

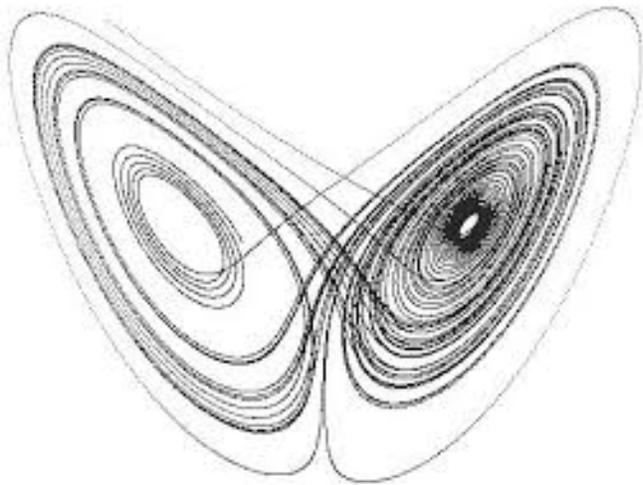
## Steve's Current Thinking on Spiritual Development

I could have arranged these segments in several different ways. You will need to read this as a whole to connect all the dots, I hope they fit and make sense, but then if they don't you can ask!!!

The process of spiritual development has been discussed by thousands of people, including the ones we have been studying. There is a common thread among these---the journey is more linear than not. There are stages and you move from one to the other until you reach perfection—which rarely if ever happens in this life.

This is not how I see reality. Watching people and myself as well as reading the biographies of many spiritually deep people, I see a journey of fits and starts, of 3 steps forward and 2 back, of glimpses of what can be and crashes into “what happened?”

Here is a diagram of how I see the spiritual life. It comes from the world of chaos theory and is called a Strange Attractor. There is something at the center attracting something (us) to it. We zero in and then spiral out, not going completely out of orbit and never fully connecting with the center—God.



Everyone's diagram is different. Some people's orbits are wide and stay spinning in an orbit outside the center—atheists. Others are tight and close to the center—saints. This journey weaves and bobs, it is never linear.

The journey to God is a journey of intimacy. As with humans, there is physical, emotional and spiritual intimacy. We need to work on all three in human relationships and with God. We physically feel the presence of God within us and around us in nature and in others. Our bodies literally tell us what is going on, what is God's will or not. Just as filling physical intimacy with a human means understanding where they are coming from, we are called to attune to what God is up to--God knows what we are up to. The peace that passes all understanding is both a physical and an emotional sensation.

Emotional intimacy with God acknowledges that God is with us in and through all things, in the darkness and in the light. We feel safe and secure, we know that even in the midst of chaos in the big picture, God wins. The level of trust is very deep.

Spiritually we long to spend time with God, a day without that is noticeable. We yearn to be both fed and challenged, as uncomfortable as that may be.

There are many levels of intimacy. No one starts a relationship of any kind with intimacy at a deep level, it builds over time and activity.

A life of deep spiritual intimacy is one where we are circling the strange attractor at a very close level and rarely stray far off.

The spiritual life is based on acts of willingness rather than willfulness. Sin is an act of willfulness. It says that I know better than God. It breaches intimacy and the relationship--- that breach may be a hairline fracture or one of multiple and permanent breaks. Free will necessitates willfulness. Fortunately for us, God's willingness allows for grace and redemption when we become willing to listen and to act.

Attachment theory has become one of the hallmarks of current psychotherapy. It speaks to the relation of the child (0-2 years of age) to their parent/guardian(s). We know that those who do not have secure attachments at that age significantly more often than not run into problems in their lives. Those who have a secure attachment may have problems, but their coping skills are radically better. So what do you get from a secure attachment and how does that relate to our attachment to God?

Safe Haven--- To have a safe haven means to know that I am loved and cared for—in spirituality it says, “I know God loves me unconditionally and accepts and loves me for who I am.” This does not mean I can simply stay where I am because God loves the core of us, not the sinful behaviors we might exhibit. We have a sense of trust in God, feel safe with God, enjoy being fully in the presence of God.

