resurrection of the body. Two of the six remaining methods could be impacted directly by dreams. They include "mental suggestion" and "deliverance from underlying fears, loneliness, self-centeredness, purposelessness, resentments, guilts, that produce disease" (75).

Mental suggestion focuses itself in the thought processes of the individual. A healthy attitude in all aspects of an individual's life produces a higher degree of health in each of the three areas—spiritual, mental, and physical. Though Jones suggests that this is a conscious attitudinal change (Stanger 75), such a change can be directly impacted and even implemented through the comforting and encouraging action of God in a dream.

Dreams can point the individual to the underlying issues that produce disease, stress, and conflict. This is the principle under which both Freud and Jung operated. Often the source of the problem can be so deeply imbedded within the individual that a direct approach is impossible. Dreams can bring the issue to the surface. Once they can be seen for what they are, deliverance can be obtained. Jacob's experience at Peniel depicted in Genesis 32:24-30 is an example.

Jacob spent the night wrestling with a man. While the experience is not depicted

as a dream per se, it has the characteristics of a dream or vision-like situation. A “man” later implied to be God is suddenly there with Jacob, and they begin to wrestle. The man could not overpower Jacob and so “touched” the socket of Jacob’s hip and thus dislocated or severely damaged it, but still Jacob controlled the situation, and the other asked Jacob to release him as the morning came.

The story abounds with unusual language and circumstances. Perhaps the most unusual of all is the fact that Jacob fought. For the first time in his life, as far as a reader of Genesis knows, Jacob did not run away from a confrontation. He had usurped his elder brother’s position and had run away from his anger. He had caused his brothers-in-law to grow angry and despise him through his increase in wealth at their expense and then ran away from them. Jacob awaited his upcoming meeting with Esau in great fear, not knowing what would happen. Suddenly he had a confrontation with a mysterious stranger in the middle of the night, and Jacob had to fight. He won. It was a turning point in Jacob’s life, a time of healing of fear that had held him captive for much of his life. With God’s blessing he moved ahead in new faith and spiritual health.

Spiritual Growth, Guidance, and Dreams

Demaray states, “All the Christian writers on spiritual formation agree on a fundamental principle of wholeness: SURRENDER [original emphasis]” (122). A summary of E. Stanley Jones’ book Victory through Surrender commends the route of self-surrender to those who are seeking self-realization. The only thing that a person can truly claim as his or her own is that very person that God first gave us. This is the only real gift that we have to give back to God (29).

Conscious self-surrender to God is critical to spiritual growth. We surrender ourselves willingly or unwillingly at many points in life. Jones suggests that surrender is a principle to which survival itself is subservient (124). One such surrender comes in sleep.

Sleep is a surrender in which the body rests. Theories from the Church fathers

through Freud to physiologists come to bear on what happens during this rest phase. Church fathers suggest that the control goes in one of three directions—the human soul, God, or demons. Psychology suggests that control goes to the subconscious. Physiological research suggests that no control exists, just unrelated firing of electrical impulses in the brain.

The one theory that connects them all is very simple. The conscious mind gives up control. In the life of a Christian—a person who claims the Lordship of Christ in his or her life—this is a time in which God could reach us in ways that might be impossible while we are awake and “in control.” Gregory of Nyssa wrote, “When asleep the senses and the reason rest and the less rational parts of the soul appear to take over” (qtd. in Schalff and Wace 5: 142). The surrender of our rational side is a profound surrender in a world so completely engulfed in the worship of scientific fact and reason. Gregory did not claim that reason was completely nonexistent in sleep and dreams, simply that it no longer ruled over all others. Parker suggests that this reality allows us to give our dreams to God in prayer in an examination of our spiritual journey (41). A level of surrender allows the dream in the first place, and a secondary level of surrender encourages its understanding and impact in life. Divine guidance becomes a dramatic possibility in this time of surrender.

Group Work in Dreams

M. Ullman describes an experiential dream group as “one in which people come together for the purpose of helping each other work out the feelings and metaphors conveyed by the imagery of their dreams. It is best thought of as an exercise in dream appreciation” (406). Ronald Barnes suggests that a critical issue in dream appreciation for spiritual directors is their place in the process. Rather than serving as an interpreter of the dream, the spiritual director needs to allow, encourage, and help the dreamer find his or her own meaning (403-404). Spiritual direction is defined within a specific context for Barnes. It is a one-on-one interaction between two individuals, one of whom is more

spiritually mature and serves as a mentor. Even such a formal relationship does not allow the mentor to serve as an interpreter of the dream in Barnes' understanding. The context of this study is sufficiently different than that of spiritual direction to make it particularly imperative for the group to see itself in a supportive rather than interpretive vein. In order to achieve this goal, the nature of discussion of the dream is critical. The group needs to ask questions of explanation and clarification that will help the dreamer to look more deeply into his or her own dream. This procedure will help the dreamer come to conclusions that are his or her own, rather than simply those of the group.

Dream Journals

The dream journal provides a permanent account of the dream. This can be accessed later for more complete interpretation. Many books on spiritual growth encourage the use of journals as a means of recording the spiritual journey that is the life of the Christian. Ben Johnson encourages the use of journaling and lifts up dreams as a worthwhile journal entry, claiming to record most of his night dreams in his own journal (103). Within the context of the study, the recording of dreams allowed the dreamer not only to use it as a milestone of his or her spiritual journey but also simply to encourage remembering the dream.

Nienkirchen suggests that a dream journal should be kept near the bed for immediate access upon waking from a dream. Speed is critical before the dream images fade. Without a format for recalling the dream, many, perhaps most, will be lost in the remainder of the night or in the business of the following day.

Research Methods

A spiritual view of dreams has great potential in the life of a Christian. This research sought qualitative findings in order to gain a solid foundation for further research and greater understanding of the phenomenon. Therefore, the research needed to access the thought processes of the participants at the deepest level possible. Thus, it needed to be focused very specifically on the dream experience. This reality led to a

focus group approach as suggested by Morgan (2). Within the basic foundation of the focus group, however, my position was clearly that of a participant observer as detailed by Jorgenson (14).

Lickert-type rating scales were used to gain a general measure of attitudes towards various aspects of dreaming based on a five point assessment as suggested by Thomas (23). The Lickert scale is potentially a helpful tool for dream study in that it helps define in a quantifiable way the intensity of the participants' feelings about the nature of dreams.

Summary

The early Church inherited a biblical perspective toward dreams that recognized their potential as a source of communication with God. As the centuries passed, this belief was put into a theological structure that was progressively altered and diminished.

The Enlightenment of the eighteenth century caused most individuals to dismiss dreams as contrary to reason. While folk interest continued, intellectuals scoffed. The colonial structures that abounded at that time denigrated local cultures and their beliefs. This attack included the dream experience. Those with authority merely attributed the dreams to native superstitions and pagan religions (Gackenbach 322). Dream study from a genuine theological stance had stagnated. Real interest in dreams as genuine experiences with attached importance underwent a renaissance of sorts during the late nineteenth century with the works of Freud and later Jung.

The discovery of REM sleep in 1954 brought a new surge of interest to the field of dreaming. The physiological aspects of sleep and dreams were explored, and new findings from scientific research became widely known to the public. Though greater knowledge exists concerning what happens physically, the question of exactly why these things happen and their ultimate effects relative to the dream experience are still a mystery. The source and potential of dreams is as elusive a subject as ever.

The point of this study is to determine if God speaks to us in dreams and why.

Two local congregations of the United Methodist Church in western New York will seek an answer to that question through examinations of their own dreams and through a study of the dream experience in general.

CHAPTER 3

DESIGN OF THE STUDY

The Problem and Purpose

One of the fundamental desires of life is happiness. Within the Christian context, happiness and joy are derived from being in the center of God's will, that is having a sense of God's purpose and plan in life and pursuing it. This joy overcomes opposition and turmoil because it is based in something far beyond both. The problem that confronts a Christian is simple. As Herman Riffel asks, "How do you recognize the voice of God and distinguish it from all the other voices that we hear?" (9).

This question is posed to most pastors at some point in their ministry. Riffel breaks it down into three basic issues: how we differentiate voices, how we test our interpretations, and what visible pattern helps in the process (18). Sometimes the questions address major life decisions relating to a job, spouse, children, and other relationships. Sometimes people ask these questions relative to deep spiritual concerns. What answer does the pastor have to give? Occasionally pointing to a specific passage of Scripture is sufficient. Church polity and doctrine offer another option at times. Perhaps the most common response of the pastor is that he or she will pray for the individual.

Prayer is a critical issue in discerning God's will but begs another question: How will those who pray know the answer? Hearing might be through the spoken word of a trusted Christian friend, spouse, or pastor. It might be through a coincidental event with direct repercussions relative to the needed answer. It might be an internal response that seems firm and reflects that "still small voice."

Biblically, God speaks to his people in dreams and visions. These dreams and visions are sometimes very obvious in their conveyance of the message. Sometimes they are veiled, symbolic in nature, needing further interpretation in order that full understanding and validation might come.

The study or theologizing of dreams fell largely into disfavor in the Middle Ages.

By the time of the Enlightenment in the eighteenth century, the concept of theologizing dreams was perceived as against reason. Dreams still held folk interest but were generally discredited by the educated classes (Gackenbach 322). Psychological theories prevailed in the twentieth century and claimed a sort of ownership of the dream world. Looking at dreams from a Christian perspective requires first looking at the biblical principles and perspectives.

The purpose of this study was to examine the dream experience of lay individuals within a framework of orthodox Christianity in order to discover God's acts of communicating comfort and guidance to his people through dreams.

Research Questions

Two assumptions are fundamental to the purpose statement. The first is that not all dreams are divine disclosures. The second is that some dreams may be given by God as a revelation of his will or a needed word in the life of the dreamer for healing, strengthening, instruction, or comfort. The second assumption is of prime importance to the study and leads to the research questions.

Research Question #1

What perceptions do subjects hold toward dreams as a means of listening to and discerning the voice of God relative to divine guidance and comfort in their lives?

This question was measured and analyzed from the perspective of the opening and closing questionnaires. This provided a baseline and final reading from which the answer to research question #2 could be determined. The initial measurement helped inform the seminar content to a certain extent by qualifying the level of understanding prevalent in the group. The second measurement helped determine the effectiveness of the teaching methods and content.

Research Question #2

Do the attitudes of the subjects toward dreaming change as a result of the study?

The questionnaires are primarily oriented toward ascertaining the theology of

dreams and dreaming the subjects possess. Any change that occurs in that theology as a result of participation in the study and fulfilling the requirements of that participation were crucial to note.

Research Question #3

What evidence indicates that God speaks through dreams to subjects participating in a twelve-week seminar on listening to God through dreams?

Participation in the study required more conscious thought and action in regard to dreams and dreaming than most people were prone to give under normal circumstances. As the subjects gave serious consideration to their dreams, certain characteristics of dreams were lifted up that pointed the dreamer toward an experience of the divine as the source. If such characteristics existed for an individual, they proved helpful in determining what dreams are worth the person's deeper consideration. Identification of these characteristics is important because should they prove consistent between multiple individuals in the group, they may serve as benchmarks for a Christian examination of dreams in general.

Research Question #4

What aspects of the seminar seem to contribute to the subjects experiences of God giving guidance and comfort through dreams?

The previous question deals with subjective evidences of God's communication through dreams. This question is more didactic. The study was designed to educate the subjects on basic biblical, psychological, and physiological concepts of dreams and the dreaming process. It further attempted to join them in a manner that allowed the dreamer the opportunity to consider each facet of dreaming within a Christian context. This consideration needed to come out of an educated, theological perspective. Therefore, the points within the seminar that encouraged this examination of the dream experience were potentially the most important in an educational sense.

Population and Sample

The population from which the sample was drawn was the active adult membership, both official and constituent, of the Dansville and Sparta Center United Methodist Churches. This active membership included those who were active in the life of the church as opposed to the total membership, many of whom live too far away to attend, even out of state. Many names appear on the membership rolls. Not all attend or contribute to the life of the church.

Average attendance of the two church services combined is 245 individuals with an active attendance (two or more times per month) of approximately 325. Excluding children and youth under eighteen as well as those who might be gone during winter months left a viable group of between 175 and two hundred.

Requests for participation were offered from the pulpit and through the churches' mutual newsletter. This invitation included an explanation of the project and the time commitment required. Participants were self-selected. Twenty individuals over eighteen years of age who were willing to commit to the project were initially accepted. Fourteen individuals completed the study.

Instrumentation

The primary instruments that were used in the study were researcher-designed questionnaires (see Appendixes A and B) that were filled out during the first and last seminar sessions. They were designed to provide information about the participants' attitudes toward dreams and dreaming. They were separated by a twenty-four-week interval in which the seminars occurred. The two questionnaires were similar in content but contained a few significant differences.

The first questionnaire contained personal information including gender, age, educational, and religious background that are not included in the closing questionnaire. The second questionnaire contained questions that sought to discover those aspects of the seminars most helpful to the participants. They were, therefore, only applicable to a final

questionnaire.

A pretest of the instrument with a limited group left many questions unanswered as they were not fully understood or were simply ignored. Using a portion of the first and last seminar sessions to work through the instruments together decreased the variables of interpretation.

Methodology

The project was an evaluative study in the descriptive mode that utilized a pretest and posttest design. Following the opening interview/questionnaire, the participants engaged in twelve seminar sessions over a twenty-four-week period. These seminars included all participants (with occasional absentees) and consisted of two portions. The first was a teaching session I conducted on some aspect of dreams and dreaming (see Appendix D). The second portion was a discussion of the participants' dreams taken from dream notebooks I provided in the first session (see Appendix C).

Within the context of heterogeneous society, the perceptions of the nature and potential of the dream experience vary greatly. I hoped to offer teaching on that heritage, focusing primarily on the unique Christian portion, and discover what claims were made by a relatively homogenous group of Christians.

A search for instruments designed to explore the nature of Christian perceptions relative to dreaming demonstrated a void. Anecdotal information is available. Most books that promote dreams as a viable means to encounter God do so as an assumption: Of course God still speaks to his people through dreams. On the other hand, should someone desire to inspire a chuckle among a group of clergy or any educated individuals, a simple suggestion that the individual believed that God spoke to them is usually sufficient. The subject immediately becomes suspect of foolishness at best. A more typical assumption would include mental aberrations. Still, genuine interest in dreams exists from a religious standpoint, and a need exists for material and understanding that will help define its place in Christian understanding in this day and age. This research represents a beginning point

from which further research might be engaged.

The nature of the research design was best described as a focus group according to the definitions found in David Morgan's work. The design was a self-contained study in which the group serves as the principle source of data (2). The study did lean toward participant observation as described by Jorgensen's book, in that the researcher was directly involved both in teaching for the first half of each seminar session and then participating in the group discussion on particular dreams (6). However, the best description of the proposed research is the linking of focus groups and participant observation as suggested by Morgan (23).

