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LIVING ONE'S PURPOSE: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF AWAKENING TO A CALL

by

Heather Elaine Scott

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in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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Lovingly dedicated to my children, Craig and Alanna Beaton.

Abstract

This phenomenological study examined the lived experience of two men and one woman who are living their lives in response to a personal calling. Semi-structured in-depth interviews were used to collect the data pertaining to the question: What is the experience of awakening to a call to live one's purpose? A thematic analysis revealed nine themes: 1) impact of early memories, 2) growing sense of self-identity, 3) sense of connection, 4) feeling of commitment, 5) authenticity, 6) personal well-being, 7) sense of knowing, 8) feeling of being helped along the way, and 9) willingness to change. The findings showed that the seeds that would later germinate into the co-researchers' call to action were sown during their early years. Discovering what was personally relevant and meaningful to each of the co-researchers necessitated that they not only listen to, but respond from, the heart so that their values, beliefs and attitudes might merge into a more authentic way of being. The overwhelming desire to share their passions left each of the co-researchers feeling inspired, energized, and engrossed. Although they doubted themselves at times, they also experienced the positive emotions of joy and gratitude. In sharing their gifts with others, the co-researchers felt a deep sense of commitment and connection with others as well as the Divine. There was a sense of knowing that this was what they should be doing with their lives. They also felt they were being helped along on their journey. This study raised awareness of the transformative power that awakening to a call can have in all areas of a person's life—physically, emotionally, psychologically, and spiritually. Implications for counselling practice and suggestions for future topics of inquiry were addressed.

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Author's Note

In this thesis the word *self* is capitalized at times and not others. When I speak of the Self, I am referring to Carl Jung's archetypal metaphor for wholeness. The word is capitalized to distinguish it from ordinary ego consciousness. However in quoting some reference sources, the lower case "s" is used.

INTRODUCTION

Why is it that some people are able to move forward, deeply committed and engaged in what they are doing while others struggle to find meaning in their lives? This is a question that arose again and again during my practicums. I was struck by the fact that many of my clients were "out of touch" with the impact their experiences were having on the **meaning** in their lives. In attempting to find answers, it is easy to think of reasons why people might suffer from lack of meaning—adversity is one. However the world is full of individuals who have known adversity and yet have gone on to make a difference in their lives and in the lives of others. What factors might account for this? I suggest one factor might be that such individuals were able to find some unifying purpose that gave direction to their actions. What do the life experiences of these people reveal about their urge to know, and their capacity to respond to, the reason why they are here?

My interest in such questions is deeply personal. As a former teacher, I was looking forward to my retirement years. I never dreamed I would once again be back in the world of academia on a journey to become a psychotherapist. Yet, in looking back over my life, I should not be so surprised. The psychologist, James Hillman (1996), states:

> Sooner or later something seems to call us onto a particular path. You may remember this 'something' as a signal moment in childhood when an urge out of nowhere, a fascination, a peculiar turn of events struck like an annunciation: This is what I must do; this is what I've got to have. This is who I am. (p. 3)

When I was ten or eleven years old, I had this experience of sensing something particular announce itself to me. I woke up one Sunday morning and felt compelled to go to church. For a child who had never attended church before, or whose parents had never attended either, that may seem a little odd— though I never thought so at the time. To listen to the inner "signal" seemed a perfectly natural thing to do and I did not question its source or its meaning. I could not at that time say "this is who I am" but I definitely felt it was something I must do. We had recently moved and I had no idea where to find a church. But I just headed out the door, certain I would find one. When I did, I walked in and sat down with the adults. I remember gazing at the stained glass windows and feeling that there was no place in the world that I would rather be. Church attendance after that was sporadic for many years until my thirties when I began attending regularly. However, I believe the meaning of that childhood experience was what stirred my soul for the first time.

The second "signal moment" also occurred in childhood. Whenever anyone asked me what I wanted to be when I grew up, I told them I wanted to be a psychiatrist because I was always curious about people and their motivations. That fascination grew into a love of psychology over the years; that love has never waned though self-doubt did lead me away from psychiatry and onto a different career path.

During my early years of retirement I began to sense a third "signal"—that I was supposed to do more than just continue with my daily rounds. It was not that I was discontented with my life; in fact, I was very happy with the rhythm of my days. It was

just this vague feeling that I was supposed to respond to something—to what I did not know. Then, in church one day I heard someone speak about a Master's Degree Program that combined my two greatest loves—psychology and spirituality. Just like that other Sunday morning many years ago, I knew this was important somehow. Parker Palmer (2000) in his book *Let Your Life Speak: Listening for the voice of vocation* states: "this is something I can't not do, for reasons I'm unable to explain to anyone else and don't fully understand myself but that are nonetheless compelling" (p. 25). I felt this compulsion like an inner compass, guiding me forward. The American philosopher and psychotherapist Eugene Gendlin (1978) would refer to this as a *knowing* that comes from deep within.

The three personal experiences I have just described have had a profound impact on the direction my life has taken in recent years. They have led me to my research question:

What is the experience of awakening to a call to live one's purpose?

I chose phenomenology as my research method because it gave me the opportunity to study the lived experiences of individuals, with the intention of exploring the uniqueness of this awakening experience as well as the shared meanings that permeate our human existence.

> The aim of phenomenology is to transform lived experience into a textual expression of its essence – in such a way that the effect of the text is at once a reflexive re-living and a reflective appropriation of something meaningful: a

> notion by which a reader is powerfully animated in his or her own lived experience. (Van Manen, 1990, p. 36)

It is my hope that this research project will lead to a better understanding of what it means to have one's thoughts, feelings, and behaviors guided by a personal calling. A study of this kind has the potential to deepen personal insight in everyone. For psychotherapists in particular, such insight can inform their practice when working with clients who struggle with meaning in their lives.

At this stage it is necessary to clarify certain key words in my research question. It took some time for me to arrive at the precise wording of my question, but the endeavor has been a rewarding growth experience for me. Specifically, the word *call* was problematic. This word appeared, then disappeared, and finally reappeared in my research question. Originally I removed the word because some people I talked to assumed I was referring to a religious life or a vocation. A call can certainly be thought of in those terms. My goal in undertaking this research, however, is to broaden our understanding of what it means to feel called to live one's purpose. But even as I omitted the word from my question I realized a vital part was missing. After all, it was because I felt a call that I am on this journey in the first place. Upon further reading and some soul searching by way of meditation and journaling, I came to the conclusion that the word *call* must take its rightful place in my research question. In writing about callings, Neafsey (2006) states they are "interrelated in complex and mysterious ways" (p. 3); I believe this research brings to light the nature of this complex interrelation. Therefore,

for the purpose of this research study, these are the meanings I ascribe to the following words:

awakening – to be conscious of one's "original face" (The phrase "original face" comes from a quote by Thomas Merton (1971): "to 'become someone' that one already (potentially) is, the person one is truly meant to be. Zen calls this awakening a recognition of 'your original face before you were born'" (pp. 201-2).

call – " a strong inner prompting to a particular course of action" (Merriam-Webster, 1998)

live – to conduct one's action

purpose – an intentionality and goal directedness that guides behavior, which expresses one's own way of being in the world, and gives meaning to one's life.

LITERATURE REVIEW

One belief I hold is that there is a life force operating within every human being. What is this life force asking of us? What is it that wants to "come to being through us" (Hollis, 2005, p. 184)? Levoy (1997) suggests this force alerts us to the need for change; our response is an "awakening of some kind" (p. 2). Too often, however, it is simply easier to go back to sleep because a call asks something of us and sometimes requires us to move out of our comfort zone. How willing are we to trust its intent and open to it? The answers do not come quickly or easily, nor do they guarantee an immediate sense of truth. Confusion and uncertainty are common responses. Our promptings may come to us disguised as a metaphor, or in a dream, or filtered through "symptoms, happenstances, and synchronicities" (Levoy, 1997, p. 5). Regardless of the form, an authentic call will continue to surface until it is heard (Hillman, 1996; Hollis, 2005).

Nature of a Call

In order to discover who we are and why we are here, Neafsey (2006) instructs us to listen to our hearts. When we are not preoccupied with who we think we are or what others are expecting of us, we can expand our vision of who we are. As our perceptions about ourselves change, it is possible that our reality may change as well. Both these inner and outer changes have the potential to heighten our awareness of emotions, dreams, synchronicities, and intuition. Hollis (2005) speaks of a "sense of rightness and a

harmony within" (p. 149) that arises as we learn to listen to these sources of guidance and wisdom.

In order to listen to our hearts I believe we must first be willing to be still, for it is often in stillness that we are summoned by an "'inner voice' that calls us to our destiny" (Neafsey, 2006, p. x). Rollo May (1981) refers to *destiny* as "the pattern of limits and talents that constitute the 'givens' in life (p. 89). These "givens" may be physical, psychological, and cultural and yet they need not hold us hostage, for in confronting such limits we engage our destiny in creative ways: "we experience a sense of gratification and achievement, a conviction that we are becoming what we were meant to become" (p. 93). In order to find that "authentic pattern to which we are called" (p. 94), May contends that we must move beyond the question of who am I, to ask who we are in relation to the world. Whatever that "destiny" might be, there is a sense that "one has something to contribute, that one can make a difference, and that one can shape the world and not just be shaped by it" (Hansen, 1995, p. 90). Is that what I found missing in the lives of certain clients of mine—a sense of purpose?

In *The Call: Discovering why you are here*, Oriah (2003) writes about finding our own particular way of responding to the world and the responsibility that entails. She believes we are all called to "embody the meaning in our lives" (p. 206) because that is what the world needs from us. She also echoes Neafsey's (2006) sentiment that the heart needs to have its say. This might be experienced as a longing, perhaps more implicit than explicit. Nevertheless, for some people, this longing can serve as an awakening to what

"seeks fuller expression through us" (Hollis, 2005, p. 12), giving us a sense of purpose and direction. Purpose can provide direction but it does not necessarily make life easier. In order to live one's purpose, one should be prepared for the "surrender of the ego's agenda of security and emotional reinforcement, in favor of humbling service to the soul's intent" (Hollis, 2005, p. 10). Doing so takes a certain level of consciousness; we must be awake in order to know what is going on inside ourselves.

What are our passions? What energizes us such that time ceases to exist? What is it we are doing when we feel most alive? Corbett (2007) suggests that in order to answer such questions we focus on our "intrinsic assets—the wisdom, knowledge, and strongly held values and beliefs that underlie our skills and gifts" (p. 91). Are there clues from our past that might lead to some answers? What matters to us and has endured the test of time? What messages are we giving others just by living our lives? Palmer (2000) suggests we learn to listen to what our lives are telling us about ourselves. Are there dreams or visions we have long since set aside for more practical matters? Reawakening who we are takes time and effort but Martin Buber (1960) reminds us that "every person born in this world represents something new, something that never existed before, something original and unique, and every man's foremost task is the actualization of his unique, unprecedented and never-recurring possibilities" (pp. 12-13).

In *The Call of Service: A witness to idealism,* Robert Coles (1993) describes the phenomenology of service. Part of Cole's research entailed a questionnaire given to individuals who donated their time to volunteer services. When asked why they chose to

put forth an effort in this way, many responded by saying the work they did offered them something "bigger and more compelling: a way to live, a sign of what matters, a clue as to what this life means" (p. 280). In other words, they had something other than their own satisfaction in mind. Contrast this with others who said they volunteered because they had time on their hands, or they felt they needed to give back, or it might be something that would look good on a resume someday (Coles, 1993).

According to Michael Himes (as cited in Neafsey, 2006), a calling is manifested by the coming together of three things: "what we most enjoy doing, what we are good at, and what others most need from us" (p. 43). One of the crucial words in my research question is the word *live*. Is a call to live one's purpose a call to action? I suspect it is; something is being asked of us that only we can give in our own particular way. "Every journey, honestly undertaken, stands a chance of taking us toward the place where our deep gladness meets the world's deep need" (Palmer, 2000, p. 36). Is it our willingness to embark on such a journey where our lived response meets the world's needs that forms in us a life of meaning? The research of Kovan & Dirkx (2003) points to the affirmative. In interviewing environmental activists, Kovan & Dirkx discovered that a bridge between "gladness" and "need" was formed when the activists showed a willingness to "invest head, heart, and spirit into the work" (p. 110). The marriage of self and work felt like "a natural extension of their identity" (p. 110). Such reciprocity brings with it a feeling of "resonance, a deep consonance" (Hollis, 2009, p. 41).

Psychological underpinnings of a call.