Safe Harbor---When we feel safe with God, we know we can venture out and explore and when we get scared or something happens, we have a harbor to return to that is safe, trustworthy and calm. Venturing out can mean many different things; trying a new ministry, exploring a different faith while maintaining the relationship with the God we know, venturing into other people's stormy seas, looking at our shadows and others.

Stress Tolerance--- Having a secure attachment means I can handle stressors of any kind, especially spiritual ones because I know God is walking with me.

Proximity Maintenance--- The need to have the one we are attached to present in some form, “nearby.” In earthly terms this means that the parent or guardian is available when needed and when they aren't, their “spirit” lives within to a degree that enables that person to get through things. On the spiritual plane it means we know that God is fully present to us, that we are the block if God is not felt. Those with secure attachment acknowledge this, those without it at times struggle with where God is. Yes, even people with secure attachments can have brief moments of feelings of abandonment—Jesus on the cross—but they are brief.

It needs to be noted that attachments can be created. Even on the earthly plane, if you were raised in an insecure attachment setting, you can build secure attachments to those around you. With God, life is a process of deepening the attachment to God. You can not know if you have a deep secure attachment

unless you are willing to push your spirituality, get out of your comfort zone and see if the harbor is still there, see if you can tolerate spiritual stress, and seek to discover when God feels close and when God feels distant.

#### Theology vs. Theophany—

Too many of us get stuck on theology, fitting all the pieces and questions of the puzzle together into a coherent whole. Other than in delusion it never works. The finite can never fully comprehend the infinite, period. While theology is fun and to some degree allows us to gather together the faith community, it is not spiritually as important as theophany—the manifestation and experience of God. The reality is that there is no human theology that will be completely right and to think that there isn't a "true" theology is crazy. The spiritual journey is much more about finding and being found by God than thinking accurately—and who makes the rules? We each need to find a theology in the moment that builds intimacy. Good, strong, secure relationships do not hide from the world, they are in the world as a relationship. True spiritual intimacy demands that we share that intimacy with others. A deepening faith finds God in more places and in more ways than before, it calls us to more adventure and to more purging of the ego that Jung and Underhill talk about.

#### Ego/Shadow

In order to find ourselves we must die to ourselves. Our egos need to be controlled. In order to do this we find out what fuels our egos currently and what we can do to rein that in. This is where the shadow often shows up. God gave us egos so they are crucial to life. A secure attachment in life breeds strong egos—not big egos, strong. A strong ego has a sense of perspective that understands its place in God's kingdom, has humility and breeds secure attachments in and with others. The shadow often wants us to obscure that sense and to lift ourselves up to a "higher" level, or squash us into shame. Both are not acceptable in secure attachment. We find these things by attuning to the theophanies in life. The Anglican Church has long said that scripture, reason, tradition, and experience are the hallmarks of discovering God and God's will for our lives. It should be noted that the person who came up with that, Richard Hooker, stated this could not be done in a void. To be part of a faith community was critical in each of those---no one is an island unto themselves.

#### Building Intimacy with God

So this brings us full circle back to Steve's book on the soul. I believe that the 5 main parts of the life of the soul are what we use to build intimacy. If you want to know more about each section, read the book, lol.

Transcendence—Meaning—Here we ask how God brings meaning to our lives? How does a spiritual life answer questions and what questions doesn't it answer—where is the mystery? There is an answer to every question. We might not find it in this life, but it exists. We have brains to use, not to lie idle. Yes, the brain can be a dangerous thing which is one of the reasons we have each other, a wonderful check and balance system. Meaningful lives create hope which is important in life as we all know. We find meaning by thinking, feeling, studying, worshipping, relating, having fun, serving, laughing, and doing rather than just being. For believers, ultimately all meaning comes through the vision of God.