The size of the group was small, and its makeup was, as previously stated, homogenous. Morgan suggests that focus groups consisting of homogenous strangers typically deliver better results, that is, less inhibited (34). Under the circumstances, the subjects were not entirely strangers, though not all were acquainted, especially drawing as the study did from two churches. The nature of discussing a topic as personal as dreams may have made some familiarity helpful, however.

Morgan's second suggestion for focus groups is that they rely on relatively structured format and a high involvement by the moderator, in this case the researcher. The structure of the seminar sessions and the discussion of the dreams following the outline described in the dream journal promoted just such a format.

Finally, Morgan states that focus groups typically consist of six to ten individuals in each of three to five different groups (34). Here the study deviated from the focus group definition at the greatest level in only providing one group at a higher membership than suggested. The nature of the study and its structure, however, was such that it did not greatly compromise the results. In fact, since all received exactly the same information in the same format, the nature of a single group may have helped to substantiate the results that were obtained.

The research leaned toward participant observation in some elements. The topic

fit Jorgensen's criteria in that little is known about the phenomenon (in the present day), important differences existed between the views of insiders as opposed to outsiders, and the phenomenon was obscured from the view of outsiders and the public in general (12). Further, "ultimately, the methodology of participant observation aims to generate practical and theoretical truths about human life grounded in the realities of daily existence" (14). The study sought to examine the attitudes of Christians relative to their view of dreams as an avenue for contact with the divine in terms of guidance and comfort. This examination lived itself out in two questionnaires and in observation of the living dream experiences of the participants. The results of this research pointed the way to some theory development based on what happens as people are given permission and encouragement to examine their dreams within the context of the possibility of an encounter with God.

I directed the teaching portion of each seminar session, which consisted of an examination of some aspect of the dream experience. The elements in the literature review that reflected the greatest importance in understanding dreams were threefold. First, chronologically and culturally, was an understanding of dreams as a spiritual experience—the religious element. Second was an understanding of dreams as a psychological phenomenon. The third element was demonstrated in the physiological realities of dreams. The twelve sessions reflected this threefold emphasis and attempted to compile them in a holistic manner reflecting the threefold nature of humanity: body, mind, and spirit. The emphasis consistently focused on the Christian aspects, however (see Appendix D).

Variables

The independent variables of this research project were the dream seminar series, the dream journal experiences, and the discussion of dreams that occurred at the seminar sessions. Each seminar session was built from the research and literature review already noted in Chapter 2. Additionally, the sessions leaned on the class notes and handouts

taken from a July 1996 Doctor of Ministry course offered at Asbury Theological Seminary. Charles Nienkirchen presented “Messages from Heaven/Musings of the Soul: Exploring the ‘Dream Experience’ in Christian Spirituality.”

The dependent variable was the change that occurred in the attitudes of the participants toward their theology of dreams as a result of their participation in the seminar sessions. This change was qualified by the pre- and posttest questionnaires and researcher observation within the seminars themselves.

Data Collection

The pre- and posttest questionnaires served as the primary data collection. Additionally, the dream journals, observation of the subjects, and their participation in the seminars served as data sources. Other data was gathered through my position as a participant observer. This data consisted of moments of revelation, questions and conversation during dream discussion, and changes occurring in an individual’s dream theology. In addition to the questionnaires and notes from the discussions, the seminar and discussion times were audio-recorded. A benefit of this recording was that the tapes could be given to those who missed a session so that they might be able to keep up with the lecture sessions. The recordings were able to accurately capture the lectures, but were unable to adequately pick up the dream discussion time. Again, missed lectures could be accessed, but missed dream discussion sessions could not.

The dreams selected for discussion from the dream journals were voluntary. When such sharing became somewhat unbalanced in that some individuals had more dreams or were more eager to share those that they had, I endeavored to encourage full participation of quieter members. Additionally, I did some steering of the discussion and reminded participants of the nature of the discussion time.

Confidentiality and Anonymity

Total confidentiality and anonymity was impossible within the construct of the project. A group of fourteen to twenty individuals shared the stories of their dreams and

discussed the nature and potential of them. Still, I stressed confidentiality consistently within the group both in the initial session and at each subsequent meeting. The dream journals and questionnaires were set up with a numerical system that encouraged the anonymity of the written work.

Data Analysis

I examined pre- and posttest questionnaire answers using an inductive method, looking for changes in emphasis given to dream importance in matters of spiritual growth and general revelation of God's nature and guidance. Further, the quantifiable information from the questionnaires was examined using paired-samples t-tests. This procedure compared the means of the answers from the two questionnaires and tested whether the average for the differences between the values differed from zero. The tests also indicated the significance of the differences observed.

The research also sought to discover occurrences of divine comfort and encouragement in the dream experiences of the participants. Material taken from seminar session observations was used in addition to the material from the pre- and posttest questionnaires.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The study of the phenomenon of dreaming and the attitudes of a group of Christians toward it is necessarily colored by a number of issues and preconceived notions based on spiritual views, physical or physiological understandings, and the psychological world with which many are familiar. This familiarity ranges from quite shallow to a deeper understanding of all three components. The purpose of this research was to examine the dream experience of lay individuals within a framework of orthodox Christianity in order to discover God's acts of communicating comfort and guidance to his people through dreams.

The seminar sessions, twelve over a period of approximately twenty-four weeks, did spend a limited amount of time examining the nature of psychological and physiological theories, findings and assumptions relative to the nature of dreams and how these related to a Christian understanding. The seminars based the majority of the instruction, however, in biblical and traditional Christian approaches to this subject. Additionally, half of each seminar session (forty-five minutes out of the 1 1/2 hour sessions) consisted of group examination and discussion of dream experiences of individual participants in the study. Pre-seminar attitudes and changes in attitudes by subjects over the course of the study were determined primarily through pre- and post-seminar questionnaires and observations made during the seminar sessions.

Four research questions guided the study's content. The first question dealt with determining the perceptions that the subjects held toward dreams as a means of listening to and discerning the voice of God relative to divine guidance for and comfort in their lives. This was examined both in the pre- and post-seminar questionnaires to determine an answer to the second question: Did any change of attitude occur as a result of the study?

The third question examined the existing evidence that God spoke through dreams

to the participants. This question is subjective, yet the answers were very compelling. They came through the statements and observations of the group itself during the course of the seminars as well as information from the pre- and post-seminar questionnaires.

The fourth question was more evaluative of the seminar content in that it sought to discover the aspects of the seminar experience contributing the greatest help to the subjects in receiving an understanding of guidance or comfort from God through dreams.

Profile of the Subjects

The request for participation was mailed out to all families in the church as a part of the churches' monthly newsletter (see Appendix E). Additionally it was offered at the entry of both churches for a three-week period prior to the beginning of the study, with self-addressed, stamped envelopes attached. I also encouraged participation from the pulpit of both churches for that same time period.

Out of a total membership of approximately eight-hundred (including constituent members) and an actively worshipping group of approximately 325, twenty people responded by filling out the permission/participation sheets and returning them to me. All twenty completed the pre-seminar questionnaire, but only fourteen completed the full series of seminars and the post-seminar questionnaire.

Six individuals dropped out of the study. Three left due to work schedule or job changes. One left due to the difficulty of the relatively late hour of the meeting (Monday evenings from 8:00 to 9:30) and the fact that his job began at 5:00 a.m. One individual left as a result of family issues, and the final individual left the study without giving a reason. Four men and sixteen women began the study. Two men and twelve women completed it. Age ranges can be seen in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1
Age Range of Participants

Age	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60-69
Women	1	1	3	5	2
Men			2		

The figures reflect a predominance of women over men in the program at a ratio of six to one. I have no explanation for this unequal ratio. It does not reflect the gender ratio of the congregation as a whole.

The educational experiences of the participants ranged from high school (three individuals) to college (seven individuals) to postgraduate work (four individuals). Six individuals were employed as teachers or paraprofessionals within the school system. Two participants were employed as secretaries, and the remaining six consisted of a computer programmer/machinist, a road maintenance supervisor, a retired nurse, a realtor, a human resources employer benefits assistant, and an account clerk. Of the twenty individuals who started the seminars, seven were employed by the school (one secretary works there), and five were or had been employed in health care. The general educational makeup of the congregation is adequately reflected in the makeup of the study participants.

The following are the reasons stated (question 17, pre-seminar questionnaire) for participating in the study:

To help me: 4 responses;

Personal interest in dreams: 11 responses;

To learn to interpret dreams: 5 responses; and,

Felt God's leading: 1 response.

Twenty-one total responses are listed for fourteen individuals. This is due to the fact that some participants indicated more than one reason for entering the study.

The purpose rated second in emphasis for participating in the study reflects a desire on the part of the respondent to learn how to interpret dreams. During the recruitment of volunteers, I consistently stated that dream interpretation was not the purpose of the study, though people were aware that we would be discussing individuals' dreams as a part of the study.

Reliability

The pre- and post-seminar questionnaires were researcher-designed instruments consisting of 33 questions based on Lickert scales (see Appendixes A and B).

Additionally, the pre-seminar questionnaire contained nine questions not based on a Lickert scale. Five were yes/no questions, two questions were essays, one question sought to discover what sources the subjects used to determine God's direction in their lives, and one question sought to determine what source served as a primary means of conveying God's comfort and encouragement in the life of the subject.

The post-seminar questionnaire contained a number of questions in addition to those already stated for the pre-seminar questionnaire. One question identified the most helpful portions of the study, two were essays, and one less yes/no question was posed.

The Lickert scales were analyzed using a paired-samples t-test. The data was fed into SPSS, a computer statistics program. This program provided information on the mean, the standard deviation, the standard error mean, the paired sample correlation, and the significance of the resulting numbers at a 95 percent confidence level.

Unfortunately, a mistake on my part led to a problem with the post-seminar questionnaire. I had revised the original document in several key areas but had failed to save the material correctly in the computer. The first post-seminar questionnaire that the group filled out was not fully compatible with the pre-seminar questionnaire. As a result,

two weeks after the first post-seminar questionnaire was completed, the group met and filled out a second, compatible questionnaire. Considering the nature of the questionnaire itself and the qualitative research foundation upon which this material is built, I did not anticipate any great difference in results. The problem was, however, a major flaw in the study.

The plan to audio-tape the sessions was also subject to limitations that made the tapes of very little worth in evaluating the dream discussion time. The sound equipment available was adequate to tape the lecture portion of each evening's seminar but was inadequate to fully capture the voices from around the room as we discussed the dreams during the second portion of the seminar each night. No other equipment was available, and attempting to pass the microphone and recorder around the room would have been impossible considering the conversational nature of the discussion time. The recordings were helpful in maintaining a record of the lectures.

Opening Attitudes and Changes

The first research question dealt with the perceptions that subjects held toward dreams as a means of listening to and discerning the voice of God relative to divine guidance and comfort in their lives. The second research question sought to identify changes that occurred in these perceptions as a result of the study. These questions will be examined together due to the charting of figures and the thought process involved.

Questions 15 and 16 of the pre-seminar questionnaire sought to define whether the subjects had a clear theology of dreaming. Essentially, they identified whether or not the participants believed that God did or could work through the dream process. This provided the primary answer to the first research question. Thirteen of the fourteen respondents (95 percent) were able to make such a statement. One respondent (7 percent) did not, though this individual claimed to possess such a theology. The responses stressed one or more of the four general areas listed below:

God can and does impact our dreams: 4 responses;

God can impact if we believe he can: 5 responses;

Dreams are only one avenue for God to work: 4 responses; and,

The Bible proves God's work in dreams: 2 responses.

The responses demonstrate that the participants (with one possible exception) did believe that God could impact dreams at some level. Again, this is the primary starting point for an answer to research question one. More information on both prior understanding of dreams and the impact of the study itself on the participants will be seen in the following material.

Question 16 in the posttest asked the same question, and the answers were generally more detailed and stated with greater clarity. All fourteen respondents made a statement of theological belief that included one or more of the following five emphases for a total of twenty-four responses:

God uses dreams because our conscious nature wields less authority: 4 responses;

God does deal with issues in our lives through the dream experience: 5 responses;

God instructs us in our dreams: 5 responses;

God encourages us in our dreams: 5 responses; and,

God sometimes uses dreams: 3 responses.

A comparison with the pre-seminar questionnaire demonstrates a higher clarity in the theological statements following the seminar series. Additionally, the responses in the post-seminar questionnaire are more active and positive. The stress moved from, "God can work in dreams," to, "God does work in dreams," and even suggested what kind of work God does. This result correlated with a progressive and significant change in the dream discussion time as well.

Initial questions sought to determine how critically the participants valued knowing God's direction and feeling God's comfort in their lives. The following table reflects the responses to those questions, with the number one representing the highest valuation by the participant and five representing the lowest valuation.

Table 4.2
Pre- and Post-Seminar Value of Direction (D) and Comfort (C) from God

	Mean	Std. Dev.
Pre-Sem. Importance of D	1.2143	0.4258
Post-Sem. Importance of D	1.0000	0.0000
Pre-Sem. Importance of C	1.3571	0.4972
Post-Sem. Importance of C	1.0000	0.0000
(N=14)		

The results demonstrate that the participants began the study with a conscious desire to perceive both God's direction or guidance in their lives, though not all rated it at the highest level of importance. By the end of the seminar session, all participants rated their desire to perceive God's direction for their lives at the highest level. The same situation held true for their desire to feel God's comfort in their lives. These questions were not directly related to dreams as such in the instrument. They were merely asked in a general sense. The potential significance of the figures in Table 4.2 are discussed further in Chapter 5.

With a perspective on how critical God's direction and comfort was for the lives of the participants, the study next looked for a correlation of how dreams fit as a source within which God could work to bring that guidance and comfort. Table 4.3 demonstrates the subjects' responses, with values varying from one as a frequent source to five as never occurring as a source.

Table 4.3
Dreams as a Source of Direction and Comfort

	Mean	Std. Dev.	Corr.	Sig.
Pre-S. Dir.	2.5000	1.6525		
Post-S. Dir.	2.2143	1.1883	- 0.020	0.947
Pre-S Comfort	2.7143	1.4899		
Post-S Comfort	2.3571	1.0082	- 0.073	0.804
(N=14)				

The mean of answers to the pre-seminar questionnaire shows a mid-range attitude of the participants relative to the importance of dreams as a source of both direction and comfort in their lives. The responses would place dreams as an occasional source of comfort or direction.

The responses to the post-seminar questionnaire reflect an increase in frequency cited for dreams both as a source of God's direction for life and as a source of God's comfort in life. They are still perceived only as an occasional source. The increase is, however, statistically significant.

Five other sources for receiving God's direction and comfort were also rated by the participants. The sources included Bible readings, prayer, sermons, conversations with other Christians, and inner feelings (see Table 4.4). The values for the five sources are independent of each other. Additionally, each source is separated to examine its value for receiving direction from God and for receiving comfort from God with a score of one offering the highest rating and a five the lowest.