Psychologically speaking, in order to live our lives in accord with who we are and what we love, callings originate from "our deepest and most authentic self" (Neafsey, 2006, p. 6). What is Neafsey referring to when he uses the term "authentic self"? Philosophers, theologians, psychologists, mystics, and poets have all tried to address this question. Carl Jung's (1983) archetype of unity and totality speaks best to how I understand and will be using the term throughout this research. His metaphor for the *Self* (capitalized to distinguish it from ordinary ego consciousness) can be described as that "inherent, unique, knowing, directive, intelligence" (Hollis, 2005, p. 4). Jung believed something within each of us "seeks that state of being that is the apparent purpose of our incarnation in the first place" (Hollis, 2005, p. 4). Discovering one's place in the world has to do with *individuation*, a process that leads to "wholeness" or "integration," a condition whereby "all the different elements of the psyche both conscious and unconscious are welded together" in such a way that we become who we truly are (Jung, 1983, p. 229). I see a similarity here between Jung's concept of Self and this quote by Thomas Merton (1971):

> In Sufism, Zen Buddhism and in many other religious or spiritual traditions, emphasis is placed on the call to fulfill certain urgent potentialities in the ground of one's being, to 'become someone' that one already (potentially) is, the person one is truly meant to be. (pp. 201-202)

In other words, the ego tells us who we *think* we are; the Self calls us back to who we have been all along. Failing to honor the Self comes with a price, sometimes leading to dis-ease, as I found working with clients who were living in a way that was out-of-sync with who they really are. That is one of the benefits of psychotherapy; it can help us live a more authentic life.

Living more authentically implies paying attention to what is going on in our lives. What messages wish to make themselves known? What do these messages demand from us? We do not exist in a vacuum. I believe we are born to be in relationship with others. I therefore agree with Levoy (1997) that "calls are not just inner experiences—passions, dreams, symptoms—but also outer. These come to us from the world and from the events in our lives" (p. 99). This implies we must pay attention to what is going on in our lives; what message wants to make itself known; what is being asked of us? In exploring the lives of environmental activists, Kovan and Dirkx (2003) discovered this connection between the inner and outer dimensions. Their research participants continued to feel called "even at times when their conscious rational selves seem to tell them otherwise" (p. 113). They managed to sustain their commitment during times of stress and doubt by turning inward in order to understand the deeper aspects of themselves.

Psychotherapists may have a role to play in this. Sometimes it is the clients' symptoms that draw them to the therapist's office. Similar to their physical health, these symptoms can serve as a wakeup call to their mental health if they are willing to listen.

Corbett & Stein (2005) suggest it is wise to pay attention to the Self's agenda because, from a Jungian perspective at least, there might be a price to be paid if we do not. Psychological health is seen by some as "the ability to live from the true Self rather than false selves that form to protect us from fear" (Borysenko, 1993, p. 71).

Psychiatrist Victor Frankl believed that the search for meaning is the primary motivation in a person's life. We can discover meaning through our actions, by experiencing a particular value or some achievement through work, and through suffering (Frankl, 2006). Meaning is unique to each individual and failure to find it can lead to "existential crises of growth and development" (p. 102). The gap between what limits a person and what that person is capable of becoming may arouse tension; yet, tension is not necessarily a bad thing provided it is directed towards a "reorientation toward the meaning of one's life" (p. 105). Psychotherapists have an important role to play in assisting clients discover what is of value, what is worth working toward. The clarification of values facilitates an exploration of what we live for, what we **really** want to live for, and how we might find our purpose (Jacobsen, 2005).

> Everyone has his own specific vocation or mission in life to carry out a concrete assignment which demands fulfillment. Therein he cannot be replaced, nor can his life be repeated. Thus, everyone's task is as unique as is his specific opportunity to implement it. (Frankl, 2006, p. 109)

Eric Erickson uses a different lens on human growth and development than Frankl yet his theory of psychosocial development also has implications for awakening to a call

to live one's purpose. In his model of lifespan development, Erikson (1980) pinpoints various existential issues that arise at particular stages during the course of life and identifies various means of adapting to these developmental crises. The first crisis that I feel is relevant typically happens during adolescence around issues of *identity*. During this time, the need arises to develop a strong sense of personal identity with one's own set of values and beliefs, separate from that of one's parents. This move towards independence sometimes leads to conflict as individuals attempt to clarify life's meaning for themselves. Failure to develop a sense of identity results in *role confusion,* according to Erikson.

If I were to look at my own life in terms of Erikson's theory, I can now see that the seeds of my future were planted during my early years. Nevertheless, these seeds would take half a lifetime to sprout and grow into a call to live my purpose. In the meantime, those initial stirrings became lost amidst others' perceptions of me and what was expected of a young girl growing up in the fifties. As a result, my sense of identity was more in tune with what was being mirrored by others around me rather than who I really was. I suspect I was not alone.

The intervening years between adolescence and middle adulthood are often spent forming close, committed relationships with others. By midlife, a new developmental crisis arises between *generativity* and *stagnation* (Erikson, 1980). The concept of generativity refers to "*procreativity, productivity,* and *creativity*" (Erikson, 1982, p. 67). This commitment and caring for the next generation is not just limited to parental

responsibility but also encompasses "new productions and new ideas, including a kind of self-generation concerned with further identity development" (p. 67). The question that can arise at this time is "what is life all about?" I believe a call is asking us to respond to the question "what is *my* life all about?" Opening myself up to that question upon retirement was the catalyst for change. The seeds of knowing who and why I am here that I intuited early in my life, but buried beneath the debris of life's demands, returned and with it renewed energy for life and its meaning.

These conflicts that arise at various stages of life can serve as turning points for growth, depending on choices that are made. The choices that we make early in life are often made in response to our external world, and on what we learned to attach to for security. Varying patterns of attachment behavior are observable throughout one's lifespan although they are more easily recognizable in early childhood (Bowlby, 1988). John Bowlby's (1969) theory of attachment attempts to explain behavior in terms of the ways in which a child relates to an attachment figure that is able to provide a secure base from which to explore the world. "To remain within easy access of a familiar individual known to be ready and willing to come to our aid in an emergency is clearly a good insurance policy – whatever our age" (Bowlby, 1988, p. 27). As comforting as it is to attach ourselves to the familiar, at some point the quest for meaning may require some of us to release the grip that people, places, and things have on our sense of security. However choosing to listen to that which is summoning us to a larger life, can lead us on an inward journey with an opportunity to see ourselves as so much more than what the world sees of us.

In reviewing Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's (1990) research related to the positive aspects of human experience, which he calls *flow*, I discovered that for many people who were able to find a "unifying purpose" in their day-to-day existence, this purpose acted like a "magnetic field" attracting their psychic energy (p. 218)—thoughts, feelings and actions were in greater harmony; the quality of their experiences improved, and their lives held more meaning. This is not likely to happen if one is struggling just to survive. However, once survival needs are met and safety is no longer a concern, a person's meaning system may expand to incorporate the conventional norms and values of a community, such as the family, or a religious or ethnic group. From there, Csikszentimihalyi suggests a possible sequence of steps in the making of meaning that involves a turning inward (reflective individualism) to reawaken within our being that "desire for growth, improvement, the actualization of potential." This is followed at last by a "final turning away from the self, back toward an integration with other people and with universal values" (pp. 221-222). I suggest it is this last step in particular that relates most to a call to live one's purpose; it is not so much our ego's needs that are being met, but the fulfillment of the larger whole. Although this sequence of steps may not relate to everyone, depending on life circumstances, it does show what is possible if one is willing to rise to the challenge.

While there is consensus in the psychological literature among some writers on what constitutes a call to live one's purpose (Hansen, 1995; Hillman, 1996; Hollis, 2005; Levoy, 1997), I found very few personal accounts of the actual experience of awakening to a call. Nor did I find many when I examined the general research literature. The few

articles I did find were in the field of nursing (Jeffries, 1998; Nurses Talk About Their Calling, 2008; Van Manen, 2002). Despite the different ways in which calls make themselves known—"as a voice, as an address, as an appeal to me" (Van Manen, 2002, p. 270) or perhaps they are "subtle, a series of accidental steps that prepare the way" (Jeffries, 1998, p. 34)—when nurses were asked to talk about what led them to the field of nursing, certain words kept repeating themselves. In reading their stories, more than once I came across phrases such as "in my core", "knew one day", and "what I had been intended to do" (Nurses Talk About Their Calling, 2008, p. 31). While these personal accounts describe what it is like to experience a call to a particular vocation, my intention in this research study is to broaden the parameters of a call to include any activity that brings meaning and purpose to life, regardless of whether one is paid or not. From this perspective I do not feel the research literature has adequately addressed the experiential aspects of awakening to a call in this broader sense of the word.

Theological underpinnings of a call.

For some people, a personal mission in life has a spiritual component. Francis of Assisi, John of the Cross, Teresa of Avila, and the Eastern mystic, Rumi, are examples of individuals who led purpose-driven lives with a passion to connect to the sacred. However, it is not necessary to be a mystic to have such desire. Writer Karen Armstrong began her search for a calling at the age of seventeen when she entered a convent to pursue her calling as a nun. Later, disenchanted, she left the convent and studied at Oxford, hoping to become a professor of literature. When that dream did not materialize, she became interested once again in theology and scripture and began to write. Here, through her bestselling works, she reconnected with that sacred essence which had led her to the convent so many years before. Her memoir, *The Spiral Staircase,* is the story of her spiritual search for a life of meaning and purpose; it serves as a reminder that "each of us does have a calling, even if it is not the one we expected" (McCormack, 2004, p. 41).

I believe that all things are connected in a web of life. At the heart of it all is a creative power which, for me, is God. Hence, there is a deep connection to my faith in the call I heard to become a psychotherapist. My intention is to use my gifts to walk with others on their journey. Neafsey (2006) would say these gifts and talents are given to us by God, and if put to good use in the service of others, are a sign of a true calling. It is up to each individual to discover what these gifts are so we can begin to live a life that enables us to "become the people we are truly meant to be" (p. 52). "From a spiritual

perspective, it is possible to see our own deepest and most authentic desires as God's desires *in* us or *for* us" (pp. 78-79). Neafsey goes on to say:

> Theologically, it can be said that God uses the inclinations of our true [S]elf, the promptings of conscience, the wisdom of our 'secret heart' to help and guide and call us through decisions big and small toward the goal or purpose for which we were created…. (pp. 132-133)

"God calls everyone who is listening; there is no individual or group for whom God's call is reserved" (Nouwen, 1989, 1997, p. 148). I believe a key word here is *listening.* One must be awake and attuned to the "still, small voice" if one hopes to hear, discern, and follow its whisper. That may not be easy considering there are so many opposing voices clamoring for our attention in today's busy world. How can I be sure a call I hear is not just my self-centered ego making itself known? Neafsey (2006) suggests one possible answer to that question lies in whether or not our desires of the heart are in line with "God's purpose or will or design for our lives" (p. 79). In order to open ourselves to receive guidance, it may be necessary to surrender the illusion of being the knower in favor of a co-creative partnership with the divine. "As all of the great world religions have long recognized, becoming ourselves actually requires repeated submissions of the ego" (Hollis, 2005, p. 154).

How can we trust the messages that do come our way? I believe this is where faith comes in. Here I am referring to faith, not as a noun, but as a verb—"an active mode of being and committing, a way of moving into and giving shape to our experiences of

life" (Fowler, 1981, p. 16). James Fowler's (1981) theory of faith was influenced by the theologian, Paul Tillich, both of whom believed that faith is universal and has to do with the way we make sense of our lives. In other words, what do we love, value, and honor "that has the power to sustain our being" (p. 5)? Building on the works of Piaget, Erikson, and Kohlberg as well as his own research, Fowler has set forth six stages of developmental faith that parallels psychological development from childhood through late adulthood. These six stages include 1) Intuitive-Projective Faith, 2) Mythic-Literal Faith, 3) Synthetic-Conventional Faith, 4) Individuative-Reflective Faith, 5) Conjunctive Faith, and 6) Universalizing Faith. While in Fowler's words, "their categories of description are necessarily formal and without specific content, general and not particular" (p. 90), I believe there are implications inherent in some of the stages for awakening to a call to live one's purpose. By way of example, in Stage 4, which Fowler names *Individuative-Reflective* faith, one no longer relies on external sources of authority which contributed to one's former assumptive value system; rather, one begins to rely on authority within the self. Furthermore, through a process of self-reflection, an individual's mind is more open to reconsidering life's meaning, including taking responsibility for what that entails. When I examined research studies conducted on callings, I discovered comments resembling Individuative-Reflective faith expressed by certain research participants:

> I felt as though some missing piece of my self had fallen into place. I guess it was more like some false piece of my self had fallen away….Life seemed to have

> meaning. The world seemed to need what I had to offer, and I had found my way. (Thompson & Miller-Perrin, 2008, p. 105)

Another research participant put it this way: "'in that soul searching that I've done, this has felt really right and good for me….It hasn't felt like, oh, there are other rungs of the ladder that I want to continue to climb'" (Kovan & Dirkx, 2003, p. 109).

According to Fowler, the transition from Stage 4 to Stage 5 (*Conjunctive faith*), often occurs in mid-life. It may appear as a voice from the past, an image, a shift in energy or perhaps a loss of meaning—all indications of a readiness for something new. In an exploratory study of university professors (Thompson & Miller-Perrin, 2008), one research participant said the turning point that propelled him towards his call was '"the gap between the seemingly solitary and self-serving work of the scholar and the need I felt to give back to the society that had helped educate me in the first place"' (p. 104).

Whereas Individuative-Reflective faith revolves around the conscious mind attempting to figure out the boundaries of things that results in an either/or way of thinking, Conjunctive faith is characterized by a willingness to look at a situation from all sides and to come to terms with both the conscious and unconscious aspects of self that determine one's actions. Kovan & Dirkx (2003) found that activists' willingness to accept not knowing and to listen to what is sometimes '"below the surface or beyond conscious awareness"' (p. 107), contributed to a better understanding of themselves as well as a deeper commitment to their work as a calling.