Holiness—Self-Identity— How we see ourselves matters—immensely. Those with large degrees of shame (I am not worthy) or guilt struggle with a deep relationship with God. True holiness is found when

the ego is living as it was created to be. The persona is all but gone, the shadow is understood, valued, and controlled. Our persona is the mask we wear primarily to protect us and to fit in. If we are true to ourselves and to the image God has for us, we do not need protection, we have a safe harbor. Yes, our tone and affect may be different in different settings, but we are still true to who we are at the core. The holy person creates a sense of safety, trust, and secure attachments. While not devaluing the truth about themselves, they always point to one greater than themselves, God. Their identity is found in and through their relationship with God. Jesus and Paul were constantly pointing to God. It is always and interesting exercise to write your own obituary and then look at it through these lenses. It's not really fair because you have been influenced already by what you are reading, lol. Part of who we are is obviously created by culture. Yes, anatomically we are male and female with rare exceptions. But we all have the animus and the anima within—psychologically and spiritually. Avoiding them is to deny and avoid the reality you were created to be. Do you see yourself as holy and sacred? On a scale of 0-10 how much? What keeps you from going further? How do you think God sees you? Why?

Connectedness—Relationships—We are hard wired to be connected to other people and I believe to be connected to God. Those who are not connected at all to something greater than themselves are a small minority on planet earth and are missing something. Relationships are the checks and balance and the support system for our spiritual life. You learn something you don't know by connecting to others. You can learn a language or an instrument by watching a DVD or the internet, but you won't learn as well or as fast as when you are face to face with another person. Spirituality is no different. The human mind is so good at self delusion that we can think we can find God fully by ourselves, others just get in the way—Nonsense!! There is minimal spiritual growth outside the context of community. Even hermits met/meet in community from time to time. We become comfortable with our spirituality and lives, even when they are a mess, so we avoid others or don't share painful realities with them. This is not how God created the world. Prayer groups, healing groups, study groups, worshipping and socializing are all ways of connecting as long as discussing our journey—the ups and downs—are part of it. How often do you talk about your relationship with God at coffee hour or over coffee with a friend?

Imagination—Creativity—We are all called to be creative and to use the creative powers God has blessed us with. There are an infinite number of ways to be creative, just look at the universe. We can be creative in everything we do, every relationship, every job, every act of service—Everything. How is your creativity? What keeps you from being more creative? What is the fear? Many fear rejection—gets back to self-image, they are all interconnected and each influences the other. The Holy Spirit is the spirit of creativity, constantly trying to break into our lives to enliven our sense of imagination and creativity.

The Call—Purpose—All human beings are called—constantly. Most of us ignore the calls or don't do them very well at least some of the time. We create purposes on our own—I have no problem with that. But God also gives us purpose based on what needs doing in the moment or over a long period of time. I have been called to be a priest for my adult life. Even when working for the public schools I was a priest and that was part of my purpose. I can choose to not be or act like a priest, I can ignore the call of God, but that takes away from what makes my life meaningful, creative, connected, and having a strong self-image. On any given day, God has a purpose for me, I can choose to attune and live out that purpose or ignore it. Some of God's purposes are little things and many I can probably figure out on my own. Then there are others that I need to check in with the community about. "I feel God calling me to X, what do you think?" That is how we "test" people's call to priesthood. The process is way out of control, but it is what the process is supposed to be about. Purpose is what gives our life meaning and

meaning brings hope. Why are you here? What is God calling you to? What is holding you back? Many of God's purposes for us change. Some may be for a few minutes and others for a lifetime. It is important to note that just because something or someone gets in your way of living out what you are called to do does not mean God did not call you to do it. It can be frustrating trying to figure out that what I feel is God's will might not be because something got in the way.

Each of these areas when done well breeds spiritual intimacy with God. Spiritual intimacy empowers the gifts and talents we have when we use them for God's purposes.

This process is life long, goes in fits and spats, has moments of peak experiences and of desert experiences. God is present in them all. In the true spiritual life there is no coasting, you are either moving to God or away from God—constantly. Our souls are active entities that are eternal, the choice as to what we do with them is ours—why wait?