Table 4.4

Other Sources of Direction or Comfort (D = direction, C = Comfort)

	Pre-S. Mean	Post-S. Mean	Corr.	Sig.
Bible (D)	2.6429	2.2143	0.8700	0.0000
Bible (C)	2.1429	2.2143	0.7270	0.0030
Prayer (D)	1.5714	1.2143	0.9090	0.0000
Prayer (C)	1.5000	1.7143	0.7160	0.0040
Sermons (D)	1.8571	2.2143	0.3420	0.2320
Sermons (C)	2.0000	1.9286	0.5560	0.0390
Conversations (D)	2.1429	2.1429	0.3480	0.2220
Conversations (C)	2.1429	1.9286	0.2610	0.3670
Inner Feelings (D)	1.0714	1.7857	0.4480	0.1090
Inner Feelings (C)	1.3571	1.5710	0.0200	0.9470
(N=14)				

Most of these figures demonstrate a greater frequency as a means of receiving God's direction or comfort in life than the reliance demonstrated in the dream experience. This is true prior to the seminar series and continued to be true following it. The category of "Inner Feelings" offers the lowest pre-seminar mean of any source in receiving God's

comfort and direction and thus represents the most frequent source of receiving God’s comfort and direction in the lives of the participants. In the post-seminar questionnaire, inner feelings are exceeded in frequency as a source of direction only by prayer. Within the study, a dependence on the Holy Spirit was stressed to deliver such inner feelings.

To this point, most of the results have reflected the theological perspective of the participants toward dreams and dreaming, both pre- and post-seminar. The questionnaires also sought information at a personal level. Did the participants have any personal experience in what they perceived to be a communication with God through a dream in their own lives? Questions seven through thirteen in the pre- and post-seminar questionnaires were designed to obtain this information. They were based on the preconceptions stated in Chapter 1 relative to what might indicate that a dream was from God (see Tables 4.5, 4.6, 4.7, and 4.8).

Question seven of the pre- and post-seminar questionnaire asked how often the participants remembered dreams upon waking. In this case, a score of one reflected that dreams were frequently remembered. A score of five indicated that dreams were never remembered (see table 4.5).

Table 4.5
Frequency of Remembered Dreams upon Waking (Question #7)

	Mean	St. Dev.	Corr.	Sig.
Pre-Sem.	2.4286	1.3425		
Post-Sem.	2.2857	1.1387	0.8190	0.0000
(N=14)				

The results demonstrate that as a group dreams were remembered at a moderate

level. An increase in frequency of dreams remembered by the participants occurred over the course of the study, but this increase was not significant according to the t-test scores. This increase was, however, reflected in the observations of the group and may not be adequately represented by the statistics. Several participants were not typically aware of having dreams. During the course of the study, all but one participant were able to remember several dreams and brought some of them before the group for discussion. The individual who did not remember several dreams did share one dream during the discussion time and had a second dream early in the study that he recorded in his dream journal. He also had a theology of dreams that he was able to state clearly both in the pre-seminar questionnaire as well as the post-seminar questionnaire.

Question eight sought to determine how many of the participants had a long-term memory of a dream—a dream that they had had and remembered for months or even years. Thirteen responded that they had had such a dream memory. One participant recognized no such dream event. The responses to this question were identical for all participants for both the pre- and post-seminar questionnaires.

Question nine sought to determine whether or not the participants had a dream at some point in their lives that had seemed significant to them. The pre-seminar questionnaire revealed that thirteen participants had had such a dream. One participant had not. The post-seminar questionnaire reflected a change in that twelve participants claimed to have had a “significant” dream while two participants now claimed that they had not. The fact remains that nearly all participants had experienced at some point in their lives one or more dreams that left them with a feeling of significance.

Question ten sought to determine whether or not the meaning of the significant dream had been clear to the dreamer (see Table 4.6).

Table 4.6
Meaning of Significant Dreams

	Pre-Seminar	Post-Seminar
Yes (Clear)	11 (79%)	9 (64%)
No (Unclear)	2 (14%)	3 (21%)
Blank	1 (7%)	2 (14%)

Affirmative responses to this question, in both the pre- and post-seminar questionnaires, indicate that at least in some dreams the dreamer experienced a clear understanding of the message of the dream whether or not it was perceived to have been given by God. Once again the post-seminar responses reflect a reduced number of affirmative answers, an increase in negative response, and, in this case, two individuals who did not respond.

Observation of the dream discussion time did not correspond to these answers. Each of the individuals whose responses are recorded in Table 4.6 shared dreams that they had had. In one case, the dream was one of the few dreams the participant was aware of ever having had.

Question eleven sought to determine whether or not the meaning of a dream had ever been clarified to the dreamer if it were not clear initially. The resulting answers, while clear in and of themselves, were uninterpretable due to a number of unexpected variables.

Table 4.7
Ultimate Establishment of Meaning

	Pre-Seminar	Post-Seminar
Yes	9 (65%)	6 (43%)
No	3 (21%)	0 (0%)
Blank	2 (14%)	8 (57%)

The responses to the pre-seminar question were in line with the preceding questions. One of the blanks is explained by the fact that one participant indicated that he did not have any dreams that seemed significant to him. The second blank is due to the fact that the dream was clear in and of itself, and no further interpretation was deemed necessary.

Analysis of the post-seminar questionnaire responses is much more difficult. Logically, the numbers should contain at least the same numbers of yes, no, and blank responses as were demonstrated in the pre-seminar answers (see Table 4.8).

Table 4.8
Individual Participant Responses to Question 11 (see Appendixes A and B)

Participant Number	Pre-Seminar	Post-Seminar
1	Yes	Blank
2	Yes	Yes
5	Yes	Yes
6	Blank	Blank

Table 4.8, continued

Participant Number	Pre-Seminar	Post-Seminar
8	Yes	Yes
9	Yes	Yes
10	No	Yes
11	Yes	Blank
13	Yes	Blank
14	Yes	Yes
16	No	Blank
17	Yes	Blank
18	Blank	Blank
20	No	Yes

An evaluation of the above table is difficult without directly questioning the participants. If the blank spaces in the post-seminar responses are given the same answer as that in the pre-seminar questionnaire, the participants really had, at one time in their lives, received an adequate or accurate interpretation of a dream subsequent to the actual dream experience. A “no” response in the initial questionnaire would still be a “no” response in the post-seminar questionnaire if it were blank. A pre-seminar blank would remain a blank. Any change from a “no” response to a “yes” or from a “yes” to a “no” would be listed as such. Thus the tally of post-seminar responses would be eleven “yes,” one “no,” and two blanks.

This approach would be in keeping with the observations from the interaction during the seminar sessions, though it demands more from the responses than they will directly bear. While the purpose of dream discussion was not the interpretation of dreams per se, it was an outgrowth of the actual discussion.

The fact that fully half of the responses in this category were blank may invalidate the question. Certainly the responses are not in keeping with the answers to question ten, which is directly related. The responses to this question offer little evidence of value.

Question twelve sought to discover who or what helped the dreamer interpret a difficult dream. The responses were graded as to frequency from a list of five named sources and one optional source described in the question as “other” with a subsequent request for explanation as to what that other source might be. The results were given numerical values between one and five with one representing greatest help and five representing the least help in each of the categories. Thus the numbers are inversely proportional to their value to the dreamer as a help or tool in dream interpretation with a one offering great help and a five offering little help (see Table 4.9).

Table 4.9
Sources for Dream Interpretation

Source	Pre-Sem.		Post Sem.	
	Mean	N	Mean	N
Self	1.636	11	1.750	8
Spouse	3.833	8	2.000	2
Family	3.875	6	4.667	3
Member				
Pastor	3.400	5	2.000	7
Friend	3.286	7	2.000	3
Other	4.200	5	See expl.	

(Each option could have resulted in zero to fourteen responses.)

The most significant figures in Table 4.9 are the self-evaluation of dreams and the change in the view of pastor as a resource. Both the spouse and the friend categories demonstrate a much lower mean (therefore higher value) in the post-seminar questionnaire but also show a much lower N figure. In fact, these figures reflect very little change for the people who responded in both categories in the post-seminar questionnaire. Others, who initially valued spouse and friends as a low source of help in dream interpretation simply left the categories blank in the post-seminar questionnaire. Most people perceived themselves as the best person to analyze their own dreams, both prior to the seminar and afterwards. This was the perspective stressed as appropriate in the lecture section of the seminars. The participants were, however, as evidenced by the numbers, open to talk to others about their dreams.

The “other” category was not perceived as a particularly helpful source in the pre-seminar questionnaire. Five people responded, and four of these participants rated it as a five, or of little help, with no additional comment as to whether or not they were thinking of any particular “other” source. One participant rated it a one, however, and cited a series of retreat experiences at a particular location wherein they have been willing to examine and discuss dreams.

The “other” category was more helpful in the post-seminar category in that once again there were five responses, only two of which had actually rated the category in the pre-seminar questionnaire but all of which specified a particular source of help, though not all gave it a one to five rating. The sources cited were as follows: two mentioned the dream seminar experience, one of which rated it as a one meaning it was of greatest help; one mentioned the retreat experience (same individual) and rated it as of greatest help; one individual commented on a self-examination of her life (not rated); and, one rated the Holy Spirit a one as being of the greatest value.

The changes in responses of the group relative to their sources of help in dream thought and interpretation, coupled with observation of the group as they interacted, led

me to believe that they were more fully conscious of what this question meant and how it applied to their lives. Direct reflection on the Holy Spirit as a resource was minimal, especially considering the emphasis placed on the need for spiritual discernment in this process during the lecture and discussion sessions.

Question thirteen sought to determine how often the participants experienced dreams that seemed to have life significance. The responses were rated on a one to five basis. A one reflected the highest frequency, and five reflected the lowest frequency.

Table 4.10
Frequency of Significant Dreams

	Mean	Std. Dev.	Corr.	Sig.	t-score
Pre-Sem.	3.2857	0.9139			
Post-Sem.	2.3571	2.3571	0.169	0.563	2.414
(N=14)					

An increase occurred in the frequency of significant dreams cited from the beginning of the seminar series to the end. The attitude of acceptance in the group and the seriousness with which we examined the dreams encouraged participants progressively to share their dreams. By the end of the seminars, individuals responded more eagerly and positively to the opportunity to share a personal dream. Further, most who shared exhibited a greater level of confidence in the dream's value.

Question fourteen in the pre- and post-seminar questionnaires addressed the participants' attitudes toward the source and purpose of dreams, including reference to psychological, physiological, and spiritual possibilities. Table 4.11 shows the results of both questionnaires in this eleven-part question. Scores varied from one as "strongly

agree” to three as “no opinion” to five as “strongly disagree.”

Table 4.11
Dreams Are

		Mean	Std. Dev.	Corr.	Sig.	t-score
Purely	Pre-Sem.	3.7143	0.7263			
Psychology	Post-Sem.	4.3571	0.6333	0.4060	0.1500	-3.2290
Occasionally	Pre-Sem.	2.3571	0.7449			
Psychology	Post-Sem.	2.7857	0.9750	-0.3100	0.2800	-1.1470
Overactive	Pre-Sem.	3.2143	0.8018			
Imagination	Post-Sem.	3.5000	1.0190	0.1410	0.6300	-0.8880
Sometimes	Pre-Sem.	3.2857	1.2666			
Indigestion	Post-Sem.	2.9286	0.9129	0.4160	0.1390	1.0990
External	Pre-Sem.	2.7857	1.1217			
Stimulus	Post-Sem.	3.3571	0.9288	0.4480	0.1080	-1.9630
Significant	Pre-Sem.	1.7143	0.7263			
	Post-Sem.	1.7857	1.1883	0.1020	0.7290	-0.2010
Internal	Pre-Sem.	1.6429	0.7559			
Information	Post-Sem.	1.6429	1.1507	0.7200	0.7110	0.0000
Tool to	Pre-Sem.	1.5714	0.7449			
Address	Post-Sem.	1.4286	0.6462	-0.0230	0.0040	1.0000
Tool to	Pre-Sem.	1.3571	0.7449			
Comfort	Post-Sem.	1.4286	0.6462	0.5270	0.9380	-0.2680
Tool to	Pre-Sem.	1.5714	0.7559			
Guide	Post-Sem.	1.6429	0.7449	0.5270	0.0530	-0.3660

Table 4.11, continued

		Mean	Std. Dev.	Corr.	Sig.	t-score
Not Used	Pre-Sem.	4.2857	1.2044	-		-
Today	Post-Sem.	4.7857	0.4258	0.0210	0.9420	1,4550

(N=14)

The responses to this series of questions reflect a greater perception of a spiritual view of dreams than other areas, both in the pre-seminar questionnaire as well as in the post-seminar questionnaire. General opinions of what dreams are did not change greatly between the two questionnaires relative to the questions referring to God's part in the dream experience. Observations of this fact combined with the discussions during the seminar time (both during the instructional time as well as the dream discussions) demonstrated that most participants had a definite opinion of the nature of dreams and dreaming. As the group grew together, these thoughts began to be stated in a more straightforward manner.

The post-seminar questionnaire ended with a series of three questions designed to qualify how the seminar had affected the participants. The first question sought to determine what changes had occurred in the participants' attitudes toward dreaming. Three of the fourteen individuals responded that their attitudes had not been altered by the study. The remaining eleven responses broke down into one of three categories. Six claimed that participating in the seminar had caused them to focus more clearly on their dreams. Four stated that the study had caused them to think more about the possibility that God might actively communicate with them in their lives. One said that she had become more confused due to the fact that the seminar had not been what she expected (training specifically on how to interpret dreams).

The second question asked participants how the seminars had helped develop

their understanding of dreams and God's potential action in them. Seven responded that the study had helped them to take their dreams seriously, and seven commented that working in the group format had been a help in developing their understanding of God more clearly as his work had been pointed out or suggested to them by others. Two individuals stated that the group had been detrimental due to issues of privacy and a perception that the discussions had offered too much direction relative to the interpretation of dreams at times. One commented that she had not been helped by the study (see preceding paragraph). Note that some individuals made multiple responses to the question.

Two individuals in the group were decidedly less comfortable with the way that many dreams were attributed to God during the discussion time. These individuals had a very solidly defined understanding of dreams and spiritual issues in general prior to the study and were not entirely comfortable even with the stress on orthodox Christianity as the basis for considering the nature of dreams.

The third question in the series attempted to push the participants to consider and state the changes that had occurred in their attitudes toward how God might work in the dream experience. Ten individuals stated that they had a new understanding that God did work actively in their lives. What may have been a vague assumption had become a solid belief. Two suggested that God's speaking in symbols was something they had not anticipated, at least at the level the dreams had exemplified. Two others stated they had experienced no changes.

Overall, the participants in the seminar series came to the study with a fairly established understanding of their own theology of dreams. They entered the study because they were already interested in dreams and wanted to explore the subject further. The primary change occurring in the participants was a deepening of their understanding of God's potential action in the dream experience.

Where Was God?

The third research question sought to determine what evidence was present that God had spoken to the dreamer through a dream. This is, as has been stated earlier, a subjective question. Still, within the context of the study, the question is important and can be answered at a level that is helpful. The most critical issue necessary to answer the question is the spiritual gift of discernment. Without it, we are limited to the “gut instinct” of the individual, or even the group, which is not a safe structure for this subject.

