

STUDYING ABRAHAM'S JOURNEY

STUDYING ABRAHAM'S JOURNEY: AN INCLUSION OF AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL REFLECTION IN  
RELIGIOUS CURRICULUM

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## **Abstract**

The goal of this research was to seek and find connections between the Biblical patriarchs, autobiographical reflection, and spiritual transformation. The focus is first on the life of Abraham and how his journey characterizes, and can be characterized as, a pilgrimage, looking at several definitions and theories. The focus then shifts to how pilgrimage fits into the modern religious curriculum. Eschatological curriculum theory, autobiographical reflection, and transformative learning theory are all integrated to give a general picture of why pilgrimage can be included into the religious curriculum and be effective in the aid of spiritual formation and understanding. I have tried to not make any assumptions, but to only base my writing on what connections I have found from the literature I have read. (To note, the terms “character” and “characters” are used as a way to reference the real people who are part of these narratives being looked at, and are not referring to them in a fictional sense.)

## **Questions of Concern:**

1. Why is pilgrimage an important spiritual practice?
2. What were the spiritual transformations that took place as a result of Abraham's physical journey?
3. Is looking at autobiography a form of pilgrimage?
4. Does autobiographical reflection fit into new eschatological curriculum theory?
5. Can comparing our own autobiographical narratives to the stories of the Old Testament pilgrims successfully be added to religious curriculum?

## **Abraham the Pilgrim**

“Pilgrimages are an outward expression of inward journeys.”<sup>1</sup> If one agrees with this perspective, then the inward journey of many characters is apparent from their outward journey. One such character is the Biblical patriarch Abraham. Leaving everything and everyone he knew, Abraham followed God’s call to travel through the wilderness, and was subsequently blessed with the promise to be the “father of all nations”. Abraham’s life is unquestionably a pilgrimage, and the concepts of pilgrimage are modeled after his journey, but what are its essential characteristics? Is it defined by his outward journey, the physical act of wandering through unknown lands that God chose to lead him to? Or is it defined by his inward journey, the transformation from blind faith to one that is rooted in a greater understanding of God and his purpose for Abraham’s life? The answer lies in both in the inward and the outward: Abraham’s fleshly journey is reflected by his spiritual journey.

Nowhere in the Bible is Abraham expressly named as a pilgrim, but he has long been looked to as the archetype for pilgrimage.<sup>2</sup> Evidence of this is seen in the connection between events in Abraham’s life and in the characteristics of a pilgrimage that are customary today. In a theological sense, pilgrimage is a “response to God’s leading”.<sup>3</sup> If we classify pilgrimage in these terms, there is no doubt that Abraham’s journey is in fact a pilgrimage, initiated by his response to God’s call. Although pilgrimage is thought generally as the act of traveling to a designated holy site, Abraham was not traveling to a shrine or looking for any specific place to settle; he was simply following God’s lead and listening for where he was to go next. Looking more

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<sup>1</sup> Tony Jones, *The Sacred Way: Spiritual Practices for Everyday Life* (Zondervan: Grand Rapids, MI, 2005), 155.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. 151

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. 153

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closely at this, it is clear that Abraham's physical travels correlates to his spiritual growth, from his departure to his settlement in Canaan.

According to Phil Cousineau, a pilgrimage begins with a calling, which may stem from a loss of meaning in life, a want to atone for sins, or the urge to fulfill a vow. Abraham's call came straight from the mouth of God, and represents an enormous change in his life not only physically but spiritually. "The Lord said to Abram, 'Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you.'"<sup>4</sup> This is the beginning of Abraham's pilgrimage, his journey from the life he knew and the gods he worshipped to a walk of faith with one God, the Lord. Being born in Ur, a metropolis of Mesopotamia from 2100-2000 BC, Abraham likely grew up following a polytheistic religion, worshipping many deities.<sup>5</sup> Suddenly leaving in response to a God unknown to his culture would be a shock to his family and a momentous step in Abraham's spiritual transformation. Tad Szulc, on his journey through the sites of Abraham's life, writes that a "great monument brought me closer to understanding the magnitude of Abraham's break from those beliefs."<sup>6</sup> Szulc acknowledges that he did not really grasp that the beginning of Abraham's pilgrimage was so bizarre until he understood where he came from and how the concept of one God instead of many gods was turning his back completely on his earlier life and people.

The call of Abraham is not the only aspect of his journey that corresponds to accepted traits of pilgrimage. In his book *The Art of Pilgrimage*, Cousineau narrates his beliefs on how one should approach a pilgrim's journey. He states that "all sacred journeys are marked by ritual ceremony."<sup>7</sup> For those who long to make a journey of restitution, peace, or discovery, this piece

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<sup>4</sup> Genesis 12:1

<sup>5</sup> Tad Szulc. (2001). *ABRAHAM JOURNEY OF FAITH* (National Geographic, 2006): 90.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 90.

<sup>7</sup> Phil Cousineau, *The Art of Pilgrimage* (Conari Press: Berkeley, CA, 1998), 63.