Another feature of Conjunctive faith is the awareness of injustice and its implications. In this stage of faith there is a release from the confines of what may have once been thought of as the other in favor of a focus on the interconnectedness of things and a move towards a more inclusive way of being (Fowler, 1981). In responding to the meaning of environmental work for those in the field, one interviewee said, '"it's something that has to do with almost their spirituality….I'm committed to the earth. It's committed to me, after all. The least I can do is give back"' (Kovan & Dirkx, 2003, p. 105). Spending and being spent in service of something they love is how these activists honor and show respect for creation, at the same time working to preserve its beauty for others to enjoy.

Turning now to Christian scripture, the Bible is full of central characters who were seized by the spirit and who responded to a call to live their purpose, among them Moses (Exodus 4:12 New International Version) and the prophets (Isaiah 61:1, Jeremiah 1:4-10, Ezekiel 1:2). The self-emptying, servanthood of Jesus, of dying to an old way of life reminds us of what may be required for those who heed the call. This "dying to an old way of life" varies from person to person; it may be an inrushing of the spirit, a life crisis, or perhaps it is a gradual process. Whatever the occurrence, Marcus Borg (1987) believes "the central movement in dying is a handing over, a surrendering, a letting go, and a radical centering in God" (p. 113). A Biblical example of this is Saul of Tarsus.

There are theological aspects of a call to live one's purpose in other religions as well. For example in the Indian tradition, the *Law of Dharma* states "that we have taken

manifestation in physical form to fulfill a purpose" (Chopra, 1994, p. 95). There are three components to the *Law of Dharma.* The first component relates to the discovery of our true Self as spiritual in nature. The second relates to the expression of our unique talents and the third relates to the usage of our talents to serve humanity (Chopra, 1994). As others have expressed (Hollis, 2005; Neafsey, 2006), in order to fulfill this last component, sometimes one must let go of the pull of the ego in favor of the soul.

If individuals are willing to take a risk and let go of the familiar for what is not, a journey of transformation can begin. My journey began the day I decided to make my call my priority. In doing so, I needed to learn to live with the tension that arose from my doubts and fears. I became aware of how the psychological and theological aspects of a call can blend together. My inner experiences were alerting me to the fact that I could no longer play it safe if I was to bring clarity to the breadth and depth of my passion for my research topic. I would need to take risks in order to allow what was previously hidden to show itself. My fear of expressing my beliefs was overshadowed by God's belief in my ability to do so.

What do the experiences of those who are becoming conscious of their "original face" have to tell us about creating meaning in our lives? A discussion of the literature offers some insights but in order to capture the complexity of the subject, I believe we must also examine the stories of those who are living the experience. This brings us to methodology.

METHODOLOGY

In reviewing the literature, I found studies related to the *meaning* of a call to live one's purpose, some of which made reference to theology. I found very few studies that described what it is like for individuals to actually *experience* awakening to that meaning. In order to address this gap in the most powerful way, I chose phenomenology as my methodology since phenomenology looks at the essence of deep personal experience. According to the founder of phenomenology, Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), "to arrive at certainty, anything outside immediate experience must be ignored, and in this way the external world is reduced to the contents of personal consciousness. Realities are thus treated as pure 'phenomena' and the only absolute data from where to begin" (as cited in Groenewald, 2004, p. 4). Instead of taking for granted assumptions about what is known, phenomenological researchers attempt to see human experience "naively and freshly again" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 101). Phenomenological methodology approaches research without trying to construct a predetermined set of fixed procedures, techniques and concepts that would lay down the ground rules for the project (Van Manen, 1990); in other words, it is descriptive rather than analytical.

One lesson I learned during my practicums was that in order to come to a better understanding of a client, I must first understand how the client experiences their situation. It reinforced for me the fact that I cannot understand clients apart from the world they inhabit. Since I believe we are meaning-making beings with the potential to determine the significance of events in our lives, phenomenology was a logical choice for

me because it is a methodology that strives to understand how we come to interpret our own and other's actions as meaningful (Schwandt, 2000). It is an approach that is in keeping with my existential worldview. From a phenomenological standpoint there are no objective facts that are independent of subjective consciousness. Subject and object are connected to one another through "intentionality of consciousness where experiences contain both the outward appearance and inward consciousness based on memory, image, and meaning" (Creswell, 1998, p. 52). Objective "facts" presuppose a meaning-imbuing subject (Karlsson, 1993). The aim of phenomenological research is to ascertain what it means to an individual to have a particular experience and to describe that experience as comprehensively as possible.

The place to begin psychological inquiry using a phenomenological approach is with comprehensive descriptions of personal experience (Giorgi, 1985). These descriptions then provide the basis for rich data that conveys the essence or underlying structure of the experience (Moustakas, 1994). As we reflect on our experiences, we assign meaning to the phenomena of lived life (Van Manen, 1990). "Phenomenological insight, in providing deep insights and understandings into the way that things are, enables people to see the world differently, and in seeing it differently to act differently towards it" (Swinton & Mowat, 2006, p. 107).

The following steps outline the procedure I used in researching the question: **What is the experience of awakening to a call to live one's purpose?**

a) initial preparation – At the outset of the research process I identified and placed on the side my own preconceived ideas of the phenomenon under study in order that I might "be fresh and maximally open to the concrete experiences being researched" (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2008, p. 33). Husserl introduced the term *Epoche* to describe this process of "allowing a phenomenon or experience to be just what it is and to come to know it as it presents itself" (Moustakas, 1994, pp. 85-86). *Bracketing* one's presuppositions is a difficult process and may not be perfectly achieved but the "energy, attention, and work involved in reflection and self-dialogue" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 90) contributed to my goal of remaining open and receptive to the data and to what it might be telling me. Allowing pre-existing thoughts and beliefs to enter my consciousness and leave freely, without grasping at them, is something I am familiar with having practised mindfulness meditation for many years. I also found it helpful to keep a record of my presuppositions in a journal (Hycner, 1999) as a jumping-off point for dialogue with my supervisor and Thesis Process Group when the need arose.

b) finding potential co-researchers – I approached friends and colleagues in person or via telephone for the names of possible co-researchers.

c) selecting appropriate co-researchers – Since the goal of phenomenological research is to illuminate lived experience, I chose purposive sampling to identify co-researchers. It was also important that the co-researchers be able to articulate their experience since they were asked probing questions that encouraged them to elaborate on details and to clarify their stories, anecdotes, and recollections. "Typical sample sizes for phenomenological studies range from 1 to 10 persons" (Starks & Trinidad, 2007, p. 1375). Taking into consideration the scope of my research study, the time it would take to transcribe and analyse the data, and the nature of the topic, I choose a sample size of three, believing the number sufficient to illustrate the lived experience.

d) initial contact – Once I had the names of potential co-researchers, I sent them a recruitment email (see Appendix A). Those that expressed an interest were given a Letter of Information (see Appendix B) outlining the purpose and procedure of the research, the co-researcher's role, the voluntary nature of the study, the fact that they were free to withdraw at any time, and methods taken to ensure confidentiality (King, 2010). I then had a telephone conversation with those who replied to my Letter of Information and arranged to conduct the first of two interviews at a mutually agreed upon place.

e) informed consent – Before beginning the first interview, I went over the informed consent form with each co-researcher, which included permission to audio-record (see Appendix C). They were given an opportunity to ask

questions before they were asked to sign. One copy was given to the co-researcher and I kept the other for my files.

f) data collection – I conducted one-on-one semi-structured interviews, consisting of pre-set guiding questions (see Appendix D) that allowed for flexibility and were open-ended to allow for elaboration (Hugh-Jones, 2010). The first interview lasted approximately 2 hours. My focus throughout the interview process was on the "actual experience of things rather than on received ideas or mental models or cultural projections that we have about them" (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998, p. 165). The second interview lasted approximately 1 hour and was intended as a follow-up to the first to ensure that the essence of the first interview was captured and was accurate, as well as to allow the co-researchers to add anything new that would describe their experience more fully (Hycner, 1999).

g) recording the data - I audio-recorded the interviews and made brief notes of what was said beside each of the interview questions in case of equipment failure. I also recorded my observations, enabling me to gain access to visual as well as auditory data (Silverman, 2010). At the end of each interview, I expanded my notes within 24 hours while my memory was still fresh.

h) confidentiality of the data – Establishing an atmosphere of trust is critical to the health and well-being of co-researchers. As a means to this end, I strived to build trust by being open and transparent in all my interactions. Real names

were removed from transcripts and all other identifying information either removed or disguised. The transcriptionist was required to sign a confidentiality agreement (see Appendix E). Pseudonyms were chosen by each co-researcher and used in the final report. A record of names and matching pseudonyms was kept separate from the research data in a secure file. In order to safeguard the data, all audio-tapes, transcripts, and written material were locked in a filing cabinet in my home. Electronic files were password protected. Once final approval of the thesis is granted, all written documents will be destroyed. Audio-tapes will be destroyed or returned to the each of the co-researchers if requested. Electronic files will be deleted from my computer hard drive.

i) data analysis – "Analysis is a process of breaking down the data and thematizing it in ways which draw out the meanings hidden within the text" (Swinton & Mowat, 2006, p. 57). In breaking down the data it was necessary to replay the tapes and reread the transcripts many times. Hearing the voices on tape was a very different experience than reading over the transcripts. I was better able to discern the meaning lying just beneath the surface of the spoken words by listening for intonation, pauses, repetitions, and the like. Each time I listened to a tape or reread a transcript, I absorbed more of the bigger picture as each of the individual pieces began to fit together to form the whole. I felt privileged that the co-researchers felt comfortable sharing such intimate aspects of their lives with me. There were times when certain statements spoke to me

louder than others. It was then I needed to pause, pull out my reflective journal, jot down my thoughts, and reflect on what was written. Why was I smiling? What prompted me to nod my head? Was I seeing myself in the words of the co-researcher and if so, what influence was that having on me? Once the questions were addressed, I was able to set all this aside and begin anew. I used Hycner's (1999) thematic approach since it provided me with useful guidelines while remaining true to the phenomenon. Hycner's approach includes the following steps:

1. Transcribing interview tapes.

2. Bracketing and *phenomenological reduction.* Phenomenological reduction means "using the matrices of that person's worldview in order to understand the meaning of what that person is saying rather than what the researcher expects that person to say" (Hycner, 1999, p. 144). Therefore, it was necessary to examine how the co-researchers experienced the phenomenon within the context of their own beliefs, feelings, and convictions. Recording my presuppositions about the research data in a journal during the initial preparation phase of the research process helped me to set these aside and to remain open to whatever meanings emerged from the data.

3. Listening to the interview for a sense of the whole. I listened to the tapes and made notes in my journal of intonations and emphases in order to

remain as true as possible to the co-researcher's meaning. Reading over the transcripts several times also gave me a holistic sense of the data.

4. Delineating units of general meaning. Hycner (1999) refers to a unit of meaning as "those words, phrases, non-verbal or paralinguistic communications which express a unique and coherent meaning (irrespective of the research question) clearly differentiated from that which precedes and follows" (p. 145). Every time there was a transition in meaning, I made a slash mark in the transcript. All general meanings were included at this stage even redundant and ambiguous ones.

5. Delineating units of meaning relevant to the research question. To ensure rigor, I read over all units of general meaning and eliminated those that were clearly irrelevant to the research question (Kruger, 1981). The challenge was to continue to bracket my own presuppositions as I asked myself if the phenomenon would still be the same if the meaning unit was eliminated (Van Manen, 1990). If I was in doubt, I included it.

6. Eliminating redundancies. Only those units that were clearly redundant were removed.

7. Clustering units of relevant meaning. Once redundancies were eliminated, I looked to see if any of the units of meaning naturally fit together. Hycner (1999) suggests the researcher rigorously examine the list of units of

meaning to see if "several discrete units of relevant meanings" have some "essence" in common (p. 150).

8. Determining themes from clusters of meaning. In determining the themes I looked for clusters of meanings that were particularly revealing about the experience of awakening to a call to live one's purpose. I kept a *reflective diary* (Shaw, 2010) where I recorded thoughts that came to mind during this process. It was a way for me to keep track of my reflections on the themes as they emerged. In searching for central themes it was necessary to go back and forth between the transcript and the clusters of meaning to make sure that the themes arose out of the data itself rather than being imposed on from outside (Crotty, 1998).

9. Writing a summary for each interview incorporating the themes. The summary "gives a sense of the whole" while "providing the context for the emergence of themes" (Hycner, 1999, p.153).

10. Returning to the co-researcher with the summary and conducting a second interview. The co-researcher was given the summary to read over prior to the second interview. The purpose of this validity check was to determine if the first interview was accurately captured and to give the co-researcher an opportunity to add further information that would describe their experience more fully (Hycner, 1999).

11. Modifying themes and summary. This step did not prove necessary because any clarification of data that did arise during the second interview did not impact the original themes nor were any new themes generated.

12. Identifying general and unique themes for all the interviews. At this point, it was helpful to look at these themes within the context from which they emerged. Care was taken not to cluster themes together when in fact there were significant differences. By careful monitoring of thoughts and ideas as they came to mind through the use of memoing, and by consulting with my supervisor and colleagues in the Thesis Process group, I was in a better position to decide if my findings "rang true." Paying attention to my values throughout the research process and bracketing how they may be influencing my understanding of the main themes added rigor to my thematic analysis.