The first chapter of this study contains a table of initial criteria for the identification and interpretation of dreams indicating a godly origin. Without completely reproducing that table here, the criteria used to identify the possibility of God’s presence in the dream experience were as follows:

1. The message of a God-given dream will coincide with orthodox Christian beliefs and practices;
2. The dream must be remembered;
3. The dream must be perceived as significant by the dreamer;
4. The dream will typically persist in the mind of the dreamer. This persistence is usually more than merely remembering the dream;
5. Other people in the dream may not represent themselves as such; and,
6. Some dreams are pizza, and some dreams are God, that is, some dreams are nothing of consequence, while others are important, and from God.

The group approached each dream presented by an individual with these thoughts in mind. We did not automatically assume that just because a dream met one or more of the criteria it was from God. If, however, it met the criteria in general terms, we looked for indications of God’s guidance or comfort as a result of the dream. Not only did the dreams often meet all criteria and offer clear instruction or comfort, but dreams from different individuals often meshed in amazing ways on a given evening. One night, early in the seminar experience, all the dreams discussed involved cars. The next meeting, all

the dreams discussed involved boats. This participants first observed this similarity, and speculation arose that perhaps the correlation pointed to divine intervention designed to cause the participants to seriously consider both the individual dreams and the seminar experience. Chapter 5 contains an example of one dream the group considered.

The ultimate answer to the question of God's presence in a dream was left up to the individual dreamer. Each dream discussion session opened with the statement that the group was not there to interpret the dream. The purpose of the dream discussion was simply to talk about the dreams and offer thoughts about directions the dreamer might go in considering the dream as a potential message from God.

The most compelling evidence that God did speak to participants through dreams, either in dreams experienced prior to the study or in dreams experienced during the course of the study, is the fact that most participants believed that that had happened. The changes in their responses to the theology of dreams question are particularly strong evidence of this belief.

Contributing Factors

The final research question sought to determine which elements of the seminar had contributed most to the participants' understanding of receiving God's guidance or comfort through dreams. Question seventeen of the post-seminar questionnaire addressed this question specifically, seeking a one to four rating of the four basic elements of the study: the opening questionnaire, the keeping of a dream journal, the seminar experiences themselves, and the closing questionnaire. A score of one was the highest rating, a score of four was the lowest. The elements were rated from highest to lowest (see Table 4.12).

Table 4.12
Helpfulness of Seminar Elements

Elements of Seminar	Mean of Valuation
Dream Journals	1.679
Seminar Sessions	1.821
Opening Questionnaire	3.214
Closing Questionnaire	3.286
(N=14)	

The results broke down into two categories in effect, with the dream journals and seminars having a greater impact than the questionnaires. An examination of the dream journals reflected this appreciation. The number of dreams recorded by the participants ranged from 1 to 21, with a mean of 6.786 for the fourteen participants. All participants used the journals.

The interest expressed in the hands-on study of dreams was most obvious in the dream discussion time of the seminars. People were genuinely interested and excited about seriously considering their dreams and the dreams of others. This response is seen in many of the essay questions previously cited. The results indicate that the most helpful part of the study consisted of those sections that encouraged participants to actively consider dreams as a possible source of communication with God.

Summary of Significant Findings

The first thing of significance that became clear in the course of the study was the fact that all of the participants had a theology of dreams. All but one participant were able to express this theology in words. All written responses to the initial questionnaire reflected an understanding of the fact that God can and does work through dreams. This

same view was expressed by one individual who normally did not dream and had never experienced a dream that seemed significant for his life. Prior to the study, most participants were fascinated with the dream experience, believed that God did speak through dreams, but reflected little confidence that he might actually speak to them.

The level of and ability to express the theological understanding that they held relative to dreams increased by the end of the study. Qualifying terms like “can” and “if” disappeared in the theological statements of the post-seminar questionnaire. They were replaced with the view that God does speak through the dream experience. This understanding did not, however, extend to all dreams that an individual might have.

The participants began with a desire to receive God’s guidance and comfort in their lives. They did not perceive that dreams were a primary source of that guidance or comfort either before or after the study. Their perceptions of the dream experience as a possible source of guidance or of comfort did, however, increase in the post-seminar questionnaire (see Table 4.2 p. 85; Table 4.3 p. 86; Table 4.4 p. 87).

Another significant finding which pertains to the information in Tables 4.3 and 4.4 (pp. 86-87) is the level at which, for the mean of the group, the Bible played a role as a source of receiving direction or comfort from God. It was an occasional source, and its value did not change significantly between the pre- and post-seminar questionnaire.

Most participants began to share deep beliefs, fears, and dreams quickly in the group. Little time was spent getting to know each other. The fact that two churches were involved resulted in some individuals who were relatively unknown to some others. For all participants, the familiarity grew steadily throughout the weeks of the study.

All participants ended the study with an understanding and belief that God can and does work directly in their lives through the dream experience. They were able to put that belief succinctly into words by the end of the seminar.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This is an evaluative study in the descriptive mode. Some material can be quantified, as outlined and presented in tables in the last chapter. Still, much valid and important material is far more subjective and comes from my position as a participant observer. The study is, in and of itself, a minimal beginning into examining the dream experience from a Christian perspective; therefore, the conclusions drawn from the previously outlined data are limited in scope, though they are significant in their impact.

The data gives the reader a sense of the attitudes that a small body of United Methodists hold in regard to the potential for divine intervention in and through dreams, both before and after a twenty-four week, twelve-seminar study of dreams. Though the number of participants was small, a consideration of the potential implications of this information in spiritual terms leads to the conclusion that it should be approached seriously, with an eye toward further study, definition, and development of a genuine theology of dreams in the lives of individuals and, as a body, the church.

Spiritual discernment is paramount in the examination of spiritual issues. Specifically, the spiritual gift of discernment is needed. In turn, this factor is difficult to quantify. The identification of spiritual discernment within the study lies directly on the my shoulders as a participant observer to determine and relate, and plays critically in any analysis of the results from the discussions that occurred during the seminar sessions, both in terms of actual dream discussion and discussion of the content of the instruction.

With these issues in mind, the results of the t-test comparisons, questions in the pre- and post-seminar questionnaires, and observations of the study group itself lead to the following general conclusions.

1. Each individual who took part in the study began with a theological understanding of the dream experience. The scope of that theology varied. Participation in the study increased the depth of the perception that God can and does speak through

dreams to provide guidance and comfort to his people.

The fact that all participants possessed a theological framework for dreams prior to the study is perhaps the most important finding of the study. For most this came from general life experiences and not from any formalized thought or instruction. The church had not been a part of that process in any direct manner. Further, biblical authority was not high on the list of foundation issues for this theological formulation as will be discussed later. The fact that participants possessed a theological understanding of dreams at all is surprising, and the fact that for the most part the initial theological statements were within the context of orthodox Christianity is even more startling.

The teaching was well received, understood. Generally the post-seminar questionnaire indicates that most of the participants were searching for a way to qualify their dreams within a Christian context. This was encouraging to me, and potentially, I believe, for the Church as well.

2. Dream discussion during the seminar series consistently confirmed God's messages of peace and guidance through the dream experience. A few examples are listed later, but each dream discussion session consisted of at least three dreams and sometimes as many as five. The majority clearly demonstrated the action of God. This was recognized by the participants themselves, both in terms of those who shared the dreams and those who were hearing the dream for the first time.

The implications of this finding for spiritual growth in the lives of the participants is vast, and has less to do with dreaming perhaps than the general nature of their relationship with God. Many people wonder about God's activity in their lives. Dreams offer only one avenue for God to demonstrate that direct activity, but clearly within the context of the study, he was present and dealing in the lives of the participants.

3. The portions of the seminar that contributed most to the participants were those places in which they could actively participate. Journaling dreams and lectures and dream discussion were the most helpful. The lecture portions of the study encouraged

interaction, with questions as well as discussion. These activities promoted the perception that God could and did speak to them through their dreams.

This preference is demonstrated in Table 4.12 (p. 100) but was obvious in the overall study. The participants wanted to learn about dreams and dreaming, and had many questions. Some were answered during the lecture time, and some could only be answered through the discussion of actual dreams.

Translating Numbers, Considering Answers

The individuals who participated in the study expressed a strong desire to pursue the will of God in their lives. That is to say that they wanted God's direction, believing that God had a specific plan and specific desires for their lives. This is evident from the findings in Table 4.2 (p. 86). Paul stated in his letter to the Colossian church his prayer that they might be filled with the knowledge of God's will. The source of this knowledge was spiritual wisdom and understanding (Col. 1:9). The knowledge of God's desires in the life of a Christian, both in terms of action and of purpose is reflected in the responses of the participants. The participants greatly valued direction and comfort from God as very important in the pre-seminar questionnaire. This importance grew through the seminar series. Further, the data demonstrates that most participants valued their dreams more highly as a possible source of the spiritual wisdom and understanding following the study than they did prior to the seminars.

The responses to the questionnaire demonstrated a similar result when examining the desire of the participants relative to seeking comfort from God. Again, Table 4.2 (p. 86) quantifies the level of importance the participants attributed to finding God's comfort in their lives prior to the study. All of these numbers then offer some insight into the nature of those who were a part of this study as it began.

The desire of the participants to engage God in their lives is crucial to the understanding of the study. Since the individuals were self-selected, presumably this desire to understand God's direction and feel God's comfort was a part of the drive that

brought them into the project in the first place. The members of the group recognized that God should and did have an impact in their lives, and they were seeking ways to experience that impact.

These findings have important implications in a spiritual sense. Most churches have individuals who actively seek to grow in Christ. These people want to understand and work within the desires of God for their lives. In the study, the fact that the participants had this desire and then found guidance and/or comfort from their dreams as a means to lead them in their Christian walk suggests that God wanted to use dreams as a means to help them in this growth. The initial understanding of most participants that God *did* guide and comfort in dreams was tempered by the idea that he probably would *not* use dreams in their own lives. By the end of the study, most realized that God speaks to people in dreams, including them. The key ingredient for the change was the ability and encouragement to take their dreams seriously. When they did, they found God at work within them.

Three individuals had already encountered the presence of God in their dreams and were seeking to validate and better understand the experience. This is not directly evident in the numbers presented in the previous chapter but was stated directly by the individuals during the course of the seminars. Others had had dreams that they felt were significant in their lives but had not known what to do with that feeling. This is clear from the information gleaned from the pre-seminar questionnaire. Thirteen of the fourteen individuals participating stated that they had had a dream that they had felt was significant for their lives. Only one individual who completed the study stated that he rarely remembered dreaming and had never had a dream that he considered significant.

In the pre-seminar questionnaire, each of the fourteen participants stated that they did have a theology of dreams. Specifically, they believed that God could have an impact on dreams. A statement of that theology was minimal in most cases, however. As previously stated, one participant expressed that he/she possessed such a theology, but

could not put it into words. Those that did write out a theological statement consistently stated one or more of four themes. Four responses stated that God could and did impact dreams. Five responses included the idea that God could impact dreams if the dreamer believed that he could. Four responses emphasized that dreams were only one avenue for God to work, implying that he could make himself known through other sources. Only two responses included any mention of biblical authority as a source of theological understanding of dreams. This result was a surprise. Biblical literacy was not the issue, since most of the participants recalled most of the biblical accounts of God speaking through dreams during seminars two, three, four and five (see Appendix D.)

The pre-seminar questionnaire theological statements reflect an openness to dreams as a source of divine guidance and comfort. This perception is also indicated in Table 4.3 (p. 87). At the same time little definition exists as to how or why that might be the case prior to the study. I would suggest that it came from the prompting of the Holy Spirit in most cases. The results following the study offer a clearer picture in that the participants had experienced the confirmation of God's action during dream discussion. Some individuals felt reinforced in their original assumptions about the dream experience, and for others, material was presented that was new. In both cases, the thought processes experienced opened opportunities for God to work in new ways in the lives of the participants.

Another subtle issue mentioned earlier bears further examination. As a participant observer in the group, I would qualify the predominant feeling before the seminars as one of skepticism at a personal level. The participants believed that God could speak through dreams but, with few exceptions, believed that such communication would be highly unlikely to happen to them personally. Inasmuch as the group knew the general way the seminars were going to run and that they would have the opportunity to share their own dreams for discussion, one might well ask if this skepticism was real or if people used it as a hedge against the possibility that dreams they considered significant would be

disregarded by others in the group. This fear of ridicule was exemplified in consistent opening statements relative to dream discussions that indicated the sharer was not expecting much value in the dream but would share it anyway.

The level at which this fear of ridicule impacted most members of the group initially is difficult to determine. Three individuals conveyed a clear understanding that God had spoken to them through dreams during the first and second seminar sessions. Obviously, they did not exhibit the same skepticism as the rest of the group.

This information answered the first research question. The perceptions that the group held toward dreams as a means of listening to and discerning the voice of God relative to divine guidance and comfort in their lives were generally positive. They believed that God could and did speak in dreams, and they were open to receive that comfort and guidance from God through the avenue of a dream, though, again, many exhibited doubts that such an experience would happen to them personally. Further, they were seeking to validate and explore spiritual experiences they had had.

The question that must be asked next then is whether or not this group represents the norm in the body of Christ. Do they even represent the norm in the particular bodies of Christ from which they entered the study? Do most Christians have a perception that God might speak to them in their dreams? Further study with a broader base of subjects would be necessary to determine critically viable answers to those questions. Past experience in pastoral ministry, and the level of enthusiasm within the study group does, however, suggest that such a question is well worth exploring.

Another question that comes out of this information is the source of self-selection for the study. I have suggested that the participants had a desire to pursue new means of experiencing God's comfort and guidance, but additional issues were stated, and could have impacted their reasons for engaging in the study. Chief among them is the fact that I was their pastor, seeking to do my doctoral work, and needing their participation. Still, the level of participation by those who chose to be part of the study clearly indicates a

deep interest in the subject. The reasons stated by the group included both helping me and looking for answers to an interest in dreams.

Changes

The responses to the questionnaires reflected many changes that occurred over the course of the seminar series. The most telling were the theological statements of the participants relative to dreams. The answers in the post-seminar questionnaire were critically different than the pre-seminar answers. All still professed that they had a theology of dreams, but in this case, each one was able to put that theology into words. Further, these responses were more defined and included statements as to how and why God might use the dream experience as a way to convey a message.

The fourteen responses contained one or more of five thoughts. Four stated that God used the dream experience to communicate with the dreamer due to the fact that in sleep the conscious nature wielded less authority. Five simply stated that God deals with issues in our lives through the dream experience. Five stated that God instructs us in our dreams, and five stated that God encourages us in our dreams. Finally, three simply stated that God uses dreams occasionally.

These responses include statements about how and why God might work through the dream experience. The fact that the dreamer is not in conscious control opens an avenue for God to work. This is one “why.” The “how,” or perhaps “what” of God’s work in dreams is that the participants believed that God did offer encouragement and guidance in the dream experience. This is a substantive change from pre-seminar answers that primarily were simply statements that God “worked” in dreams.

The post-seminar questionnaire elicited responses that were much less tentative. This was in keeping with the attitude that came through clearly within the seminar sessions themselves. A definable movement from fear of ridicule, verbally expressed in several instances, to a feeling of comfort within the group, to a feeling of confidence that characterized the last few sessions occurred over the series of sessions. This confidence

did not eradicate the self-depreciating comments that proceeded nearly every dream shared. The comments did change in tone however. They began with “This probably doesn’t mean anything,” stated with conviction, and moved to “I don’t know if this is important or not, but,” stated tentatively. By the end of the seminar sessions, the preface for sharing had become “This may not be a big deal, but” stated with anticipation that something valuable, indeed, could be discovered.

Beyond the stated theology, changes in perception occurred. The belief that God continues to use dreams as a source of direction and comfort for his people increased significantly, as demonstrated in Table 4.3 (p. 87). Further, the level of importance that the participants placed on experiencing direction and comfort from God increased as well (see Table 4.2 p. 86), though the mean of the responses rated these things as important aspects of their lives even in the beginning.

The next question is simple. Why did the perceptions of the participants change over the course of the study? A number of possible explanations exist.

First is the fact that the instructor of the seminars was also the pastor of each of the participants and presented the material in a manner that was designed to lead them to this conclusion. The participants trust me as their pastor, in a general sense, to be a spiritual leader. Another possibility exists in the fact that the study was the first time that many of the individuals had seriously considered their dreams with permission (from their pastor or from themselves) to see the presence of God. This examination was private, in terms of keeping a written journal of their dreams, and public in the discussion period of each seminar. The level of affirmation from the other participants during the course of the public discussion period was a confirmation for most of those who shared dreams.

All of the previously mentioned possibilities played some part in the responses of the participants. The most important factors cited over the course of the study were the use of the dream journals and the seminar series, which included my lectures and

discussion of the dreams of the participants. Due to the fact that the dreams discussed came out of the dream journals typically and that the discussion of the dreams by the body of participants often validated the presence of God, I would suggest that the change was wrought by a combination of all elements. Principally though, the class credited the dream journals and dream discussion for the change of perspective that had occurred in their lives.

The sharing of dreams for discussion was particularly powerful in this regard. Each dream was approached thoughtfully, attentively, and with an openness to the possibility of God's presence. These characteristics were demonstrated by both the sharer of the dream and the other participants in the seminar as they considered each dream. Not all dreams shared reflected the intervention of God. Still, many did offer guidance and/or comfort. As a result, the members of the group eagerly anticipated the dream discussion time following the instruction period of each seminar session.

The progression of prefaces to the sharing of a dream from a certainty that the dream was worthless to an anticipation of potential worth has already been stated. As we came to the end of the twelve sessions, people had been examining their own dreams, applying the principles we lifted up each week, before they arrived. They were ready to hear suggestions of avenues for thought relative to the dream they were sharing.

The fact that we were not there to interpret the dream was consistently lifted up verbally to the group. Our purpose was merely to explore the various dream experiences that participants shared. This freedom allowed the dreamer himself or herself to come to any conclusions about God's instruction or comfort that might be drawn from the dream. During the dream discussion time many of the dreamers did come to some conclusions about the meaning of their dreams.

Several individuals within the group consistently demonstrated spiritual discernment in the discussions of the individual dreams. All the subjects of the study participated, but four consistently held up biblical and spiritual foundations and were

heard at a different level by most of the participants. Again, this is an important issue in this study, and in any study of dreams. Without the spiritual gift of discernment, an attempt by a group to determine God's presence in the dream experience is doomed to failure or, worse, spiritual deception.

Psychology, Physiology, and Spirituality

The study group as a whole demonstrated mixed levels of initial understanding of the three sources of dream perception discussed in the seminar—spiritual, psychological, and physiological at the beginning of the study. Most had a basis for their understanding of the psychological and physiological perspectives prior to the seminars, though this foundation was not always very deep. The spiritual basis for an understanding was generally at the same level. By the end of the seminars, this had changed dramatically in all three areas. The biggest change occurred in the spiritual area.

The examination of Freud's theories altered the attitudes of most participants toward the psychological component. Prior to the seminar experiences, the minimal understanding of Freud was based on the idea that since the world so often quoted him, he must have been right. An examination of Freud's actual theories during one of the seminar series shocked many individuals. The spiritual nature of dreams made more sense to them following that investigation. Table 4.11 (p. 97) reflects this decrease in valuation for the psychological component of dreaming.

Likewise, prior to the seminar series, most participants believed that scientists possessed an understanding of the basic physical process of dreams and dreaming. The fact that this understanding is essentially limited to the physical reactions of the body during dreams was a surprise to many. The physical source of the dream itself (if any) is still speculative. Again, this fact led many to look at the spiritual nature of dreams with greater interest, and with an increased willingness to search their dreams for spiritual meaning.

This change of attitude reflects our cultural fascination with science. People are

often shocked to discover that much of what is presented as fact is really theory. This was seen in the study. The conflict between Freud's theories of dream generation and the physiological findings of brain activity during dreaming as mentioned in Chapter 2 of this thesis reflects the problems with an uninvestigated acceptance of theory as fact. Because the nature of spiritual issues is less quantifiable, initially it seemed less credible to the participants. Study of the Bible and a better understanding of the lack of understanding from the standards of the world that excluded the spiritual component of dreaming caused the participants to rethink their positions on the dream experience. Perhaps the biggest surprise was that in spite of a minimal understanding of psychology and physiology, this group still had a perception that a spiritual component potentially existed in dreams prior to the study. Examination of the actual theories—and permission to acknowledge that they were simply theories—made the spiritual component a much more logical choice to the participants

The Presence of God

The preceding material establishes some of the perceptions that the participants held regarding God's use of dreams to guide and comfort his people. It also demonstrates that the perceptions of the participants that God was at work in their dreams increased over the course of the seminars, thus answering the first two research questions. The answer to the third research question as to the evidence of God's presence in the dream experiences of the participants over the course of the seminars must rely less on the tables of numbers and more on my subjective observations. Nevertheless, this is the most powerful part of the study.

Dream discussion is a potentially hazardous endeavor. Any such discussion runs the risk of being, or at least appearing to be, divination at some level. Throughout the seminar series, each dream discussion session was prefaced with the admonition that the purpose of the discussion was not interpretation but simply discussion. The final interpretation, if any, was the responsibility of the dreamer, not the group. The

responsibility of the group was to offer thoughts and suggestions for the dreamers to take into consideration in examining their dreams as a possible resource for spiritual growth or guidance from God. The comments reflected the group's impressions. What follows is a series of accounts of dreams that were shared, some of the group's impressions, and interpretations acknowledged by the dreamer as appropriate.

Waving Goodbye

During the dream discussion in the third seminar session, a woman related a recurring dream that she had had concerning her husband who had died six years previously of cancer. The dream was simple. Her husband was walking away from her without looking back. No discernable surroundings were present, simply the two of them. She related the dream with an obvious emotional reaction of grief and perhaps anger. She felt overwhelmed by the fact that he simply walked away without looking back.

We talked about the dream for a few minutes, agreeing as a group that the dream might have suggested that he had had his eyes focused on Christ (he was a Christian) and that looking back might not really have been an option under those circumstances. Several individuals within the group felt that the dream was really a positive one for her in her love for her husband, though it had obviously not initially struck her in that manner. She had focused on being left, forgotten. Then, as an afterthought, as we were about to move to another dream, she added "He just waved back, without looking, as he walked away." That comment hit nearly everyone in the group. We suggested to her that perhaps the wave symbolized the fact that she had not been forgotten at all. Perhaps he was keeping his eyes focused on the journey before him but was demonstrating concern for her as well. We went on to discuss the nature of dreams involving a loved one that had died. In this case, we suggested that perhaps the man in the dream, identified as her husband, might have also represented Christ in a sense. She had lost the thing she valued most in her earthly life but had been remembered by Christ.

This suggestion elicited a significant positive response, and the overall feeling this

individual had toward the dream that she had experienced several times over the six-year span since the death of her husband changed from one of sorrow and pain to one of comfort and hope. A sense of healing was conveyed that was quite powerful.

This example demonstrates the fact that though the purpose of the dream discussion was not interpretation, interpretation did occur. The ultimate interpretation was always left up to the dreamer, and the group simply shared thoughts or ideas drawn from the dream that struck them as potentially interesting or spiritually suggestive.

A look back at the qualifications for dreams that come from God (p.15) shows the following when applied to this dream.

1. The dream will not be in conflict with Christian principles. Nothing about the dream or the interpretation suggested concerning it was out of keeping with Scripture.
2. The dream must be remembered. In this case the dream was remembered very clearly and over an extended period of time, recurring as it did over the intervening years.
3. The dream must be perceived as significant by the dreamer. In this case the dream was perceived to be very significant. It had elicited a significant emotional response.
4. The dream will usually persist in the mind of the dreamer. The dream had persisted in the subject's mind for several years, still bothering her.
5. Individuals within the dream may represent someone other than themselves. In this case, some participants speculated that perhaps the image of the husband might have actually represented Christ in some measure. Though her husband had died, she was not forgotten.
6. Some dreams are nothing of consequence. This one, however, appears to be significant, as demonstrated in the life of the dreamer and her reaction to the discussion.

Parenthood

Another dream, shared by a woman in the second seminar session, had immediate impact. The dream had even more impact shortly thereafter. In the dream, the woman

had just given birth to a baby after a long, hard labor. Exhausted, (perhaps nearly unconscious in the dream) she was unable to hold or care for the baby. Her husband named the little girl and held her and cared for her in a loving and competent manner.

One of the first questions the group asked her was how the dream made her feel. Her response was that the dream gave her a sense of relief. She had recently been married and really had questions as to how good she and her husband would be as parents and was really relieved to see how well he had cared for the child. He knew how to hold her, diaper her, and generally be a good father. The twist that came out was that they did not anticipate that they would be able to have children. Still, the dream offered hope that they would be good parents, and this assessment was affirmed by the group. As we left

the dream to move on to another, one participant said, “I bet you’re going to have a baby before long, and God is getting you prepared.” As this is written, they are expecting their first child in two months, about fifteen months after the dream.

Again, a look at the criteria will be helpful.

1. The dream will not be in conflict with Christian principles. No conflict is apparent.

2. The dream must be remembered. Obviously, it was.

3. The dream must be perceived as significant by the dreamer. In this case the dreamer felt that the dream was very significant.

4. The dream will usually persist in the mind of the dreamer. She remembered the dream when she told me months later that she was pregnant.

5. Individuals within the dream may represent someone other than themselves. In this case, the dream characters probably did represent themselves—perhaps even the baby.

6. Some dreams are nothing of consequence. This dream was an encouragement at least, and perhaps even a precognitive dream in the sense that it foreshadowed her pregnancy.

Abandoned

In this dream, a woman relived an actual event from her life. Born with dislocated hips, she had been in the hospital for surgery in early childhood, and her parents came to see her. She did not want to eat the vegetables on her dinner tray and was warned by her parents that they would leave if she did not eat them. She still refused, and they left, not returning until the next day. She had told the story of the event many times during her life, always with laughter, as if it was unimportant. Then one night she relived the event in a dream, exactly as it happened with one difference, however. As her parents left, blazing over the door in off-white neon letters was the word “Abandoned.”

She woke up from the dream crying and realized that the event had been no joke. It had had many repercussions in her life. These repercussions had stemmed from the fact that she had felt abandoned, and that feeling had colored much of her life. Realizing the impact of the event helped her to deal with the issue and make some changes. She believed that God had directly spoken a word of truth that led to guidance for her. Examining the dream criteria, we see that once again, this dream meets the demands of all the categories.

The New Job

The woman who had this dream was a schoolteacher attempting to decide about a new job that involved a substantial change for her. In the dream, she was at the playground with the children and, during a warm rainfall, took off her shoes and ran through the puddles. The children followed suit, and then the new school superintendent came out and, though she invited him to join them, said, “No, you’re the risk taker.” The statement was made in a kind and positive manner. She felt happy and free upon waking from the dream, and believed that it was guidance from God relative to taking the new job. It also was a comfort to her in the decision-making process. Some time later, those feelings still continued. Once again, the dream fits the criteria for a godly dream.

A Sense of Heaven

One of the participants shared a recurring dream to which many could relate. In it, she walked to a place that was at once strange and familiar and entered a cottage that looked deceptively small on the outside but contained many rooms. A multitude of people were present, and though she did not recognize the individuals, she experienced a deep sense of family. The dream always came when she had experienced upset and severe stress in her waking life and left her feeling comforted and full of promise.

Again, many others in the group had experienced a similar sort of dream and attributed it to a comforting promise of heaven by God. It helped them to look ahead to something greater than the trials of the day and pointed to hope both in this life and in eternity.

This dream is certainly in keeping with the promises of scripture. As a recurring dream, it is not only remembered, but relived. It has a powerful presence in the life of the dreamer, so powerful that it was reflected clearly in the lives of other participants. It certainly fulfills the criteria established for a godly dream.

These are a few of the thirty-five dreams that were shared during the dream discussion. Not all reflected any immediate sense of God's presence within, but the majority did at some level. In several cases, the group, as well as the dreamer, was singularly impressed with the dream, and though no immediate understanding came, all had a sense that something would come out of the dream in God's timing.

Discussion Reactions

Emotional reactions were present during most of the sessions. They ranged from sorrow to joy, irritation to peace, with many levels in between. A box of tissues was an indispensable item during the dream discussion time. The emotions displayed often indicated deep reactions to the dream experience and the potential messages it contained. Many dreams were shared that had already been considered by the dreamer. Often these individuals shared their thoughts first and then considered the responses of the rest of the

group. On several occasions, dreams were shared that invoked a sense of peace to all who were present, as if the dreams, while being given specifically to one individual, were intended to speak to us all in some way. The dreams may have provided little more than the satisfaction that indeed God was speaking, an observation that came quite often from the participants over the weeks, but that observation brought encouragement and peace. In any event, the tears that were shed at times (both tears of joy and of sorrow) were not just shed by the individual sharing the dream.

The dreams shared often helped build a sense of community within the group. Everyone was taken seriously, and everyone had a chance to share, both in dreams that they had had and in thoughts on the dreams of others. This connection was a critical need within the study. Without it, the dream discussion time would have been minimized in value. At one level, the openness could be attributed to a proscriptive leadership style, in which I set up clear boundaries, with freedom. The boundaries consisted of confidentiality relative to individuals outside the group and the need to offer thought suggestions to the dream-sharer rather than direct interpretation.

The freedom was experienced both during the lecture time, in that questions could be asked at any point, and during the dream discussion time. During dream discussion, everyone had the opportunity and encouragement to share their dreams and to share thoughts about the dreams of others. This style reflects the basic concepts of the small group as lifted up by John Wesley and may have contributed profoundly to the affective change in the lives of the participants.