13. Composing summaries that capture the essence of the phenomenon under investigation. Van Manen (1990) believes "the essence or nature of an experience has been adequately described in language if the description reawakens or shows us the lived quality and significance of the experience in a fuller or deeper manner" (p. 10).

j) reliability and validity – I addressed these two critical issues in several ways to ensure my methods were reliable and my conclusions were valid. I began by *clarifying my personal bias* (Creswell, 1998) regarding my research topic since

"the phenomenon as named and conceived is probably associated with personal perspectives, dispositions, and feelings—in a word, their subjectivity—that also will bear on the interpretive process. We are not indifferent to the subject matter of our inquiries" (Peshkin, 2000, p. 6). I cannot deny my research question arose from personal experience. In fact, this thesis is just one in a series of steps I have undertaken to enable me to live my purpose. I began this research project having a deep connection to God and a commitment to live my life's purpose. In my own life there is an ongoing relationship between the two. This is *my* reality: How was I able to remain open as I investigated the reality of my co-researchers?

I tried to suspend or *bracket* my personal thoughts and feelings as much as possible in favor of fully entering the experience of the other (Hycner, 1999; Moustakas, 1994; Starks & Trinidad, 2007). Bracketing required "sustained attention, concentration and presence" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 88), qualities I was familiar with through many years of meditating and of practicing *Focusing*, a "body-oriented process of self-awareness" (Cornell, 1996, p.2) pioneered by Eugene Gendlin. Focusing has taught me to stand apart from what is going on in the moment in order to allow a space to open up; within that space, something new can emerge. I kept returning to both these practices to center and ground myself throughout the research process in order to remain open and receptive to the data as it presented itself. In writing about mindful inquiry, Bentz & Shapiro (1998) state researchers need to be aware of their attachments

to their research. Becoming more aware of our attachments is the first step in freeing ourselves from their grip. *Dialoguing with my supervisor* (Hycner, 1999) and with my colleagues in the *Thesis Process Group* were means of checking on my ability to bracket my presuppositions as well.

Memoing (Groenewald, 2004; Miles & Huberman, 1984; Starks & Trinidad, 2007) was my way of keeping a record of my observations during the collection and analysis phases of the research procedure. Not only did this provide an additional source of data, it was also a means of reflection on the process as well as a way to check whether or not any data was being "prematurely categorised" (Groenewald, 2004, p. 16).

Since I audio-recorded all of the interviews and utilized verbatim transcripts, the ensuing data was a detailed and accurate reflection of the words of each of the co-researchers. *Member checks* (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994), whereby co-researchers receive a summarized copy of the first interview to read over, helped to validate the accuracy of the experience. *Hand-written notes* of my visual observations throughout the interview process added validity to the study (Silverman, 2010). In order to be as objective and faithful to the phenomenon as possible, an *audit trail* (Hycner, 1999; Shaw, 2010) was established in which each step in my thematic analysis was comprehensively and consistently documented, making links between data, identification of themes, and conclusions clear to the reader.

k) ethical considerations – To ensure that my thesis process honored ethical principles as set out by *St. Stephen's College Ethical Conduct For Research Involving Humans*, it was necessary to follow specific procedures before, during, and after conducting my study. Issues such as full and frank disclosure, respect for free and informed consent, respect for privacy and confidentiality, and balancing harms and benefits were addressed.

When I first met with prospective co-researchers, I explained the purpose and nature of my research study by reading aloud my Letter of Information. They were given an opportunity to ask questions which I answered as fully and honestly as possible. They were given a copy of the Letter of Information for their records.

Since "the primary objective is to conduct research openly and without deception" (Silverman, 2010, p. 155), it was necessary to obtain *informed consent* from each of my co-researchers. Included in the Consent Form was permission to audio-record as well as permission to use anonymous direct quotes in the final publication. I addressed differences in reading comprehension by using language in the Consent Form that was easy to understand and devoid of academic jargon. Co-researchers were told they had the right to withdraw from the research study at any time without consequence. All information collected with regard to them would be destroyed or returned to them according to their wish. It was important to keep in mind that informed

consent was not something that was spoken of once and then forgotten; it was "continually open to revision and questioning" throughout the research process (Silverman, 2010, p. 155).

In order to *avoid threat or harm*, meetings were held in a location where the co-researchers felt comfortable and free to talk in private. Co-researchers were informed that if outside support was necessary as a result of participation in the study, they would be supplied with a list of supportive services. Co-researchers were also free to contact my thesis supervisor (Dr. Colleen MacDougall) or the Program Chair at St. Stephen's College (Dr. Margaret Clark) if there were concerns.

Underlying all of the above is the way I conducted myself as a researcher, which is one who adheres to the ethical principles of *beneficence, fidelity, nonmaleficence, autonomy, justice, and societal interest* (Canadian Counselling Association, 2007). I also had an ethical responsibility to ensure that any personal biases I may have in regard to a call to live one's purpose were held as separate as possible so as not to interfere with me conducting quality research.

RESULTS

Six major themes were found throughout all three of the co-researchers' data. These major themes include: impact of early memories, growing sense of self-identity, sense of connection, feeling of commitment, authenticity, and personal well-being. Two additional themes were found in two of the co-researchers—a sense of knowing and a feeling of being helped along the way. Finally, one theme—willingness to change—was unique to one co-researcher but significant none-the-less. Sub-themes were found in all but two of the themes. Following is an elaboration of each of the themes and their corresponding sub-themes.

Impact of Early Memories

Co-researchers identified experiences growing up that had an impact on the direction their lives took in later years. The memories surrounding some of these experiences were not always positive ones.

Adversity.

There were circumstances in the lives of each of the co-researchers that had an impact on their view of the world. In the case of Carole (white female, 49, yoga instructor), her desire for a good education was thwarted when she was growing up. "I didn't go to a particularly good school….I think as a child I didn't learn as much as I perhaps would have liked." She felt she was forced to be an underachiever and yearned for higher academic standards. Carole knew there were such schools but she knew she

would never attend one of them. She wanted to go to university when she graduated from high school but that, too, was not possible. Carole's belief that everybody should have the right to a good education was shaped, in part, by the inequalities that a class system imposes on opportunities for advancement.

For the first eighteen years of life, Peter (Indian male, 79, volunteer) was partially blind and had a very difficult time as a result. He struggled in school because he could not see the board. Homework became a problem; consequently, some of his grades suffered. Needless to say he was very depressed because of all this and wondered what would become of him. Peter was living in India at the time and during his formative years "the slaughter of one million Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs and mass migrations of people…put an indelible mark on my mind." Peter witnessed the stabbing of a Muslim woman and the burning of Muslims' houses. He says for the first time "I saw the futility of institutional religions." Later when he first began teaching in India, he taught at a school in the slums; this raw exposure raised his awareness of the issues surrounding poverty and injustice.

Cole's (white male, 29, photographer) childhood was a happy one; however, at the age of 21 he became quite ill for a year and a half. During that time, he had very little control over his life. He eventually recovered and after a series of life-altering events went on to become a photographer. Then he suffered an eye injury that resulted in a better appreciation for his art. Cole also has to contend with other people's opinions of what he should be doing with his life. His grandfather was a firefighter and he thought he

wanted to be one too and began the training that was required but things did not work out. It was literally making him sick doing what everybody else thought he should be doing. On some level he knew it was not right for him. It was a wakeup call that "if you're not doing what you're supposed to do, it'll hunt you down." The limiting voices of others are sometimes just as empowering as the positive ones, however, because they help drive him to find his own way in life.

Growing Sense of Self-identity

As each of the three began to pursue a life with a particular purpose in mind, a transformation slowly began to take place as their self-awareness increased. Their inward journey revealed aspects of themselves that were previously unknown. They became aware of their core values that were to guide them in their actions and they gained a better understanding of themselves in relation to the world.

Desire to learn.

From a very early age, Carole loved to learn. She always wanted to know more. "If I come across something that I don't know much about, sometimes there will be a spark and I want to follow that." About ten years ago, she discovered yoga and that set off another spark. "Learning something new excites me and then actually sharing it with others and seeing them, seeing the spark in them…that energizes me as well."

Peter is a shining example of a lifelong learner. "Though I'm grateful to India for laying the foundation of my spiritual understanding, western civilization was very

enriching. I shed the narrow parochial approaches to life and saw the world with wider perspective." For the last 50 years, Peter has delved into Greek philosophy, the existentialism of Kierkegaard, the poetry of Whitman, the ideas of Emerson and Thoreau and quantum physics to name a few. Not only does Peter want to learn all he can, he wants others to learn and to question as well. He sees himself not as a teacher, but as a student of life.

Cole has always been interested in many things. The fact that he did not really know how to use a camera did not deter him from his efforts to become a photographer. He often learned by trial and error but he persevered, sometimes learning from others in the business and sometimes by taking courses. He took a wilderness leadership training program in order to learn about canoeing, kayaking, mountain biking, and rock climbing in order to be in places that afforded him opportunities to take the kind of pictures he wanted to take. Then, in order to become more intimate with nature, he spent countless hours outdoors, using all five senses to discover what they had to teach him.

Inner work.

In addition to learning about their outer world, each of the co-researchers also demonstrate a quest for inner knowledge. Carole is continually open to learning more about herself. It is a process that provides her with opportunities to be herself and to find her own way—something she wants for her students as well. Once she became interested in yoga and had learned what there was to know about the various poses, she moved on to meditation to see what that had to offer, which in turn deepened her own practice.

As a philosopher and seeker of truth, Peter admits he is "constantly engaged in self-correction." He believes an unexamined life is not worth living. "Know thyself" is a mantra that propels him forward. He admits all is not perfect—his ego sometimes gets the better of him and upsets him. Nevertheless, he continues to learn more about himself through his reading, meditation, and conversations with people from all walks of life.

Cole thinks awareness comes from "following your calling, your passion" which, in his mind, is the inspiration to expand and to take action. However in order to do that, he believes a person must be open to listening to what the heart has to say and that is not always easy—it takes effort. For months, Cole found it helpful to spend his mornings down by the river's edge in order to be still "to listen, open myself, and truly listen to your desires" and then he needed to be willing to clear a space for what was to come.

Sense of Connection

In the process of pursuing what they love, none of the co-researchers feel they are operating in isolation. Rather, all three feel a deep sense of connection.

With others.

Carole thinks it is a gift to be given the opportunity to educate others. When people in her classes say thanks, "you don't need to pay me anymore; that's enough for me." She believes "we can all play a part in helping each other." There is warmth that comes from giving others a positive experience, whether that is witnessing ESL students grasp a new language, or literacy students getting a second chance to reach their

potential, or participants in a yoga or postural therapy class gaining a better understanding of their bodies. Carole feels she has more compassion for others because of teaching.

Peter is energized by human interaction, especially when he is speaking to others about spiritual matters—"that really grips me" says Peter. Whether it is in a group that meets on a regular basis or over coffee with a friend, it is in the conversations with others that Peter opens his heart and makes a connection. He volunteers his time twice a week teaching meditation and courses on spirituality to seniors. Compared to the other activities he is involved in, this is what he enjoys the most. He sees all types of infirm people from all walks of life and says, "I love it because all the status is gone for everybody. We are one."

The connection that Cole feels with others shows up in his work. He is amazed by the collaboration that results from the alignment with others. "It's like an image that I create with somebody—it's all them." In recalling what happened during one photo shoot Cole says, "it was her vision that she saw in her mind come through me, and then it just happened to collaborate, and it took her breath away." There were tears in her eyes as she saw for herself what Cole felt she was trying to convey.

With the Divine.

Carole sums up the connection between her passion for teaching and the Divine in this way:

> I believe that I am being guided. I believe in a higher power than me and I believe I've been given opportunities for a reason. I believe I'm on a path for a reason and so if that's a spiritual aspect, then, yes, I believe there's a spiritual aspect.

She feels in control of her life and yet, in some ways, she is not so sure. What brings her comfort, however, is a sense that she is not alone. "I think if we open our hand there's somebody there that will take it and help you along the path."

Peter was born a Hindu but does not attach himself to any particular religion, although he leans toward Buddhism. The Eight-Fold Path of the Buddha is "like a magnet to my being for leading a virtuous life." However, a burning question for him is "can we become more than we are? Can I be a Christian? Can I be a Buddhist *along with* being a Christian *instead of* being a Christian?" Peter finds inspiration in the universal teachings of the Upanishads, Sufis, Bhagavad Gita, Jesus, Lao Tzu and the Buddha and says they "ignited a flame within me." "Engaging in awe and wonder are guideposts of light for me." He relates a story of getting together with friends to talk about various issues. The others sometimes look up to him because he is not afraid to speak the truth. He has this to say about these gatherings:

> It's not teaching; it's a dialogue. It's a conversation and they talk too and I talk and we do it so respectfully and we show our differences, but there is an underlying unity of those and that gives me a joy—that the truth, which we may not express properly, or underlying all arguments—there is a beauty.