Early in the sessions, we noted that the dreams brought up for discussion were related to one another in interesting ways. One night, all the dreams (three) involved boats and water at some significant point. The next session, they all involved cars, again serving a significant function in the dream. Another evening all the dreams shared houses as a central focus. The correlation of the dreams was recognized by the group as a whole before I recognized it. Participants speculated that perhaps God was trying to tell us

something about his interjection in the study itself, suggesting that the coincidence might be too great to actually be chance.

The group felt the presence of God in our midst through the sharing of dreams. No one in the seminars expressed doubt that God did speak to us through our dreams. The evidence was seen in the comfort, the guidance, the spiritual truth lifted up, and in the group building that came out of the study and discussion.

Unexpected Results

A number of things that came out of the questionnaires were unexpected. Some were disappointments to me, relative to assumptions upon which the study was built. Additionally, some unexpected and conflicting results occurred in the answers.

The mean of the group relative to finding the Bible a source of guidance and comfort was much lower than expected (see Table 4.4 p. 88). The level was in the same range of value as dreams. This was a real surprise. I expected that the Bible would be a standard against which other sources of finding and experiencing God's guidance and comfort might be judged. The results of the questionnaire demonstrated the opposite reality with this group. It rated with the lowest sources.

This may say something about the group itself and may lend some understanding to the reasons some of these individuals chose to enter the study. Observation of the group indicated that most participants were experientially oriented. The value placed on inner feelings as a source of discovering God's guidance and comfort support this theory.

Another disappointment resulted from the lack of concretely attributing credit to the Holy Spirit as a source of dream interpretation and conveyance of God's comfort and guidance. The work of the Holy Spirit was stressed throughout the study during the lecture portion of the seminars, as well as the discussion time, but received minimal response in the questionnaires. The Holy Spirit may have been an unwritten assumption in the process, but the fact that only one individual mentioned it as a resource for discerning the meaning of a dream in either of the questionnaires is a shock.

The unintelligible results presented in Tables 4.5, 4.6, 4.7 and 4.8 (pp. 89, 91,92) were also a great disappointment. The issues have already been discussed in Chapter 4. The information would have been valuable, had it been discernible. Why it went so far awry is unknown.

The information in Table 4.11 (p. 97) contained several surprises as well. Specifically, some of the responses show conflict with the responses found in Table 4.3. Table 4.3 (p. 87) indicates a significant increase in the value of dreams as a source of God's direction and comfort between the pre- and post-seminar questionnaire. Table 4.11 demonstrates a decrease in agreement with the statements that dreams are a tool God uses to comfort and to guide his people. The results reflect an increase in agreement that dreams are a tool God uses to address his people, as well as a decrease in agreement that dreams were a tool God used at one time but no longer uses. I have no explanation for these values.

Danger Zones

This is potentially spiritually hazardous information. Genuine spiritual discernment is imperative in a study such as this. Beliefs and understandings that were in conflict with orthodox Christianity came out occasionally during the study. Sometimes they were veiled and sometimes they were more obvious. This was not unexpected, and the instructional portions of the seminar were designed to attempt to instruct against it. However, some notable issues impacted the group.

The first chapter of this work recognizes the spiritual nature of this geographic area. Spiritualism has had a long history here, and television spiritualism—with readers of Tarot cards and other fortune-tellers—has been in a dramatic increase. The subject of foreknowledge did arise in the group, along with discussion of a heredity of foreknowledge in some of the participants and their families.

I also discovered that some members of the group had been directly and indirectly involved in spiritual activities that were not within the parameters of orthodox Christian

understanding. As we discussed the dreams, this conflict occasionally came to the forefront. I did not always fully realize what was going on in every case, though clearly something was wrong at an early point. This reality led to even more private prayer prior to seminar sessions and attempts to point to orthodox views during the sessions.

This conflict was confusing to some people who may not have been at the same spiritual level as others and demonstrated the danger that exists in discussing deeply spiritual issues in a group such as this. It also demonstrates the danger of assuming that all Christians are in the same place spiritually when engaging in a study of spiritual things.

The truth is, dream discussion itself is potentially hazardous. The Church fathers were unanimous in their condemnation of diviners, or fortunetellers, who dealt in dreams. Some participants in the study looked for a revelation of the future in their dreams, though they rarely attempted to push the discussion of the dreams of others in that direction. A group designed to discuss dreams runs a great risk of becoming a body of diviners, either during the study or afterwards in conversations among individuals over dreams that they had had. One aspect of this danger was expressed in the disappointment of one participant at the end of the study in that he or she had not been instructed in how to interpret dreams. The anticipation that a formula or process existed through which one could decipher a dream has been bolstered by the various dream encyclopedias and dream web sites present on the Internet.

The danger of the group study becoming a divination party was also reflected in the comments of one individual who suggested in the final questionnaire that the group was often too forceful in their dream interpretation. This was probably true in some cases.

The study's attempt to safeguard against this risk was continually to revoice the admonition that the purpose of the dream discussion was not to interpret any dream. The discussion time was designed to explore the dream so that the dreamer might come to his or her own conclusions regarding the nature and impact of their own particular dream. At

times this focus was hard to keep in the forefront of our purposes.

This realization of these dangers initially caused a reconsideration of the validity of dealing with the subject of dreams and dreaming as a spiritual resource in the church. The same set of problems, however, touches much of our Christian witness when we discuss any spiritual experiences. The people in the study were hungry for understanding and a chance to validate something that in many cases was an important experience in their lives. Again, the view of the church fathers offers a powerful insight. They acknowledged the danger of dreams as a spiritual resource by recognizing that Satan could have a deceiving influence. That view did not lead them to discount dreams altogether though because they also recognized the fact that God impacted dreams. Still, this is potentially a very dangerous study to approach unaware.

The Church and Dreams

The church has predominantly ignored the potential for spiritual guidance and comfort in dreams. This gap has been filled today with psychic hotlines, Internet dream interpreters, individual assessments, and only occasionally a deeper understanding of the potential spiritual nature of the dream experience. This is a sad commentary on the church and its inability to rise and stand firmly on a subject that is biblical at the very least.

I believe that though the subject of dreams must be approached with utmost care and with a deep concern for spiritual discernment, the dream experience as a resource for spiritual guidance and comfort needs to be explored further and more fully defined within (and only within) the construct of orthodox Christianity. Until the Church moves to acknowledge this issue, it will remain the domain of the non-Christian, and Christians will be tempted to move in that direction with dreams that leave a deep impression on them as they seek understanding. This should be unacceptable to those truly interested in offering soul care to Christian brothers and sisters.

Limitations of the Study

The limitations of the study are manifold. First, the research has obtained information that is important but not as deep as further studies need to explore. As a result, the project raised as many questions as it answered in some respects.

The number of participants is another limitation. Universally significant statements are impossible to draw from a twelve-person study group. This is not to say that the results have no statistical significance, simply that they may not be totally applicable to the general population—even the general Christian population. Would the openness that came so quickly to this group be achieved as quickly in a more urban setting or in a larger group? Would a more open invitation to Christians in the community rather than just members of a specific pastoral charge give different results due to the pastoral role of the researcher? The geographic location and similarity of the participants culturally, financially, and educationally have other implications for the results.

The fact that the instruments used are original to this study is another limitation. They have no past record of use upon which to build, and though they did extract the required information for the most part, portions also created areas of confusion. This occurred primarily in the series of questions that dealt with past significant dream experiences (see Appendixes A and B questions 9-12).

The single question that I desire most to change was found in the post-seminar questionnaire (see Appendix B question 17). This question sought to determine which aspects of the study had been most helpful to the participants. The two questionnaires were listed separately as options, as well as the dream journals and the seminars, offering four options to be rated one to four with a score of one reflecting the greatest level of help. The results reflected a nearly even distribution between the dream journals and seminars that were rated as somewhat less than twice as helpful as either of the two questionnaires (see Table 4.11 p. 97). This information was helpful in that it reflected a

preference for the experiential aspects of what was done. However, had the instrument delineated between the two aspects of the seminar sessions—the more experiential aspect of the dream discussion or the more concrete aspect of the lecture/instruction time—the results would have been much more precise, and much more useful.

I would anticipate that the dream discussion would have received a higher value than the instructional time. This is a critical issue since the seminar experience, if divided into the portions of which it consisted, might reflect a very different score. Would the dream discussion have rated higher even than the dream journals had it stood alone? Conversely, would the lecture portion have rated more highly? If so, the score could indicate potentially a lower comfort level in the discussion portion of the seminar than appeared to be the case. The present information is inadequate to provide an answer.

Another limitation of the study was the gender distribution, which was predominately female. The results of a better gender balance remain to be seen. One wonders why so few men entered the study. Their lack of participation could reflect a number of issues including a lack of interest, a perceived lack of time, or perhaps a fear of sharing something as personal as a dream.

Further Study

This study dug deeply into the private realm of individuals' lives. It was not only private, but deeply spiritual. The fact that such great openness and interconnectedness came into being so quickly within the group is amazing. Part of that is due to the nature of the study and the interest level of the participants. Further research in the subject could not guarantee identical results within any other group, but from this experience, one might certainly hope that such a connection might be the case.

The potential of the style of study should not be ignored for other subjects, especially spiritual issues. The content of the presentations was broad, attempting to show multiple points of view. This approach always ended, however, with a call back to a focus on orthodox Christianity. The boundaries were clear though not always to the

liking of all participants. The general state of spiritual issues requires these boundaries, however.

The style is not unlike a small group in the tradition of John Wesley and offers the same potential in an approach to other spiritual studies. It includes a focus, a support group, and a leader. Though many spiritual issues appear subjective initially, they often have very objective results, and such a group can help define and validate or question and invalidate experiences of the members. Such a proscriptive approach may help many Christians stymied by the world's spirituality to come to a biblically- founded orthodox Christian understanding of issues that belong in the teaching of the Church.

Summary

The study sought to find answers to four research questions. The first searched for the perceptions that the subjects held toward dreams as a means of listening to and discerning the voice of God relative to divine guidance and comfort in their lives. The study demonstrated that the participants had a theology of dreams, that is, they believed that God could impact a Christian in his or her dreams. Further the responses to the study indicated that the participants had a desire to grow in their understanding of the potential of divine communication through the venue of dreams.

The second question sought to determine what change, if any, had occurred in the participant's attitudes toward dreaming as a result of the study. The answer to this question is that changes did occur. Participants owned the potential for God's guidance and comfort through their own dreams, were able to describe their theology of dreams more clearly, and had a better understanding of the nature of the three aspects of dream study present today in our society with a decided increase in valuation of the spiritual component.

The third research question sought to define evidence that God did speak to the participants through their dreams during the study. All of the participants in the study claimed at some point during the study that they were seeing God at work either in their

dreams or in the dreams of someone else in the group. The evidence was the guidance drawn from the dream or the comfort experienced as a result of the dream. In several cases, the guidance and comfort came to fruition by the end of the twenty-four weeks that the study encompassed.

Finally, the fourth research question sought to determine which aspects of the seminar contributed to an experience of God's guidance and comfort through dreams. From the responses in the questionnaires and the actual observation of the participants, the experiential elements, the dream journaling, lectures, and the dream discussion contributed the most.

This group of Christians was eager for a chance to explore and validate the dream experiences that were a part of their lives. They engaged in the study fully as a result. I suspect that that same desire is true of many, if not most, Christians. The Church as a whole has not responded to that need or desire, and as a result, people are at risk in a world that offers answers that are not of God. The Bible offers instruction and parameters for the dream experience. Early Church history contains many admonitions and instructions relative to the dream experience. Can the Church afford to continue to ignore or only talk in hushed tones about this subject without putting Christians at risk?

I approached the research with a great deal of concern for maintaining a Christian perspective as primary to all that followed. Following the study, I am more convinced than ever that without a person, or preferably a number of people, with the spiritual gift of discernment involved, reproducing this study would be a spiritually hazardous undertaking. I am also convinced that further study needs to be done.

The most telling analysis of the study came from one of the participants several months after the study itself had come to a conclusion. He said,

"You know Jamie, I learned a lot about dreams during the study, but that wasn't the most important thing. The biggest thing I got out of it was the realization that God really is active in my life. He actually does things! That's amazing!"

The image of God sitting in heaven watching us, perhaps even loving us from afar, with little real impact in our lives is a prevalent one. The way that God actively worked in dreams during this study demonstrated to this individual, and to others as well, that God is not a distant, inactive thought process, but an interactive, guiding, and comforting reality.

APPENDIX A

Pre-Seminar Questionnaire

Gender: Male _____ Female _____ Questionnaire Number _____

Age: Teens____ Twenties____ Thirties____ Forties____ Fifties____ Sixties____ Seventies____
Eighties____

Occupation: _____

Educational Background: Grade School____ High School____ College____ Post-Grad____

Please briefly describe your religious background—i.e. your acceptance of Christ, your denominational background, approximate age and time of joining the first church of which you were a member, as well as any subsequent memberships.

1) It is important for me to know God's direction in my life.

Agree	←		→	Disagree
1	2	3	4	5

2) I discern God's direction for my life through:

	Frequently	←		→	Never
	1	2	3	4	5
a) Bible Readings					
b) Prayer					
c) Dreams					
d) Sermons					
e) Conversations with other Christians					
f) Inner Feelings (Inspiration)					

3) Which of the above plays the greatest role for you? _____

4) It is important for me to feel God's comfort and encouragement in my life.

Agree	←		→	Disagree
1	2	3	4	5

5) I experience God's encouragement and comfort in my life through:

	Frequently	←		→	Never
	1	2	3	4	5
a) Bible Readings					
b) Prayer					
c) Dreams					
d) Sermons					
e) Conversations with other Christians					
f) Inner Feelings (Inspiration)					

6) Which of the above plays the greatest role in conveying God's encouragement and comfort in your life? _____

7) I remember dreams upon awakening:

Frequently	←		→	Never
1	2	3	4	5

8) Have you ever remembered a dream for an extended period of time? Yes ___ No ___

9) Have you ever had a dream/dreams that seemed especially significant for your life? Yes ___ No ___

10) If the answer to number 9 was "Yes," was/were the dream/dreams clear and understandable in and of itself/themselves? Yes ___ No ___

11) If the answer to number 10 was "No," were you ever able to gain an interpretation of

the dream that you felt was appropriate and accurate for your life? Yes__ No__

12) If the answer to number 11 was "Yes," who helped you interpret the dream?

	Great Help	←		→	Little Help
	1	2	3	4	5
a) Self					
b) Spouse					
c) Family Member					
d) Pastor					
e) Friend					
f) Other					

If "Other," please explain: _____

13) Dreams with significant meaning occur in my life:

Frequently	←		→	Never
1	2	3	4	5

14) I believe the following about dreams:

	Strongly Agree	Agree	No Opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
	1	2	3	4	5
a) Dreams are purely a psych. phenomenon.					
b) Dreams are occasionally a psychological phenomenon.					
c) Dreams are often the result of an over-active imagination.					
d) Dreams are sometimes the result of indigestion.					
e) Dreams are the result of external stimulus during sleep.					
f) Dreams are					

significant.					
	Strongly Agree	Agree	No Opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
g) Dreams are a way to get at things inside.					
h) Dreams are one tool that God uses to address his people.					
i) Dreams are one tool that God uses to bring comfort and encouragement to his people.					
j) Dreams are one tool that God uses to guide his people.					
k) Dreams are a tool that God used at one time to bring comfort and guidance to his people but that he no longer uses in this modern age.					