When asked whether or not he sees the work he does in the world as a call, he responds by saying: "call from up over there—that I do not know, but certainly there is a sense of urgency for me and now is the time." He feels he is summing up his life and in spite of falling short, every day he wants "to reach or practise those universal ethics of love and compassion and it has nothing to do with any religion."

Cole senses that the photographic work he is doing is a call but he was not "chosen" for this; he is simply "trying to experience heaven on earth" which he thinks is everyone's calling. The critical question for him is "what are you going to do to find it?" According to Cole, one must be peaceful and still in order to hear God. Cole finds that peace in nature and that is where he feels God. "I definitely see something else there but sometimes I won't let it in"—afraid of the power that might come if he did.

Feeling of Commitment

Not only do all three co-researchers feel a connection *with* others and the Divine, they also feel committed *to* others. They take responsibility for the way they choose to live in the world.

Share something of yourself with others.

Carole loves sharing what she has learned with others because she wants to help people. Her belief that she has a part to play is coupled with her belief in what she is sharing. She knows it is going to help others and so she wants others to benefit from what she has learned—"sometimes *too much*", she adds.

Peter is a socially conscious individual. He is passionate about social justice in our society and feels compelled to respond, although he is no longer politically active. Nevertheless, he gets involved in other ways such as lecturing in schools and universities with the Gandhi Foundation. While he was in education, he was the director of the Multicultural Education Council for many years.

Photography gives Cole the opportunity to document things he considers to be historic into positive images that he does not need to explain to anybody. He would rather his pictures be the form of communication in which he, the camera, and the image are all blended into one. Cole did not feel he had the vocabulary or that strong of a voice "so my passion wasn't photography; it was to have that voice. I think that's what your passion is—is that voice."

Make a difference.

Carole would describe herself as someone who wants to "do something useful with my life" in order to "make a difference, to share something with someone else so they can have a positive experience." When she was growing up, she always wanted

someone to make a difference in *her* life but she was disappointed. As an adult, she now has the chance to give others the opportunities she missed by helping others to experience a sense of achievement.

Peter makes a difference to those around him by modelling the values he upholds. His actions are a result of his efforts to uplift himself and others. Love, compassion, tolerance, and respect are guiding principles. He has been on an interfaith board for many years. His lectures, meditation classes, and spiritual courses impact a wide range of people from inner-city youth to those in Seniors Centres. These opportunities enable him "to inspire and empower" others.

By choosing photography as a way to express himself, Cole is able to "make a difference or to make, you know, something very simple, give someone a positive experience and send a positive vibration." Since he pours his heart and soul into his work, Cole is very intentional about the projects he chooses, passing up on anything he feels has negative energy. In his life and in his art, Cole wants to "be the change" he wants to see in the world.

Authenticity

As each of the three set out on a path that beckoned them to live their purpose, they came to a better understanding of who they are as persons.

Listening and responding from the heart.

Even at an early age, Carole was listening to what her heart was telling her. The high academic standards that she was expecting were absent and she felt held back as a result. "I felt I was being forced to be an underachiever and I thought that's crazy…I felt this wasn't fair." Fast forward to adulthood and the transformation in her thinking—"I'm going to now go out and do something…maybe give people what I didn't get." When the opportunity arose in her thirties to attend university, she thought "this is definitely what I should be doing!" Fast forward once again to a present day yoga class and her response when asked what this requires of her—"I don't feel really that it asks anything; it's almost that I just want to give it…it just feels natural."

Peter does not shy away from asking tough philosophical questions but he is discerning. He will not accept what does not fit with his understanding. The depth of knowledge that he has acquired, not only about the world but about himself and what he has to offer, has come from many years spent reading and reflecting in order to see what fits and what does not. "I don't accept everything and am very, very selective—only those ideas which match my experience."

When Cole feels inspired he says he feels something "visceral" right in the middle of his chest. It is definitely not in his head—in fact, the thought and all the detail come later. He says it takes practice to listen to what can be a "very, very, subtle, little thing." He speaks of being in alignment. Essentially there are two feelings—one feels good and one feels bad. He gets that feeling whenever he has the opportunity to work with

someone influential in photography or when he thinks of having a farm or an educational center some day. "It's love and a purpose behind that keeps you doing it." As an art form, photography is a way for Cole to "return to who you really are", a truer form of you." He is reminded of when he was a child soaking everything up, much like a sponge soaks up water.

Merging of values, beliefs, actions.

Carole believes everybody should be given an opportunity for a basic education regardless of their individual circumstances. She values education and feels it is often taken for granted. The confidence she feels today partly stems from the education she received later in life and from realizing she has a lot to offer others. It saddens her to think some individuals are denied opportunities in life because of social issues and she is grateful to have the opportunity to play a part in educating others that they, too, might live with confidence and dignity.

At times it is difficult to separate Peter's values, beliefs and actions because they are intertwined. He lives what he believes. Gandhi has been an ongoing source of inspiration for Peter and he tries to model nonviolence in his own life. The work he does in the community on behalf of the Gandhi Foundation is a testament to beliefs translated into action. Social conscience is one of Peter's guiding principles. He believes "social equality and the removal of economic disparities are essential to achieve human brotherhood." The treatment of minorities and injustice of any kind arouses his emotions and led to political involvement in his earlier days.

Cole admits it was a lot of work to get into that place where things began to unfold for him the way he hoped they would. Since he is adamant about limiting the photos he takes to those that send out positive energy, his biggest struggle is finding the balance between what makes him happy and what makes money. Unfortunately, sometimes the two are not compatible. Authenticity is linked to awareness in the present moment. When Cole is working on a shoot, awareness in the present moment is critical.

> It's really putting your subject in a place where their vision is clear…you're helping, but you're also creating and documenting; so…you're kind of like the channel for the awareness. There's me; then there's the thought and idea; and there's this translation through the equipment, right, which is you learn how to do certain things with the camera to translate it.

It is at such moments that Cole forgets who he is. He and the name of his company are one—"raw, in its natural state, as real as possible."

Personal Well-being

The data revealed several particular physical and emotional responses to awakening to a call to live one's purpose that contribute to the co-researchers' overall sense of well-being.

Inspired.

The co-researchers were first inspired *by others* and then they became inspired *themselves* and now they are sources of inspiration *for others*. For Carole, it was an adult

instructor who took an interest in her, encouraged her to go to university, and put her in touch with someone who was able to set the wheels in motion. A source of inspiration for Peter was the vast amounts of reading he did from such notables as Walt Whitman, Emerson, Socrates, St. Theresa of Avila, Rumi, and Thich Nhat Hanh. Some of Cole's inspiration came from other individuals who were living out their dreams, some of whom offered to help him pursue his own. Cole describes inspiration experientially: there is an "expansion" going from "your heart, your center, your center of being and I guess, you know, out into action." He elaborates further by saying, "the inspiration that comes to you is just love."

Energized.

There is an energy that surrounds all three co-researchers as they engage in what they love to do. As Carole puts it, when she is teaching a class, "I start, then the energy just builds in me as I go…I feel like I'm kind of riding along on a cloud." Cole speaks of his work as "an energy gain not a money gain" and states he "can do it all day."

Engrossed.

When Carole is in class, she is not thinking about anything else and the time passes quickly. Although she was in the throes of moving when she was interviewed for this research study, Carole says it was a blessing to step into a class because not once did she think about all the things that needed to be done. Peter speaks of "total involvement" and Cole speaks of being "lost in what you're doing." "You can forget to eat. It's timeless."

Passionate.

The word *passion* appeared many times in the data. Carole thinks passion comes before any talent or skill she might have. For her, teaching is "just the best feeling ever!" After being in class, she feels better and that feeling carries her throughout the day and into the evening. Peter feels he is "a philosopher at heart" and the passion he feels for the meaning of life is lived out by way of his community involvement. Cole talks about passion as the voice that's telling him to make a difference. "It's what I live for."

Joyful.

"I think there is a great benefit for me in the sense of joy"—these words by Peter are echoed by Carole and Cole. They all enjoy what they do, gain pleasure from it, and are uplifted because of it.

Grateful.

Gratitude was also spoken of numerous times by the co-researchers. In Carole's words,

> I think there's a degree of satisfaction now that I perhaps achieved something of what I always could achieve…before that I think that would have been more of a frustration that I never got the opportunity to do and I should have done….so, a gratitude I think for what I have and the abilities I've been given.

Doubtful.

Two of the co-researchers also spoke of doubt. Carole thought she was too old to go to university and then, when she did graduate, thought "Who am I to think that I can go in the classroom and stand up there and give people what they need to know?" Cole admitted that there were times when he doubted himself and yet he was just as quick to admit that you must not let fear keep you from reaching your potential. He thinks "as soon as you doubt yourself, it's just confirmation that you're to keep going."

Sense of Knowing

A theme that emerged from the data of two of the co-researchers was a feeling that what they were doing with their life felt right but that feeling seemed to be coming more from the heart than from the head. Even when there were doubts, they continued to pursue their passions. For Carole "it was almost a given" that she would teach English someday. She had the sense "that this is the path I'm supposed to be on." "It's almost as if it's not a choice. It is a choice but it's something that I just need to do." As for Cole, he says he always knew there was something else for him to do with his life even when dissenting voices were telling him otherwise. "Sometimes you don't know how, or when, or details; you just know." That explains why he had business cards before he had a camera. The details would come later. Once he did own a camera and was taking pictures, this sense of knowing reappeared. Cole explains: "and when you nail it…you see it happen as the shutter closes, that memory is with me forever. I know at that second when I get it. I don't even have to look; it's amazing!"

Feeling of Being Helped Along the Way

Another theme that emerged from the data pertaining to Carole and Cole was the feeling of being helped along the way. Once Carole made the decision to change career paths, things began falling into place for her. She felt she was in the "right place at the right time." Opportunities have come her way and she has not "had to look too hard for the doors to open." Without any experience, she was still able to get a job teaching in a school within a few months of moving to Canada as if it had all been laid out for her. Once Cole began to act *as if* he was already a photographer, "the universe opened up doors where there were walls." Cole points out that the photographs he takes have nothing to do with him—"it's just coming through to you; and if you accept and you ask to be an open vessel where it seems to flow…then it'll come."

Willingness to Change

This last theme was explicitly unique to Cole's data. Watching television and movies, Cole was inspired by what some people were doing with their lives. However, once he realized he was pouring all his energy into admiring others instead of living his own life, he woke up to the fact that, "no, I'm in charge and if I'm in charge…I can paint my own canvas."

The first thing Cole did in order to change the things that were holding him back from living his own life was to move to another province, to a location where he was able to get closer to nature—to the type of setting he envisioned in his photography. Once there, he began to meet new people, some of whom offered to help him in fulfilling his

desire to become a photographer. He admits leaving the security of home and the support of family was scary at times but he was determined to consciously choose the kind of life he wanted to live.

Letting go.

The act of letting go was part of the change process for Cole, but it has been an emotional rollercoaster for him. Moving away has meant being separated from family and missing out on watching his beloved niece and nephew grow up. He has had to let go of other relationships as well, such as friends that he grew up with and was close to. The biggest thing Cole needed to let go of was his identity. That was hard because "for years I think I worked so hard—this is my story—I'm trying to prove myself." However, in letting go of the things Cole *thought* he was, he cleared a space for new things to come.

DISCUSSION

The experiences in the co-researchers' descriptions of what it is like to awaken to a call to live their purpose have provided us with a greater understanding of this under researched phenomenon. I will now build on that understanding by discussing each of the themes in light of pertinent psychological and theological research.

Impact of Early Memories

In looking back on the lives of the co-researchers, it is easy to see how the impact of circumstances and certain events in their youth and young adulthood laid the groundwork for what was to come later. These circumstances, often beyond their control, shaped the values and beliefs of each of the co-researchers and guided the direction their lives took. According to Rollo May (1981), these physical (Cole) and psychological and cultural "givens" (Carole and Peter) set limits on people's lives but these limits need not define who we are or what we become. Rather than create autobiographies of victims, the co-researchers chose to turn the givens of their lives into assets, opening up new possibilities for each of them.

Carole would agree that even as a child she was aware that things were not as they should be and yet when questioned, she does not know why she would know that. What she does know is that she felt it was "so very wrong" that people were held back and not given the opportunities they deserved. There was also a feeling of sadness and a desperate yearning to know whether she was ever going to get the opportunities she felt

she needed to thrive. Although she reconciled herself to the way things were and moved on with her life, the memories of those early years remained. She thinks "that's what maybe led me to education in the first instance." There was a call back to understand, from where she stood later, what her early experience had truly been about.

We know it is not wise to live in the past and yet the past is what shapes us and informs our calls. According to Levoy (1997),

> Our past is intricately woven into our calls, and we can learn much about those calls by casting the occasional glance backward. The past tells us what has passed on to us and what we're attuned to because of it. It tells us what wounds might be calls in waiting, what business is unfinished….what wrongs we feel compelled to right (p. 163).

It seems to me, the unfinished business in the lives of the co-researchers did, indeed, impact the direction their lives took.

Growing Sense of Self-identity

In interviewing the three co-researchers, it was evident they are all committed to continual learning, not only in terms of the external world but their internal world as well. It is through introspection that they came to know themselves better. Meditation is one means by which they are able to get beneath the surface of things in order to plumb the depths. Carole recalls going through emotional ups and downs when she was doing her

yoga teacher training because the practice, itself, can bring up unresolved issues for the practitioner. She learned things about herself that she could not learn from books.