15) Do you have a theology of dreams, that is, do you have an existing belief or understanding that dreams are affected by God? Yes___ No___

16) Can you put this theology into words?_____

17) Please explain why you desire to participate in this study:

APPENDIX B**Post-Seminar Questionnaire**

Questionnaire Number _____

1) It is important for me to know God's direction in my life.

Agree	←		→	Disagree
1	2	3	4	5

2) I discern God's direction for my life through:

	Frequently	←		→	Never
	1	2	3	4	5
a) Bible Readings					
b) Prayer					
c) Dreams					
d) Sermons					
e) Conversations with fellow Christians					
f) Inner Feelings (Inspiration)					

3) Which of the above plays the greatest role for you? _____

4) It is important for me to feel God's comfort and encouragement in my life.

Agree	←		→	Disagree
1	2	3	4	5

5) I experience God's comfort and encouragement in my life through:

	Frequently	←		→	Never
	1	2	3	4	5
a) Bible Readings					
b) Prayer					
c) Dreams					

d) Sermons					
e) Conversations with fellow Christians					
f) Inner feelings (Inspiration)					

6) Which of the above plays the greatest role in conveying God's encouragement and comfort in your life? _____

7) I remember dreams upon awakening:

Frequently	←		→	Never
1	2	3	4	5

8) Have you ever remembered a dream for an extended period of time? Yes ___ No ___

9) Have you ever had a dream/dreams that seemed especially significant for your life?
Yes ___ No ___

10) If the answer to Number 9 was "Yes" was the dream/dreams clear and understandable in and of itself? Yes ___ No ___

11) If the answer to number 10 was "No" were you ever able to obtain an interpretation of the dream that you felt was appropriate and accurate for your life?
Yes ___ No ___

12) If the answer to Number 11 was "Yes" who helped you accurately interpret the dream?

	Great Help	←		→	Little Help
	1	2	3	4	5
a) Self					
b) Spouse					
c) Family Member					
d) Pastor					
e) Friend					
f) Other					

If you answered "Other," please explain: _____

13) Dreams with significant meaning occur in my life:

Frequently	←		→	Never
1	2	3	4	5

14) I believe the following about dreams:

	Strongly Agree	Agree	No Opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
	1	2	3	4	5
a) Dreams are purely a psych. phenomenon.					
b) Dreams are occasionally a psychological phenomenon.					
c) Dreams are often the result of an overactive imagination.					
d) Dreams are sometimes the result of indigestion.					
e) Dreams are the result of external stimulus during sleep.					
f) Dreams are significant.					
g) Dreams are a way to get at things inside.					
h) Dreams are a tool that God uses to address his people.					
i) Dreams are a tool that God uses to bring comfort and encouragement to his people.					
j) Dreams are a tool that God uses to guide his people.					

	Strongly Agree	Agree	No Opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
	1	2	3	4	5
k) Dreams are a tool that God used at one time to bring guidance to his people but which he no longer uses in this modern age.					

15) Do you have a theology of dreams, that is, do you have an existing belief or understanding that dreams are affected by God? Yes___ No___
Can you put this theology into words? _____

16) Has participating in this study changed any previously held attitudes about the nature of dreams for you? Yes___ No___
If so, how? _____

17) How helpful did you find the following parts of the study? (Please rank, with 1 being most helpful, and 4 being least helpful.)

- a. Opening questionnaire: _____
- b. Dream Journals: _____
- c. Seminars: _____
- d. Closing questionnaire: _____

18) Please describe how the seminars helped your understanding of dreams and God's potential action in them to grow: _____

19) What changes have occurred in your understanding of God's work in dreams as a

result of taking this seminar series?

APPENDIX C

Dream Journal Format

Participant Number_____

Date: _____ Time: _____

Key characters, objects, and issues in dream: _____

Primary emotions the dream left you with: Anxiety___ Anger___ Fear___ Peace___
Happiness___ Joy___ Curiosity___ Love___

A brief description of the dream itself: (Use back of sheet if necessary)_____

Do you believe that this dream has significance for your life? Yes No

Do you believe this dream might be from God for your spiritual growth? Yes___ No___

Did you feel that God was instructing you or guiding you in some particular way in the dream? Yes _____ No _____

Describe: _____

Did the dream comfort or encourage you in some way in your life? Yes ___ No ___
If so, how?

Is this dream understandable to you as it is? Yes ___ No ___
What does it mean? _____

APPENDIX D

Seminar Sessions

I. Session One: Introduction

A. Hand out pre-study questionnaire and work through with group.

B. Introduction to the study: Statement of purpose and plan.

1. Purpose: To engage the group in consideration and study of dreams, both their own and each other's, and evaluate any change that occurs over the course of that study.

2. Plan

a. To educate participants on the nature of dreams: multiple foci

1) Biblical/theological

2) Psychological—within the context of a Christian perspective: How does God work in our minds?

3) Physiological—within the context of a Christian perspective: How does God work in our bodies?

b. To educate participants in terms of the nature/work of the Holy Spirit as this nature/work applies to dreams and their interpretation—a brief description of the gift of discernment. If God gives a dream that requires interpretation, he is able to provide the discernment required to do that interpretation.

1) Define “Discernment”

a) 1 Corinthians 12:4-11

b) “Discernment is the ability to read or hear a teaching or to consider a proposed course of action and then determine whether the source behind the teaching or action is divine, human, or Satanic” (Kingham 11).

c) “The ability to differentiate between good and evil, right and wrong, and what is of God, human nature, or evil, and use this knowledge for the protection and health of the body of Christ” (Bryant 178).

2) Discuss the nature of this gift, (emphasis it isn't “psychic” but a gift of God) and that it is present in the body of Christ. If given a dream, the discernment might be through the dreamer, and/or may need to be confirmed by a trusted Christian friend with the gift of discernment.

3) Discuss critical need for spiritual discernment:

a) If human source of dream—may reflect more sin than sanctification.

b) If satanic (demonic) source—real problems with acting on it.

c) If Godly—need to understand and acknowledge (in God's timing) and perhaps to act on it if so called. (Encouragement from Christian friend with discernment may be necessary or at least helpful both in understanding the dream fully, and in living out its call, if a call to action is part of the dream.

- d. To give the participants the opportunity/requirement to engage in examining their own dreams through dream journaling and a discussion time that will end each of the twelve sessions.
 - 1) Dream journals explained and handed out.
 - 2) Confidentiality stressed: Discuss the nature of what will come in dream sharing and the importance of confidentiality for what comes from that sharing time.
- C. Discussion session allowing each participant to share a dream from the past, semi-structured by leader along lines of journal entries. Each participant will have the chance to share a dream—perhaps the one (if any) mentioned in the opening questionnaire.

Note: These activities will fill the 1.5 hour period easily. Descriptions of the “Plan” portion will be very limited as they will be dealt with in-depth in separate seminar sessions. All processes will be audio-taped for the use of my research only. This will be stated at the beginning of the sessions.

II. Session Two: God and Communication

A. How does God communicate with his people?

1. In the Old Testament

- a. Direct Communication: In some cases appearing in human form, in some cases God speaks as a formless voice to convey his messages.
 - 1) Adam and Eve—Genesis 3:8-17
 - 2) Cain—Genesis 4:6-16
 - 3) Noah—Genesis 6:13ff
 - 4) Abraham—Genesis 12:1-3 (plus others for Abraham)
 - 5) Moses—The burning bush—Exodus 3ff
- b. Messengers: Angel of the Lord motif—Angels carry God's messages to individuals.
 - 1) Hagar—Genesis 16:6-11; Genesis 21:17-18
 - 2) Lot—Genesis 19:1-22
- c. Messengers: The Prophets—here God speaks through human individuals specifically chosen to convey his messages, typically to an entire nation but often to an individual, especially a king.
 - 1) The book of Jonah
 - 2) The book of Daniel
 - 3) David and Nathan over Bathsheba—2 Samuel 12:1-14
- d. Dreams: God speaks to people in dreams, sometimes clearly and sometimes in a veiled manner requiring interpretation.
 - 1) Direct revelation in dreams:
 - a) Abraham—Genesis 15:12-16
 - b) Abimelech—Genesis 20:3-7
 - c) Isaac—Genesis 26:23-24
 - d) Jacob—Genesis 28:10-15, 32:22-29 (?dream?)
 - 2) Requiring interpretation:
 - a) Joseph—Genesis 37:5, 37:10
 - b) Pharaoh—Genesis 41

2. In the New Testament

- a. Direct Communication: In the NT, God reveals himself, his commands, and person in the person of Jesus Christ as well as separately in more visionary experiences.
 - 1) The incarnation of Jesus
 - 2) Saul/Paul—Acts 9:1-19
- b. Angelic messenger
 - 1) Zechariah—Luke 1:11-20
 - 2) Mary—Luke 1:26-38
- c. The Holy Spirit—more discussion later
- d. Dreams—as in the OT dream experience, some were clear in and of themselves; others required interpretation.
 - 1) Clear dreams
 - a) Joseph—Matthew 1:18-23, 2:13, 2:19

- b) Paul—16:9, 18:9, etc.
- 2) Veiled dreams—Peter—Acts 10:9-29

B. Note that God's communication doesn't change from OT to NT

C. Move into dream discussion with group

1. Review nature of confidentiality
2. Stress the fact that the group is not there to interpret dreams for each other, rather, we are there to ask questions, suggest lines of thought, and to allow the dreamer to claim meaning for themselves. Dream meaning, if the dream is from God, will be in agreement with Scripture. If not, it is either the wrong interpretation, or the dream is not from God.
3. Seek volunteers to share dreams: Attempt to keep them to about fifteen minute segments. May need to drop from three dreams/forty-five minutes to two dreams to do them justice.

III. Session Three: God's Messages Continued, The Dream Journal

A. Review Seminar II

1. God's communication in OT and NT
 - a. Direct
 - b. Messenger—Angel, prophet
 - c. Holy Spirit
 - d. Dreams
2. God's communication today? Challenge to discussion
 - a. Direct? What do people say about those who hear God's voice? Does that mean it doesn't happen?
 - b. Messenger?
 - 1) Angel (unaware, or perhaps aware)
 - 2) Prophet—what is a prophet? A forth-teller, not future teller
 - c. Holy Spirit—The still small voice inside
 - d. Scripture—Most common—desires, rules, love made known interpreted by the Holy Spirit.
 - e. Dreams—Has God changed? Note presence of Holy Spirit makes openness to dreams all the more likely.
3. Begin focus on dreams: How do we tap into the dream experience as an avenue of God's communication?
 - a. Take dreams seriously—recognizing that they may need much interpretation, and that some/most may not be from God.
 - b. Recognize the place and work of the Holy Spirit in dream work.

B. The dream notebook:

1. If taking our dreams seriously, we must:
 - a. Examine the dream experience in general.
 - b. Examine our dream experiences particularly.
 - c. Approach such examination prayerfully, seeking first and foremost God's guidance.
2. Examining the dream—recording it in journal:
 - a. Must remember; therefore, must write down. The sooner it is written, the less detail will be forgotten.
 - b. Important issues to note:
 - 1) Mood of dream during and after, may reflect a life situation.
 - 2) Objects: animals, backgrounds, etc.
 - 3) Symbols: religious or otherwise—what do they mean to you?
 - 4) Your activity in the dream—active or passive?
 - 5) People involved in the dream—may not represent themselves!
3. Examining the dream—prayerful thought.
4. Examining the dream—discussion with trusted Christian spouse, friend, and/or counselor.

C. Group dream discussion

1. Review confidentiality issues.
2. Stress that the group is not there to interpret the dream for the dreamer.
3. Seek new volunteers to share dreams; three individuals at fifteen minutes each.

IV. Session Four: Dreams in the Bible Part 1: Their Nature and Purpose in the Old Testament

A. The purpose of God-given dreams in the Bible (with descriptions)

1. Dreams of guidance/instruction: Why would God guide individuals?
2. Dreams of prophecy—a telling of the future in this case.
3. Dreams of comfort/encouragement and promise.

B. Dreams in the Bible—The Old Testament

1. Handout listing of dream experiences in O.T.

a. Patriarchs

- 1) Abraham
- 2) Isaac
- 3) Jacob
- 4) Joseph

b. Other Jews

- 1) Prophet—Numbers 12:6-8
- 2) Samuel—1 Samuel 3

c. Non-Jews

- 1) Abimelech
- 2) Pharoah—Genesis 41
- 3) A Midianite—Judges 7:13-15
- 4) Nebuchadnezzar—Daniel 39 and 40

d. Other dream comments/commands

- 1) Warnings about false dreams and false prophets
- 2) Prohibition against diviners—Leviticus 19:26
- 3) Worthlessness of dreams—Ecclesiastes 5:3, 5:7
- 4) Torment of dreams—Job 4:12-21, 7:13-14
- 5) Promise of dreams and visions as a future blessing—Joel 2:28

2. Discuss what purpose each served from A above

3. Summarize nature of dreams in O.T.

a. Dreams communicate warnings and information to Jews and specific non-Jews.

b. Some dreams are clear; some require interpretation (provided).

c. Note how dreams appear to progress from clear to obscure correlating from patriarchs to pagans.

d. Prohibitions regarding dreams focus on divination/false prophets.

C. Discussion of dreams from dream journals:

1. Review confidentiality issues.
2. Stress that the group is not there to interpret the dream for the dreamer.
3. Seek volunteers to share dreams—three dreams at fifteen minutes each.

V. Session Five: Dreams in the Bible Part 2: Their Nature and Purpose in the New Testament

A. Review the purpose of God-given dreams in the Bible.

1. Dreams offer guidance/instruction from God.
2. Dreams offer prophetic (future) images.
3. Dreams offer comfort/encouragement and promise.

B. Dreams in the Bible—The New Testament

1. Handout—Listing of New Testament dreams—progress through looking for similarities and differences from the Old Testament dreams
 - a. Jewish dreams.
 - 1) Joseph's dreams—discuss
 - 2) Peter's dream—outreach to Gentiles—discuss
 - 3) Paul's dreams—discuss
 - b. Non-Jewish dreams
 - 1) Magi—Matthew 2:12
 - 2) Pilate's wife—Matthew 27:1
2. Examine dreams to determine where they fit in A above.
3. Summarize Nature of Dreams in N.T.
 - a. Similar to O.T. with some new parts, i.e., evangelism.
 - b. Some dreams clear; some require interpretation.

C. Review the biblical material

1. What does the Bible tell us about dreams?
2. Is it reasonable to expect God to continue to speak to his people in dreams?
3. Look at Pentecost and Peter's comments—Acts 2:14-18.
Preface next meeting—the work of the Holy Spirit.