> I had a lot of doubt and fear, just a lot of that, because of things that had happened as a child, not at school, but just in life; and I think education and realizing I had something to offer gave me a confidence that I never realized that existed inside me—that I was actually worthwhile, that I could do something….I'm like a different person.

Sharp (1998) believes it is through the process of turning inwards that "unconscious compulsion is replaced by conscious development; aimless activity gives way to directed focus on what is personally relevant and meaningful." This shift in consciousness is what Jung referred to as "being called awake" (p.99). In the process, one comes to understand "who one is apart from yet intimately interconnected with the collective in which one's life is embedded" (Kovan & Dirkx, 2003, p. 103).

Peter seeks to do away with self-deception even if it means "internally there is a turmoil." Inner work entails a process of self-discovery where we come to know the truth of who we are. Hillman (1996) believes another aspect of inner work involves identifying the ways in which we are called. I suggest that there is something about feeling called, or for Peter, feeling "a sense of urgency", that touched all co-researchers at a very deep level. The challenge, then, was to discern what was right for each of them. Jeffries (1998) suggests one way to do this is to reconnect with ourselves. Contemplation and meditation helped the co-researchers in this process.

Sometimes a crisis in a person's life awakens the need to look within. Such was the case with Cole, when he realized the career path he set out on was not the right one for him. There was a disconnect between the person he thought he was and the person he wanted to be. He describes what it feels like for him to detach from his story and to grow into himself: "I'm scared all the time. When it's time to expand, I do things I don't want to because you're comfortable. When I feel the most scared and most fear is when I'm most detached from what my patterns are."

The co-researchers in this study are aware of their inner emotional experience which is required in order to feel at ease with the nonrational dimension in each of us (Neafsey, 2006). This can sometimes feel scary, as Cole confessed, or leave one full of turmoil, as Peter pointed out; but there is light inside the dark. Jungian analyst Jean Shinoda Bolen (1996) believes although an individuation path is unique to each of us, there is an underlying human pattern that relates to a "universal longing to do what we came for" (p. 180). Life, then, becomes less random and more meaningful—part of a divine universe. Discovering for ourselves what that is does not come from a voice "out there" according to Palmer (2000), but from a voice within calling us to be the person we already are. As the co-researchers embraced their own growth and expansion through their desire to learn and to do their inner work, they were able to bring forth their hidden potential.

Sense of Connection

"Each of us is born with certain gifts, part of our happiness is to use these to give back to the earth, to our community, family and friends" and as we do so "we grow in interconnectedness" (Kornfield, 1993, p. 290). This deep sense of connection is felt by the co-researchers when they share their gifts with others. Carole describes what this connection feels like for her:

> We're working towards a common goal and we're getting some benefit from it…. the positive feelings, the joy, the warmth that I feel I receive from people and it's just the best feeling ever actually to be in that environment.

Feeling part of the web of life affects the co-researchers in other ways as well. There is tolerance and respect for other people's ideas and opinions. "The spirit of optimism is a by-product of this" according to Peter. Cole uses the words *alignment* and *flow* to describe the sensations that come to him when he is taking pictures. The ways in which the co-researchers are affected by their connection with others, reminds me of a ripple effect—as the co-researchers live their lives in response to feeling called, they experience a greater sense of connection, which in turn gives their lives meaning and purpose, and passion's flame burns brighter.

However, a sense of purpose is not just handed to us; rather, it is a gift that comes as a result of using our innate abilities to better the lives of others, according to Myss (2013). Responding to what the world needs from us (Neafsey, 2006; Palmer, 2000) by

its very nature implies relationship and connection—something all three co-researchers have in common.

When I was formulating my research question, I made a point of defining the word *call* in general terms because my intention was to broaden people's understanding of a call beyond the more commonly-held religious definition. I discovered, in this particular study at least, a transcendent nature to awakening to a call to live one's purpose as illustrated by such comments as: "I believe there is a direction to the way I'm going and that I'm being led. I don't think it's all, in fact I know it's not me." (Carole); "The same vital force passes through all sentient beings. I believe that the Cosmos is impregnated with Divine consciousness." (Peter); and "Anyone who's living their truer purpose is coming from a place of that more pure spirit instead of a place of success or a place of status" (Cole).

Each co-researcher feels connected in some way to the creative intelligence of the universe although the naming of this intelligence may differ. Borysenko (1993) reports that people who have experienced moments when their ordinary perceptions of life were transcended no longer felt isolated but "connected to a center of love and strength deep within" (p. 84). These "holy moments" as she calls them, bring forth a sense of unity with others, nature, and the Universe. The interconnectedness that the co-researchers feel is a feature of Conjunctive faith in which individuals relate to one another and the world around them in a more inclusive manner (Fowler, 1981).

The co-researchers' comments lead me to wonder whether their connection with the Divine has the power to transform their lives in such a way that their internal process of awakening to our call is interwoven with *how* that call is lived out in the world. Hollis (2005) contends:

> Life is not a problem to be solved, finally, but a series of engagements with the cosmos in which we are asked to live as fully as we can manage. In so doing we serve the transcendent meaning that is meant to be brought into being through us. In fleeing this fullness of life, we violate our very purpose (p. 234).

Feeling of Commitment

The co-researchers' deep sense of commitment is evident, not only in the fact they want to share something of themselves with others; they also want to do their part to improve the world. The desire to make a difference is essentially love in action. They all feel compelled to uplift others by sharing what it is that makes them come alive. This is in line with the belief held by Buber (1960), Frankl (2006), and Hansen (1995) that each of us has something unique to contribute to the world. According to Coles (1993), those who feel called are not just after their own satisfaction; the work they do is meant to be in service to others. This was corroborated by the experiences of the co-researchers. They would add that what they do feels natural to them; it is something they want to do because they believe it is the right thing. Their attitude reflects Frankl's (2006) belief that "the more one forgets himself—giving himself to a cause to serve or another person to love—the more human he is and the more he actualizes himself" (pp. 110-111).

Authenticity

Earlier I asked the question "Is a call to live one's purpose a call to action?" Judging by the co-researchers' responses in this study the answer would be *yes.* All three pay attention to their inner images and dreams; then they respond to what their hearts are telling them by taking action. Csikszentmihalyi (1990) claims knowing one's desires and working to achieve those leads to congruency as one's feelings, thoughts and actions are aligned with one another. The result is inner harmony. Myss (2013) speaks of congruency as living in harmony with truth. Truth is something we are born knowing but connecting to that truth requires listening to our inner voice which often speaks in mysterious and unexpected ways.

Carole's inner voice is something she feels rather than hears—"a sense that this is the path I'm supposed to be on." When she began university she didn't think she actually wanted to be a school teacher but in spite of that she forged ahead—"do the degree, this is the way it's supposed to go; something in education will be coming for you." In retrospect, listening and responding from the heart was the right thing to do. Ethics and virtue are guiding principles for Peter but he does not just read, think, and talk about them; he tries to *live* an ethical and virtuous life. This asks that he observe his thoughts and feelings throughout the day. The values and beliefs that Peter embodies inform him as he lives his calling in the world. Cole is listening for feelings to make themselves known as well. When he feels the inspiration to expand and take action, the key for him is to be willing to "let it in or accept it."

This is an important juncture, it seems to me. Do we settle into the silence and allow it to make itself known or do we default instead to our programmed responses? May (1981) answers by saying "it is in the pause that people learn to *listen to silence"* (p.165). In silence there is a void. It is in the void that "one's spiritual inspirations are called forth and one's deepest thoughts are made manifest" (p. 182). It is at such a moment, when we are not otherwise occupied, that we create a space for the voice of truth to enter, pushing the "boundaries of our being" forward (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, p. 64). However, I believe we must be conscious and committed enough not to drown out the voice by our own personal agendas.

Learning to listen to and trust their internal guidance system, be it intuition, sensing, or feeling, enables the co-researchers to make conscious choices. By doing so, they remain true to their values and beliefs so their work is a natural extension of who they are. Personal authenticity is a mark of a genuine calling according to Neafsey (2006).

Personal Well-being

There is an amalgam of physical and emotional responses in awakening to a call to live one's purpose. At times there is an overlap and it is hard to say where one ends and the other begins but their effects are undeniable. Carole expresses her *passion* by stating:

> I love sharing with others—that is something I have to do. It's almost as if it's not a choice. I do it willingly and with a joy. They can see that I love what I do,

> that I love the topic and I, actually I'm saying that because people have told me that….So, yeah, the love of it, the enthusiasm and that's because I feel it; I absolutely feel it!

Robinson (2013) points out that passion is a form of love which explains why Carole and the others love what they do to the extent that they do not even consider it work. Carole has linked the word *love* with the word *enthusiasm*, which comes from the Greek word *en-thousiazein* which means "to be inspired" from en and theos meaning God (Mirriam-Webster, 1998). In light of this definition, when I ponder the connection between the three words, *passion*, *love*, and *enthusiasm*, once again I'm left wondering about the possible connection between a sense of call and the Divine. Certainly we all love many things in life but we are not **passionate** about all of them. What is it about the passionate ones that make them stand out?

Joy is another emotional response felt by the co-researchers. This joy is coming from within and is not contingent on an external source. Cole expresses the feeling this way:

> It's absolutely what I live for….It's joy; it's fulfilling. So you put yourself in those situations. It's 8:00 in the morning and it's cold and I'm tired and my friend wants pictures of him in the waves and you go out there and you question yourself. What am I doing? This is crazy! Then all of a sudden you get it and it's just rewarding what you're trying to do, you know….There's nothing in the

world like taking some amazing pictures and backing them up. It's incredible; it's the best!

Joy and *gratitude*, another emotion common to the three co-researchers, are two of the positive emotions studied by George Valliant, research psychiatrist at Harvard University. Valliant (2008) feels the social sciences have not paid enough attention to the effect that positive emotions have on well-being. Joy, along with gratitude, love, hope, forgiveness, compassion, trust, and awe, are "more about *us* than *me*." In stark contrast to negative emotions, positive emotions "free the self from the self" (p. 50). Not only are positive emotions good for our physical health, Valliant suggests they also improve our spiritual well-being because they relate to humanity's need for connection.

Each co-researcher speaks of feeling *energized* by their experiences. This is a common response according to Jeffries (1998). In listing five characteristics of a calling, one of these characteristics is described in the following manner: "expresses itself in enthusiasm and energy for the work…even when the going gets rough" (p. 34). This is reflected in Carole's comment: "the feeling of being energized just seems to grow…just builds in me as I go."

There is also rapt attention on the part of the co-researchers when they are *engrossed* in what they love to do. They are "totally involved" and "completely absorbed" in what is going on in the here and now, so much so that time either "flies by" in Carole's words, or is "timeless" in the case of Cole. Time is no longer linear for them, with one thing happening after another; rather, by being completely absorbed in what

they are doing, they merge with the present moment and everything else falls away. In Biblical terms this is referred to as *kairos* which is a Greek word meaning "a time when conditions are right for the accomplishment of a critical action; the opportune and decisive moment" (Merriam-Webster's online dictionary, 2011). Cole describes such a moment by saying: "All of a sudden you catch a wave and a pelican is beside you and you're like, whoa, and you start to see the pattern and you start to see how things are meant to be." It is as if the Divine is trying to break through, somehow, and get our attention. In these all too brief moments, there is clarity.

Feeling *inspired* is another response that is common to all three co-researchers. They are convinced that what they are doing with their lives is important because they are making a contribution that they believe is worthwhile. There are multiple layers of inspiration. Not only are Carole, Peter, and Cole stirred by their sense of call, they have and continue to be, inspired by others as well. However, it does not end there—when the three of them share what arouses their passions, they in turn rouse others (Hollis, 2005; Myss, 2013; Robinson, 2013). This has implications for personal well-being according to research conducted by Emmons (2005). Through the use of rating scales, surveys, and interviews, four categories of life meaning emerged from Emmons' research. One category—*generativity* is relevant to this research study. Emmons is referring to "contributing to society, leaving a legacy, and transcending self-interests" (p. 735), attributes that pertain to the co-researchers in this study. There are also parallels here between Emmons' research and Erikson's (1980) lifespan development model, specifically the midlife developmental crisis around issues of generativity and stagnation.

By believing they have something to contribute and committing themselves to doing so for the next generation, the co-researchers fit both Emmons' and Erikson's definition of generativity. It is interesting to note that according to Erikson, this crisis typically arises in midlife, yet one of the co-researchers is considerably younger, a reminder that no model or theory is true in all cases.

Lest one conclude from this research that following a call is always a positive experience, two of the co-researchers mentioned *doubt*, which can be a powerful force. Jung (1933) states: "wherever doubt holds sway, there is uncertainty and the possibility of divergent ways. And where several ways seem possible, there we have turned away from the certain guidance of instinct and are handed over to fear" (p. 96). Carole asked "Who am I?" to think I have something to offer others. In the Hebrew Scriptures, Moses asked the same question: "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt" (Exodus 3:11)? Jeremiah also doubted his ability in response to God's call, saying he was only a child (Jeremiah 1:6). However, God did not abandon either of them in their doubts and fears. Instead He promised to be with them. Neither Carole nor Cole allowed their fears to dictate their actions. Carole trusted "the certain guidance of instinct" referred to by Carl Jung (1933) and Cole recognizes doubt as confirmation to keep going.

Sense of Knowing

Carole and Cole embarked on a journey without a map, giving up the familiar for the unknown, without knowing the outcome of their choices. Yet in spite of it all, they felt it was the right thing to do. Carole took a year off to dedicate her time to yoga; Cole left his family and the friends he grew up with because he "knew" there was a different route he should be taking than the current one. One way this was made clear to him was via his body. The career path he had undertaken left him feeling "horrible." It was quite literally making him ill, confirming his belief that "if you're not doing what you're supposed to do, you're in pain."

Both Carole and Cole were listening and learning to trust their internal guidance system, something that Jeffries (1998) says can be a challenge in hearing a call if you allow your ego to get in the way. In fact, one of the roadblocks is learning to trust when the details are not yet clear. Levoy (1997) adds that we live in a culture that idolizes the rational and denigrates anything we cannot measure or control, such as intuition. Schulz (1998) thinks otherwise, believing that intuition is the "language of the soul as it speaks to us through our bodies" (p. 30). There are several characteristics of intuition, all of which apply to Carole and Cole: immediacy and gestalt nature of knowing, confidence in the process, and certainty of the truth (Schulz, 1998). As the two co-researchers in this study found out,

> In the end we will only be transformed when we can recognize and accept the fact that there is a will within each of us, quite outside the range of conscious control,

> a will which knows what is right for us, which is repeatedly reporting to us via our bodies, emotions, and dreams, and is incessantly encouraging our healing and wholeness (Hollis, 2005, p. 21).

I wonder if there is a link here between the intuition shown by the co-researchers and faith? The Bible tells us that faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see (Hebrews 11:1). Neither Carole nor Cole required *proof* that the journey they were on was right for them; their belief that they were headed in the right direction was enough.

Being able to trust in the unknown is not easy. There are some individuals who have a compelling need to continue to identify with objects or persons that offer them homeostasis at the expense of growth. According to Bowlby's (1988) attachment theory, this is "regarded as an integral part of human nature" (p. 27) because it offers protection; hence, it can be observed at any stage of life. This is especially true in emergencies. In the case of awakening to a call to live one's purpose, just what is it we are protecting ourselves from? Hollis (2009) suggests it is the fear of change and the accompanying losses that often come from change; nevertheless, "excessive attachment is the enemy of the life force itself" (p. 225).

Feeling of Being Helped Along the Way

Two people—different genders, different ages, different education, different call—yet their words are identical—"I know it's not me." I had to go back to the transcripts to be sure I was not mistaken. It was no mistake; both Carole and Cole had

chosen the same words to describe the feeling that their efforts to live their call are being facilitated by chance encounters, significant events, and coincidences that cannot be explained and yet hold a great deal of meaning for them. For Carole, it began with a brief conversation with an instructor who asked her whether she had given any thought to university or becoming a teacher. She had not. Years later she was told she would make a good yoga instructor. She had not thought about that either and yet her response to those suggestions has made a huge difference in her life. Carole also admits she has made decisions that have "seemed to be helped along at some point"; for example, within three months of graduating from university and deciding to emigrate to Canada, she and her husband managed to sell their house, obtain a visa (which was taking up to two years but was fast-tracked due to a pilot project), and secure a teaching position. Looking back in amazement at how things unfolded, Carole says, "It was as if someone was doing it for us."

From the beginning, photography was a blessing because it was the one thing that made sense as a way for Cole to express himself. He has been able to experience nature in ways that have helped him to "get outside myself a little bit." In the last couple of years, he has been more aware of "whatever that inner voice is, that willpower" which he believes is spirit. "I know I'm doing what I'm supposed to do because it's so easy." Sometimes when he is taking pictures, everything is in "alignment" which results in "collaboration." Before he knows it, the pictures have been taken and he is packing up to go.

What Carole and Cole are alluding to is *synchronicity*, a term Carl Jung used to refer to events that cannot be explained by cause and effect and yet are nevertheless linked through their meaning (Bolen, 1996). Certain synchronistic events can be deeply moving, some would say numinous, particularly if they convey a feeling of connection with others as well as the universe. Connection with the universal is one of the themes that emerged from this research study. Bolen believes synchronistic events "offer us perceptions that may be useful in our psychological and spiritual growth and may reveal to us, through *intuitive* [emphasis added] knowledge, that our lives have meaning" (p. 7). What this highlights for me is a possible connection between this theme and a sense of knowing in which intuition played a role for two of the co-researchers. Does a sense of knowing lead to increased synchronicity in one's life? American scholar Joseph Campbell (1988) was once asked if he ever felt he was being "helped by hidden hands" (p. 150) when he was following his *bliss*. Campbell used this descriptive term to refer to a journey of discovery, centered on meaning and purpose, which resonates from within rather than from others' expectations—not unlike awakening to a call. He responded by saying, in choosing to follow your bliss,

> You put yourself on a kind of track that has been there all the while, waiting for you, and the life that you ought to be living is the one you are living. When you can see that, you begin to meet people who are in the field of your bliss, and they open doors to you (p. 150).

Although Campbell's use of the word *bliss* lacks the precise language one would hope for in a definition, I believe there are still implications for this study in regards to discovering and fulfilling one's unique potential. Certainly for Carole and Cole, the "doors" that Campbell is referring to were opened with the help of people and circumstances as they began to pursue their call.

Carole and Cole are not the first, nor do I suspect will they be the last, to feel they are being helped in living their purpose. Examples can be found in the Bible; for instance, although Jeremiah at first resisted the call to be a prophet, he was given a sign that he would not be alone in the task. "'Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you and will rescue you.' Then the Lord reached out his hand and touched my mouth and said to me, 'Now, I have put my words in your mouth'" (Jeremiah 1:8-9). Like Jeremiah, Moses also felt ill-equipped but God's response was similar: "'Now go; I will help you speak and will teach you what to say'" (Exodus 4:12). Paul's conversion was an awakening and with God's help, Paul set out to awaken others. "Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, as I am fully known" (1 Corinthians 13:12). I believe these classic lines epitomize the outcome of the awakening process.

Willingness to Change

Cole was searching for something more in his life and he was willing to make the necessary changes in order for that to happen. Change can be difficult for some people, particularly if it means giving up a sense of control over our lives. Callings sometimes

ask us to do just that—we do not always choose our calling; sometimes "it" chooses us. Fear raises its ugly head when it is time for Cole to move beyond his comfort zone. However, the symptoms he was experiencing while training to become a firefighter were alerting him to something. Whether this would be called a challenge, a crossroads, or a crisis, according to Sue Monk Kidd (1990) it is a "holy summons to cross a threshold" (p. 87), leaving behind what no longer serves us, in favor of stepping towards new possibilities. For Cole, that meant letting go of the belief in his story of one day being a firefighter that was keeping him "in that place of doing what generally doesn't feel good." He let go of a lifestyle that brought with it a sense of security in favor of not knowing what would be required of him once he "crossed the threshold." Myss (2013) believes we betray ourselves if more effort is put into avoiding the messages coming our way. Instead she recommends doing what Cole did—hear the truth and allow it to guide you. Over time Cole chose to think, feel, and act differently.

Often one needs to let go of some things before change can happen. Letting go was a process for Cole, not an event. Campbell (1988) likens this to a death and a resurrection—"leaving one condition and finding the source of life to bring you forth into a richer or mature condition" (p. 152). Levoy (1997) claims it is not always easy to follow the direction a call is leading because it can be at odds with whatever it is we are trying to preserve. Nevertheless, acknowledging what needs to be let go of in order to follow that which is greater than our own ego (Levoy, 1997; Neafsey, 2006), puts one in a better position to awaken to a new way of being in the world. Sometimes this means

stepping into the unknown which requires faith. In order to be fully who and what I am, I must trust, not only in myself but in a power beyond myself.

I think of the process of letting go as a psycho-spiritual metaphor for personal transformation. Are we able to recognize when we are re-enforcing old patterns instead of listening and responding to an inner voice, far wiser than our own, urging us towards new possibilities? Rather than protest, is the ego strong enough to embrace a larger frame of reference? This may require examining our defenses under a microscope in order to see them more clearly. If we have the courage to see with eyes wide open, we might discover that we are in service to our own needs rather than the life force asking that we become *all* that we can be.

CONCLUSION

There are five areas I wish to address in this final chapter: essence of the results, revisiting the literature in view of my research findings, suggestions for further topics of inquiry, areas of potential application and lastly, a personal statement regarding the thesis experience and the implications of the findings for me in my future work. I'll begin with the essence of the results in relation to the research question.

Essence of the Results

In giving voice to the essence of the experience of awakening to a call to live one's purpose, one senses this essence unfolding through the synergistic, weaving motions among the nine themes identified. These themes are 1) impact of early memories, 2) growing sense of self-identity, 3) sense of connection, 4) feeling of commitment, 5) authenticity, 6) personal well-being, 7) sense of knowing, 8) feeling of being helped along the way, and 9) willingness to change.

In looking back on their early memories, the co-researchers all had to deal with adversity of one kind or another. Hillman (1996) states that "each person bears a uniqueness that asks to be lived" (p. 6). As it turned out, the seeds that would later germinate into their call to action were planted during their early struggles. Discovering what was personally relevant and meaningful to each of the co-researchers necessitated that they not only listen to, but respond from, the heart so that their values, beliefs and attitudes might merge into a more authentic way of being. In choosing to live their life

this way and not *that*, they made a crucial decision—"no longer to act on the outside in a way that contradicts some truth about themselves that they hold deeply on the inside" (Palmer, 2000, p. 32). In other words, the co-researchers' living became the manifestation of their awakening (becoming conscious of their original face)—one informed the other in a natural blending and weaving process. Echoing the work of others (Kovan & Dirkx, 2003; Neafsey, 2006; Palmer, 2000) who believe authentic callings better the lives of others in some way, there is an overwhelming desire on the part of the co-researchers to share their passions with others; because their passions are an integral part of who they are, they also share their life energy in the process (Csikszentmihalyi, 1993). There is a relationship between the co-researchers' commitment to others and their sense of connection which leaves them feeling less isolated and separate from one another. They also feel connected to a power greater than themselves, inspiring them to give more than they thought they were capable of giving. They discovered for themselves the truth in Parker Palmer's (2000) words: "When the gift I give to the other is integral to my own nature, when it comes from a place of organic reality within me, it will renew itself – and me – even as I give it away" (pp. 49-50). It is evident from the experiences of the co-researchers that they pour all their energy and emotion into what they are doing; yet, in terms of their personal well-being, they feel they receive so much more than they give (Valliant, 2008). Sharing their gifts with others and in doing so, feeling a sense of connection and community, has resulted in them feeling inspired, energized, engrossed, passionate, joyful, and grateful. Even doubt is seen as a benefit if it helps them learn how to trust.

Erikson (1980) points out that as far back as childhood "tentative crystallizations" (p. 122) give us an approximation of who we are. Two co-researchers spoke about learning to trust their feelings and were willing to follow the knowing, even if the details were not clear. They also felt they were being helped along on their journey. As one of them put it, "the universe opened up" for them once they made the decision to go where their hearts were leading them. Opportunities started to come their way in the form of chance encounters and serendipitous circumstances. Both co-researchers attributed a transcendent meaning to these turn of events. Finally, in the case of one co-researcher, there was willingness to change; part of that process entailed letting go of the attachment to ways of being that were no longer serving his larger purpose in life (Levoy, 1997; Hollis, 2005; Neafsey, 2006; Palmer, 2000). Do these results differ from the research literature and if so, in what way?

Revisiting the Literature

The results of this phenomenological research study generally reflect the current findings in the literature in regard to awakening to a call in terms of self-identity, connection, commitment and authenticity; that is, in coming to know themselves better, the co-researchers are able to confront two important questions: Who am I? Why am I here? They do so in an authentic way that is both meaningful to them and to those who benefit from their commitment to share their innate abilities with others. Interestingly, the co-researchers in this particular study feel this way regardless of whether they are paid or not. Their desire to make a difference brings them closer to others and the

interconnectedness of all things. Interwoven throughout two of the co-researchers' experiences is a general sense of knowing that this is what they should be doing with their life and despite uncertainties, things will work out in the end.

What is not prevalent in the research literature is *how* this sense of knowing is experienced, nor is much said about two of the themes—the feeling of being helped along the way and the willingness to change. I believe this study sheds light on these three very important aspects of awakening to a call. For example, what is it about this sense of knowing that allows for decisions to be made and action to be taken with little or no certainty of outcome?

I discovered four aspects of a sense of knowing from the research data: it comes from the heart; it can be felt; desire is a part of it; and finally, it is something they "don't understand", "a mystery", something they "can't explain in words." For one co-researcher, the source of this knowing is a "Higher Power", for another, "Divine consciousness", and for a third, "God." This source of knowing: is guiding Carole and giving her "opportunities for a reason", is in a relationship with Peter such that "there is a desire to clear the mind" and transform his "consciousness and the consciousness of others", and is inspiring Cole to "expand and take action."