D. Discussion: Dreams from Dream Journals

1. Review confidentiality issues.
2. Stress that the group is not there to interpret the dream for the dreamer.
3. Seek volunteers to share dreams with group, three at fifteen minutes each.

VI. Session Six: The Holy Spirit and Dreams

A. Nature and work of the Holy Spirit regarding Dreams

1. Define “supernatural”—outside of nature
2. Define “magic”—control of nature and supernatural by gnosis—forbidden throughout Bible.
3. Define “supranatural”—“above” nature.
4. Discuss where God fits into nature.
 - a. Creator.
 - b. Redeemer of a fallen order.
 - b. Unlimited by the natural order—supranatural.
 - c. Typically works within the confines of his created order—the natural world.
5. Discuss where Christians fit into nature.
 - a. Created.
 - b. Redeemed from the fallen order.
 - c. Limited in the natural world; limited only by God in the spiritual realm.
 - d. Work within the confines of God’s created order except as he impacts us in supernatural ways.
 - 1) the sacraments.
 - 2) divine intervention in life—miracles, communication.
6. Review the event of Pentecost and the nature and work of the Holy Spirit in subsequent history.
7. Discuss spiritual gifts focusing on those with specific application to dreams: (Kinghorn 11-13).
 - a. Discernment
 - b. Faith
 - c. Prophecy
 - d. Teaching
 - e. Word of knowledge
 - f. Word of wisdom
8. Some feel that God-inspired dreams ended when the New Testament came into being. Considering the work of the Holy Spirit, is that a reasonable assumption? Discuss.
9. If God works in our spiritual and physical lives and if he speaks to us in dreams, is it not reasonable to assume that he will also provide interpretation if we seek it from him, especially with the Holy Spirit’s presence and work in our lives? Discuss with group.

B. Discussion: Dreams from dream journals

1. Review confidentiality issues.
2. Stress that the group is not there to interpret the dreams.
3. Seek volunteers to share dreams—three at fifteen minutes each.

VII. Session Seven: Dreams in Christian History

A. Roman/Hellenistic views

1. Homer (9th century BC)—two types of dreams: fantasy and honest.
2. Aristotle (4th century BC)—animals dream; therefore, dreams not from God. They are mysterious but not divine.
3. Cicero (1st century BC)—no reliance could be placed on them.
4. Popular view was demonstrated by the following:
 - a. Divination was prevalent—fortune or future—telling by dreams.
 - b. Centers for incubation were widespread—temples where and processes by which one could gain a dream of meaning.

B. Development and destruction of a theology of dreams

1. Biblical attitudes—obviously dreams were highly regarded as a means of direct communication with God, though all were not considered equal.
2. The early Church—followed biblical principles:
 - a. No diviners.
 - b. Assumed that dreams could be of divine origin; though, not all were.
 - c. Typically encouraged caution.
3. Church fathers—Clement, Tertullian, Jerome, Origen, Gregory of Nyssa
 - a. Dreams typically seen as having 3 sources.
 - 1) Divine
 - 2) Human (environment—outside stimulation, etc.).
 - 3) Demonic.
 - b. Began to have concerns over the nature of sexual dreams.
4. Middle Ages—begins the real deathknell for dreams with Thomas Aquinas.
 - a. Looked to Aristotle and empirical evidence in all things.
 - b. Believed that dreams were unreliable at best.
 - c. Concluded that dreams were primarily a sensual experience of the night. (Sexual dreams were a real concern—how could the same avenue for God to speak also free the mind and soul to perversion or illicit practices?)
5. Age of Enlightenment—finished what Aquinas had started.
 - a. Age of humanism—man as the measure of all things.
 - b. Empirical evidence was the greatest goal.
 - c. Reason was to be worshipped.
6. Modern Attitudes
 - a. Colored by psychology.
 - b. Colored by physiological understandings.
 - c. Colored by new-age philosophy.
 - d. Little official theology of dreams.

C. Discussion: Dreams from Dream Journals

1. Review confidentiality issues.
2. Stress that the group is not there to interpret the dreams.
3. Seek volunteers to share dreams—three for fifteen minutes each.

VIII. Session Eight: Popular Psychology and the Christian View of Dreams

A. Psychology

1. Handout—Dream theory of Freud (Nienkirchen).
 - a. Basic components of Freud's concept of dreamwork.
 - 1) Dream is a disguised acting out of a socially unacceptable urge.
 - 2) Dream content is usually sexual in nature if correctly interpreted.
(Only by trained Freudian)
 - 3) Based in animal instinct—natural, not divine—no room for God.
 - b. Compare/contrast with biblical/theological perspective
 - 1) Dream can be “disguised” but open for interpretation with God's help.
 - 2) Dream can be of human origin or divine origin.
2. Handout—Dream theory of Carl Jung (Nienkirchen).
 - a. Basic components of Jung's concept of dreamwork.
 - 1) Intent of dream is to communicate something through the subconscious.
 - 2) 2 purposes.
 - a) compensation for internal imbalances.
 - b) assist in individuation process.
 - 3) Archetypes.
 - b. Compare/contrast with biblical/theological perspective.
 - 1) Dream is designed to reveal, not conceal.
 - 2) “Spiritual” is actually simply part of the natural world in Jung's view.
 - 3) Little room for God's direct intervention in dreams.
3. The burden of psychology on Christian dreamwork.
 - a. Examine how psychology and pop psychology have impacted the participants—Discussion.
 - b. How does the mind actually work in and on the dream?
 - 1) Judeo-Christian tradition and historical experience point to the potential for divine origin of dreams and the need for spiritual (divine) discernment for interpretation.
 - 2) The nature of imagery in dreams—archetypes from a Christian perspective.

B. Discussion: Dreams from Dream Journals

1. Review confidentiality issues.
2. Stress that the purpose of the group is not to interpret the dream.
3. Seek volunteers to share dreams: three individuals for fifteen minutes each.

IX. Session Nine: Physiology and the Christian View of Dreams

A. Rapid Eye Movement Sleep

1. Discovered by Eugene Aserinsky—ushered in new age of dream research—anticipated finally figuring it all out.
2. Time and experimentation have demonstrated many physical aspects of REM (and deep) sleep cycles and dreams, but little of consequence in providing insights into the nature of dreams themselves.
 - a. Mean REM duration: twenty minutes—range is three to fifty minutes.
 - b. Increase in duration through the night, interspersed with deep sleep cycles.
 - c. Dreams increase in bizzareness and vividness each new cycle.
 - d. Heart rate and brain temperature increase.
 - e. Chemical control of brain by acetylcholine—essentially paralysis from neck down (norepinephrine and serotonin control when awake).
 - f. Brain function changes:
 - 1) frontal lobes and visual cortex shut down.
 - 2) brain driven by emotion centers when dreaming.
3. Other findings from REM-based research.
 - a. Differences in dream content affected by gender.
 - b. Differences in dream recall (quantity) with age (decreases past twenty years of age).
4. General assumptions derived from REM research have denigrated the dream experience—random firing of brain neurons that the brain puts together into an image and story after the fact—therefore nonsense.
5. Compare/contrast with biblical/theological perspective.
 - a. Consider the potential of the emotion center of the brain gaining control and where God might impact such an event in the dreaming process.
 - b. Consider the nature of control so strongly held when awake and lost to a degree in sleep—even to the point of temporary paralysis—in the life of a Christian, opens the door to the one we call “lord.”

B. Discussion: Dreams from the Dream Journals

1. Review confidentiality issues.
2. Discuss that the purpose of the group is not to interpret the dream.
3. Seek volunteers to share a dream: three individuals for fifteen minutes each.

X. Session Ten: Putting It Together.

A. Combine Body, Mind, Spirit—a Holistic Approach to Dreams.

1. Review Christian, psychological, and physiological approaches.
 - a. Consider physical, mental and spiritual—which is most powerful and important, especially in the life of a Christian?
 - 1) Physical—temporal, confined by chemical/physical action/reaction (physiological).
 - 2) Mental—limited by perception of “reality” and experience (psychological).
 - 3) Spiritual—eternal, unlimited by human reality, strength, weakness, intelligence.
2. Consider the basis for spiritual growth in a Christian context:
 - a. Growing in knowledge of God through:
 - 1) Worship—public and private.
 - 2) Study—Bible as the revelation of God in Christ.
 - 3) Prayer—communion with the Lord.
 - b. Submission to the lordship of Christ.
 - 1) Seeking guidance and instruction from him in life issues that arise.
 - 2) Finding comfort and encouragement in him rather than worldly things.
 - c. How do we submit ourselves to the lordship of Christ?
 - 1) Surrender ourselves to his guidance—give up our internal control.
 - 2) We don’t do it well under most conditions in spite of our claim as Christians that Jesus is our Lord.
3. The basis for an understanding of dreams needs to be spiritual. The basis for spiritual growth is submission (surrender) of self to Jesus for guidance and comfort. Within this context, how do the mental and physical apply?
 - a. Physical
 - 1) Physical discoveries from REM sleep and dreams point the Christian back to the spiritual in that emotional centers appear to run the brain during dreaming, rather than reason centers in the frontal lobes. This points to a surrender of control.
 - 2) The body moves into a state of partial paralysis in REM sleep due to dramatic increases in acetylcholine levels in the brain. Again, there is a loss of control.
 - b. Mental
 - 1) Both Freud and Jung believe that the dreamer controls the format of the dream (objects included, etc.) from either events of the previous day or from archetypal material. Even if entirely true, does this limit the message? Consider Peter’s dream of the animals while hungry.
 - 2) If physiological research is correct, mental control takes a very different direction than typical in our enlightened lives in the day of reason. Again, the dreamer moves to a point of surrender mentally as well, at least in comparison to normal mental functions.
4. Point out connections between and potential for God’s action.
5. Open for discussion.

B. Discussion: Dreams from the Dream Journals

1. Review confidentiality issues.
2. Discuss that the purpose of the group is not the interpretation of dreams.
3. Seek volunteers to share dreams: three for fifteen minutes each.

X1. Session Eleven: Finding God in the Dream

A. God in Dreams—Why would God communicate today through dreams?

1. Because he always has—biblical example, historical examples.
2. Because it is a time when the Christian is uniquely open to experience God's guidance and instruction.
3. Because it is a time when the Christian is uniquely open to experience God's comfort and encouragement.

B. God in Dreams—How?

1. How do we communicate with God? (God knows beforehand)
 - a. Prayer.
 - b. Opening ourselves to him in:
 - 1) Worship.
 - 2) Sacraments.
2. How does God communicate with us? Through the Holy Spirit:
 - a. In Scripture.
 - b. Directly.
 - c. Through a Messenger—angel, fellow Christian, sermon.
 - d. In Dreams—we live in the age of the spirit of God prophesied by Joel.
3. How do we identify a dream that is from God? Discuss what things have come out of the study of their own dreams first.
 - a. Testimony to the truth from the Holy Spirit—primary.
 - b. Repetition—a consistently repeated dream may indicate God's action.
 - c. A dream that is clearly remembered and sticks in the mind and heart is probably worth examination, as we have done.
 - d. Direct revelation in the dream—does it comply with Scripture?

C. Discussion: Dreams from the Dream Journals

1. Review confidentiality issues.
2. Discuss that purpose of group is not to interpret the dream for the dreamer.
3. Seek volunteers to share dreams: three for fifteen minutes each.

XII. Session Twelve: Summation

A. Final meeting

1. Review principles from seminar sessions.
 - a. Highlight biblical references to dreaming.
 - b. Highlight issues in:
 - 1) Spiritual.
 - 2) Psychological.
 - 3) Physiological.
 - c. Stress the primacy of the spiritual in examining the dream experience.
 - d. Highlight the nature of a divine dream as a means of experiencing:
 - 1) God's guidance/instruction.
 - 2) God's comfort/encouragement.
 - e. Highlight the place of the Holy Spirit in dreams:
 - 1) Need for discernment in dream interpretation.
 - 2) Unique nature of the Holy Spirit and spiritual gifts.
2. Questions and answers from the participants.
3. Hand out post-seminar questionnaires and fill out.

B. Discussion: Dreams from the Dream Journals

1. Review confidentiality issues.
2. Discuss that the purpose of the group is not dream interpretation.
3. Seek volunteers to share dreams: three at fifteen minutes each.

APPENDIX E

Consent Form/Letter to All Church Members

Dear Church Members,

Most of you are aware of the fact that I am presently a Doctor of Ministry participant at Asbury Theological Seminary. I am conducting research on the topic of dreams and their potential as messages from God in the life of a Christian. I would like to include fifteen to twenty individuals in this study and am presently seeking volunteers from the two churches. I hope that the information drawn from this study will benefit the participants and the church in general in rediscovering orthodox methods to hear God's voice as a call and as a comfort.

The project will consist of a number of parts. There will be twelve evening sessions of one and one half hours each, occurring on alternate weeks over a period of twenty-four weeks. Each weekly segment will consist of approximately forty-five minutes of teaching on dreams and forty-five minutes of dream discussion by participants. During the first and last sessions, you will be asked to complete a questionnaire which will be kept as vital information for the study. Additionally, you will be asked to keep a dream journal during the course of the study which I will also keep for research purposes at the end of the study for an indefinite period of time. I will be drawing information from the journals, after which they will be destroyed or returned to you at your preference. The evening sessions, including dream discussion, will be electronically recorded for review by myself as well.

Anonymity in the dream journals will be provided by a numbering system which will be assigned the first evening. A number of sheets of paper equal to the number of participants will be numbered at the top of the sheet. Corresponding numbers will be placed on the journals as they are handed out. Participants will be asked to write their name at the bottom of the sheet, and then place it in a manila envelope. This will remain unopened until I am done reviewing the dream journals, and then those requesting their journals will be able to retrieve them through the numbering system.

Due to the nature of the study and its inclusion of a period of teaching, attendance is a critical element for all participants, though your participation is purely voluntary. All who are over 18 and a member or attender of either church are invited to participate. If you are interested in entering the study described above, please indicate with your signature and use the enclosed self-addressed envelope to return it to me. Please include your address and phone number as well as a printed version.

Thank you,

Rev. Stevens

Signature: _____ Printed: _____
 Address: _____ Telephone: _____

APPENDIX F

New Testament Greek Words for Dreams and Visions

1. **οναρ**: A dream experienced in sleep. It is found in Matthew chapters 1, 2, and 27 (Bauer 569).
2. **ενυπνιον**: A dream, or visionary experience seen in a dream. It is found in Acts 2:17 (Bauer 270).
3. **οραω**: A common word for seeing something, it can also denote a visionary experience either during sleep or while awake. It is used in three derivative words, **οραμα**, **ορασις**, and **οπτασια**. It occurs in many places in Acts, and in Matthew 17:9, Rev. 9:17, Luke 1:22, 24:23, and II Cor. 12:1 (Bauer 577-78).
4. **εκστασις**: Implies a trance-like or ecstatic state brought on by God. It occurs primarily for the purposes of the study in the account of Peter's vision in Acts 22 (Bauer 245).

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