Further Topics of Inquiry

What more can we learn about the relationship between human beings, the Divine, and the experience of feeling called? In attempting to understand the God-world relationship, Bracken (2000), proposes there is a "common field of activity" (p. 5) that

God shares with us. Furthermore, there is also a "transmission of feeling" (p. 7) from God to us but because this transmission is only one among many received, it can easily be overlooked. I am inclined to agree with Bracken that there is something inherent in the listening. Through various individual practices, all three co-researchers spend time preparing themselves to listen in silence. Something—a voice, a primal impulse, a knowing—arises out of the silence. Are the co-researchers able to name the **source** of their knowing as a result of the inner work they do or does the knowing unfold and come into clearer focus as a result of living their call in the world? I cannot answer for them but I would suggest that it is both—one fuels the other in a co-creative partnership. The nature of this giving, receiving, and living process may speak to future researchers asking questions about the relational nature of living one's call.

The results of this study also draw attention to the connection with awakening to a call and personal well-being, which I suggest may be another topic for further inquiry. *If* there is a transcendent nature to a call, as revealed in this study, and *if* by responding to a call, that meaning is shared with others, what emerges? In looking at the data, the outcome is positive—one is left feeling passionate about something, joyful, grateful, energized, engrossed, and inspired. Wouldn't we all like to feel this way about life? It seems to me that the impact that these positive emotions and behaviors have on personal well-being is worth researching further in regard to meaning and purpose from both a psychological and theological perspective. After all, when we feel good about ourselves and full of life, our cup overflows and we have so much more to give others.

Areas of Potential Application

Calls have the capacity to imbue our lives with meaning. For that reason, I believe this research study has rich implications for anyone who is searching for something more in life. This study raises awareness of the transformative power that awakening to a call can have on an individual in all areas of a person's life—physically, emotionally, psychologically, and spiritually.

Furthermore, self-knowledge brings with it the freedom to explore new possibilities one might never have considered before, helping to facilitate change in the way one chooses to live one's life. For the therapist, there are implications for helping clients examine their personal values, beliefs, and actions to see whether or not their perceptions are holding them back or moving them forward. Helping clients to see themselves as so much more than they think they are and supporting them as they discover their potential, by trying out new ways of being in the world, is an important part of the counselling process. For some clients it might also mean exploring the ways in which the Divine might be at work in their lives and what meaning that might hold for them.

For me in particular, the knowledge I have gained from conducting this research study will further shape the lens through which I continue my professional life. I believe I now have deeper insight into the importance of helping clients discover an identity and self-worth that may or may not be revealed through their present life experiences. I am more aware of the importance of listening to clients in terms of the *totality* of who they

are—the face they present to the world and the latent potential that lies within them. I have a better understanding of the benefits of inviting them to delve deeper into their experiences in the hopes of uncovering or rediscovering what it is that makes them come alive. Although it is the client that is the agent of change, I can journey with them as they gain the courage and capacity to face the challenges that may arise as the process of awakening unfolds.

This study also raises important considerations for parents and educators in respect to encouraging children's interests and providing them with varied opportunities to experiment and explore a multitude of activities that encourage them to develop their own talents and skills. Children are far more open to the world around them; their curiosity can lead to new and exciting possibilities. As this study and my own case history have shown, the seeds of a calling are sometimes sown during childhood. Whether they show themselves early in life or take half a lifetime, I believe it is important to nurture each child's inherent uniqueness as best we can. Children are our hope for the future and the collective well-being of the planet.

A Personal Statement

The process of writing this thesis has had a profound impact on me in a variety of ways. First and foremost, similar to the other "signal moments" I referred to in the introduction, the thesis process became a series of signal moments for me. In the early stages, I was more concerned with "getting it right" than I was about what the life force within was asking of me. However, as the writing process unfolded, something unfolded

in me as well. There was a gradual shift in my intention—something more was at stake than my own self interests. I found myself *living* my research question. For instance, I gained a deeper understanding and greater appreciation for the complexities of callings and how the individual themes relate to one another in a myriad of ways. This research has confirmed my belief that life is not random—there is meaning in our lives and it is up to us to find that meaning, if meaning does not find us. I was inspired to look at my own life in a fresh new way as a result.

Meaning moments continued to unfold as I worked through the analysis process, clarified the results, and revisited the literature. I became critically aware of the importance of language—both that of the co-researchers as well as my own. In attempting to describe a particular experience or feeling, the co-researchers would sometimes search for alternate words to convey what they meant. Sometimes they would come up with a word and let it go at that; other times they would grow silent, leaving the sentence hanging. I can certainly relate to this. Throughout the writing process, I struggled with how to adequately portray the depth of meaning that was sometimes hidden beneath the words themselves. I confess it was not always easy. What this suggests to me is that there are aspects of awakening to a call to live one's purpose that transcend the ordinary. It is exceedingly difficult to capture that essence in words.

My passion for the research topic never waned in spite of numerous roadblocks, self-doubts, and impatience. I have said that in order to hear a call, one must be patient and learn to sit in silence, trusting that something is moving within, even though no

results are noticeable. I had to do that while writing this thesis. I am reminded of words from the poet Rainer Maria Rilke:

> Have patience with everything that remains unsolved in your heart. Try to love the *questions themselves*, like locked rooms and like books written in a foreign language. Do not look for the answers. They cannot now be given to you because you could not live them. It is a question of experiencing everything. At present you need to *live* the question. Perhaps you will gradually, without even noticing it, find yourself experiencing the answer, some distant day. (Rilke, trans., 2000, p. 35)

I know there are ideas forming around answers to some of the questions that have arisen for me from this research; I also know that I am not there yet. Hopefully, as Rilke says, one day I will live myself into the answers.

To conclude, it is my hope that the insights gained from this study will lead to a deeper and fuller understanding of the lived experience of awakening to a call to live one's purpose here on earth. For it is in loving what we do so much that we cannot imagine not doing it, that has the power to change everything—love of self, love of others, love of life, and **that** is worth waking up for!

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Appendix A

Recruitment Email

ST. STEPHEN'S COLLEGE

MASTER OF PSYCHOTHERAPY AND SPIRITUALITY

Hello _____,

My name is Heather Scott and I am a Masters student in the Master of Psychotherapy and Spirituality program at St. Stephen's College, Edmonton. I am contacting you because you may be eligible to participate in a research study I am conducting for my thesis. Your name was suggested to me by _____ as someone who might potentially be interested in my research topic.

I am seeking individuals who are living their lives in response to a personal calling. I will be conducting two interviews with each participant which should take approximately 2 to 3 hours in total. The time and place of these interviews will be arranged at your convenience. You will be asked to respond to questions designed to explore the question: *What is the experience of awakening to a call to live one's purpose?* With your permission, these interviews will be audio-recorded.

Participation is entirely voluntary. You may withdraw from this research study at any time. All information you provide will be kept anonymous and confidential. There is no compensation for participating in this study.

If you are interested in participating in this research study, please contact me and I will be happy to provide you with a letter of information and answer any questions you may have.

Thank you for your consideration,
Heather Scott

Appendix B

Letter of Information

ST. STEPHEN'S COLLEGE
MASTER OF PSYCHOTHERAPY AND SPIRITUALITY

RE: (**Living One's Purpose: A Phenomenological Study of Awakening to a Call**)

Dear *Potential Research Participant*:

You are being invited to participate in a qualitative research study conducted as a thesis project by Heather Scott, a Master of Psychotherapy and Spirituality candidate at St. Stephen's College, Edmonton, Alberta.

The aim of my thesis is to explore the question: **What is the experience of awakening to a call to live one's purpose?** I will be conducting two face-to-face, semi-structured interviews which will require approximately 2 to 3 hours of your time in total. These interviews will be audio-recorded and transcribed. During the first interview (lasting approximately 2 hours) you will be asked to respond to open-ended questions related to the research topic. Prior to the second interview (lasting approximately 1 hour) you will be given a summary of the first interview and asked to verify its accuracy and to add anything you may have missed that would describe your experience more fully. The time and place of the interviews will be arranged at your convenience.

I do not foresee any risks associated with this research study. As to possible benefits, it is hoped that this study will provide participants with an opportunity for reflection and articulation of what it means to respond to a call, as well as insight and a new understanding of the phenomenon. If you do become concerned in any way, I will provide contact information for my thesis supervisor and Program Chair at St. Stephen's College, as well as a list of supportive services that are available.

Your participation in this research study is strictly voluntary. You may decline to participate; you may withdraw at any time without consequence. Every effort will be made to ensure confidentiality. Neither your name nor identifying information will appear in any report of the study findings. Any quotations that are used will be attached to a pseudonym.

If you have any questions, I would be happy to answer them for you.

Thank you for your consideration,
Heather Scott

Appendix C

Letter of Consent

ST. STEPHEN'S COLLEGE
MASTER OF PSYCHOTHERAPY AND SPIRITUALITY

Dear Participant:
The purpose of this research study is to explore the question: **What is the experience of awakening to a call to live one's purpose?** The research is being carried out without deception by Heather Scott with the purpose of fulfilling the thesis requirements to complete the Master of Psychotherapy and Spirituality degree at St. Stephen's College, Edmonton, Alberta.

There will be two face-to-face, semi-structured interviews which will be audio-recorded and transcribed. The first interview should last approximately 2 hours during which time you will be asked to respond to open-ended questions related to the research topic. The second interview should last approximately 1 hour during which time you will be shown a summary of the first interview, incorporating any themes that arise. You will be given the opportunity to discuss its accuracy to be sure you have been understood correctly. You may also add any additional information you feel would more fully describe your experience.

In agreeing to participate in this study, you are indicating the following:

I have the right to confidentiality. A pseudonym will be used; neither my name nor identifying information will appear in any report of the study findings. Any quotations that appear in the final report will be attached to a pseudonym. Should the researcher decide to use the data for educational purposes in the future, for example in a presentation, workshop, or journal publication, the same ethical provisions will apply.

I have the right to decline to participate in this study, and to opt out at any time without consequence. All information (including the audio-tape) will be destroyed or returned to me upon request. None of the information that I provide will be included in the study.

I will receive a copy of the thesis upon completion of the research project if I wish.

Should I have any questions regarding the study I can contact:

- Heather Scott
- Dr. Colleen MacDougall (thesis supervisor)
- Dr. Margaret Clark (Program Chair at St. Stephen's College) by telephone at 780-439-7311

CONSENT

Having read this Letter of Consent and understood its contents, I agree to participate in this study.

_____	_____	_____
Participant's printed name	Participant's signature	Date

Appendix D

Interview Schedule

ST. STEPHEN'S COLLEGE

MASTER OF PSYCHOTHERAPY AND SPIRITUALITY

RE: (**Living One's Purpose: A Phenomenological Study of Awakening to a Call**)

Main research question: **What is the experience of awakening to a call to live one's purpose?**

Since I will be conducting semi-structured interviews, the following questions serve as a guide only, to expound on the main question. I may ask other questions during the course of the interview if I feel they would be helpful in tailoring the interview to the uniqueness of the interviewee.

1. How would you describe yourself?
    - What convictions, beliefs are important to you?
2. What draws/energizes you?
    - What feelings/behaviors/attitudes arise?
    - Are passions/talents/skills involved?
    - What are your earliest memories of this?
    - How does this affect your response to what is going on in your life?
3. What provides direction/purpose in your life?
    - What is your earliest memory of this direction/purpose taking shape within you? Were there other moments? If so, tell me about them.
    - What were you sensing when you became aware of these feelings?
    - Can you say something about the influence this direction/purpose has had in your life?

- What does this require from you?
- Do you sense this as a call? Explain.

4. What drew you to _____ (current occupation/interest/call)?
   - What influenced you?
   - What has helped you/hampered you in your _____ (current occupation, interest, call)?
5. Is there a spiritual component to your _____ (current occupation/interest/call)? If so, tell me more.
   - Have there been any times in your life that stand out as significant? If so, tell me about them.
6. When you are responding to whatever provides direction/purpose in your life, what is it like for you? Please describe in as much detail as possible.
   - What are you thinking, feeling, and doing?
   - Are there other people involved? If so, what would they notice about you?
   - Tell me about the things that are important to you about _____ (current occupation/interest/call).
7. Have there been any difficulties/challenges you have had to face? If so, explain.
   - If there have been difficulties/challenges, what resources do you call upon?
   - If there have been difficulties/challenges, what have you learned from them?
8. Have there been some things that have been easy? If so, explain.
9. Has _____ (current occupation/interest/call) influenced the way you experience self, others, world? Explain.
10. Is there anything else you would like to add that addresses the research question?

Appendix E

Confidentiality Agreement

ST. STEPHEN'S COLLEGE
MASTER OF PSYCHOTHERAPY AND SPIRITUALITY

RE: (**Living One's Purpose: A Phenomenological Study of Awakening to a Call**)

I agree to abide by the St. Stephen's College, Edmonton Ethical Conduct For Research Involving Humans (of which I have been given a copy.)

I agree to hold in strictest confidence the information contained in the audio-recordings of interviews given to me by Heather Scott to transcribe.

I agree to store the audio-recordings and related documents in a secure location while they are in my possession.

I agree to return all audio-recordings and related documents to Heather Scott once the transcription is complete and agree I will *not* make copies of such materials.

_____	_____	_____
Transcriptionist's printed name	Transcriptionist's signature	Date