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of advice on what the pilgrim should do to prepare for departure and how the significance of it should be marked is also modeled by Abraham. At the great tree of Moreh at Shechem in Canaan, between Bethel and Ai, and at the trees of Mamre in Hebron, he sets up altars to the Lord to observe the Lord's blessing and to call on his name.<sup>8</sup> Relating this to his spiritual journey, these altars are a result of Abraham's growing faith, as he recognizes God's hand in his life and gives thanks to him for it. "If God has blessed you, erect an altar and give the blessing back to God as a love-gift."<sup>9</sup>

Robert Brancatelli, a current professor of religious education at Ford University, has written on the subject of pilgrimage as it concerns ritual and rite of passage. His guidebook on how to use pilgrimage in catechetical youth ministry recognizes three steps that must take place in order for the pilgrimage to result in a newfound spiritual identity: separation, liminality, and reintegration. He maintains that pilgrimage can lead to a realization of one's identity and calling in life. With respect to the narrative of Abraham, it is found that his pilgrimage also is in line with Brancatelli's model. His separation is his decision to obey the Lord's instruction to leave his country and family, and has already been discussed as beginning with God's calling. "Personal acquaintance with God shows itself in separation, symbolized by Abraham's physical separation from his country and his kindred."<sup>10</sup>

The liminal period of his pilgrimage leads to the threshold of his spirituality, the sacrifice of his and results in his identity as the father of all nations. In Abraham's pilgrimage, it consists of the events that happen before he arrives, literally and figuratively, at the threshold of a spiritual breakthrough on Mount Moriah. Liminality can be described as the time when one is stuck in between two extremes, figuring out where to go next and seeking direction. Essentially,

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<sup>8</sup> Genesis 12:6-7; 13:1-4; and 13:18.

<sup>9</sup> Oswald Chambers, *Not Knowing Whither* (Fleming H Revell Co, 1934), 19.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 14.

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being in the liminal period is being in a transition state, one where there is an ambiguity and openness to what will happen next. In Abraham's case, it is when he has not yet fully trusted God's plan and guidance, but is nonetheless on the path that has been set for him. His time in Egypt (Genesis 12:10-20) embodies this definition. Abraham instructs his wife Sarah to tell the Egyptians that she is his sister, so that he will not be killed because of her beauty. Thus, she is taken into Pharaoh's harem. Szulc says that

Genesis offers no moral judgments on this peculiar turn of events...The New Jerome Biblical Commentary ... suggests that Abraham's deception calls into question his faith that God would protect him and fulfill the promise that, "To your seed I will give this land". The JPS Torah Commentary ... makes the point that Abraham would have erred if he had expected God to work a miracle to get him out of this fix. As it turned out, God did intervene.<sup>11</sup>

Abraham's distrust that God will take care of him shows that he is still in the liminal period of his journey, not yet fully transformed spiritually. This passage "presents Abraham as a man of unfaith. He is ready to secure his own survival because at this point he does not trust exclusively in the promise."<sup>12</sup> Other events that are placed in Abraham's liminal period are when he is promised a son through Sarah, his encounter with Abimelech, and his dealings with his nephew Lot<sup>13</sup>. In all of these instances, the purpose of Abraham's journey has either not been fulfilled or he still shows signs of his faith being not yet mature. Specifically, when the Lord comes to Abraham and tells him that Sarah will bear him a son (Genesis 15:1-6), he "protests, doubting that such a promise can be accomplished in the circumstances. Yahweh responds to the doubt

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<sup>11</sup> Tad Szulc, 90.

<sup>12</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982), 126.

<sup>13</sup> In *Abraham and Moriah – Journey to Fulfillment*, Bernard Och mentions that "Lot appears not as the rival but as the anti-type to promise fulfillment" (304). Taking this generally, Lot could perhaps be seen as the anti-pilgrim when compared to Abraham: he follows what appeals to him instead of what is right in God's eyes, and thus his character is in a way minimized. His story does not become important because it does not show the proper way to follow God. More on Lot could be discussed, but his life does not fit into the main topic and goal of this paper.

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with a double statement of assurance...Abraham accepts the promise.”<sup>14</sup> Abraham has not reached the point where he trusts the Lord without questioning his ways.

Abraham comes to the end of his liminal period when God commands him to sacrifice his son Isaac. His obedience is perhaps the biggest sign of how his journey has changed him spiritually:

The command to sacrifice Isaac is the final and ultimate trial of the man chosen to father a people and to be a blessing for all of mankind... Abraham's life experiences are way stations on a journey from Haran, the scene of chaos and confusion, to Moriah, the site of reconciliation and fulfillment.<sup>15</sup>

The last step of Abraham's pilgrimage is his reintegration, which in his case is a first integration into a new relationship with the Lord. This begins when he travels to Mount Moriah and God provides the sacrificial lamb, and consists of the rest of his life on Earth. His life is a fulfillment of his past, but also of his future and the future of the human race. Indeed, centuries later, Jesus incorporated Abraham into his teachings. However, Paul uses Abraham to an even greater extent:

Jesus mentions Abraham in the Gospels, but it was Paul who did the fine mortise work, citing the patriarch in his New Testament epistles more than any other figure except Christ. Perhaps the most strongly self-identifying Jew among the Apostles, Paul clearly felt an urgency to connect his new movement with the Jewish paterfamilias. He did so primarily through Abraham's original response to God's Call and through the old man's embattled faith, or "hope against hope," as Paul famously put it, that God would bring him a son. Such faith, Paul wrote, made Abraham "the father of all who believe."<sup>16</sup>

Since Abraham's journey can be looked to as a pilgrimage, it is clear that the current concepts of pilgrimage today still fit into the events in his life. More importantly, his outward journey is a reflection of his inward journey. In the next section, this concept will be reconciled with the

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<sup>14</sup> Walter Brueggemann, 140.

<sup>15</sup> Och, Bernard, (1989). Abraham and Moriah-A Journey to Fulfillment. *Judaism*, 38(3), 293.

<sup>16</sup> Van Biema, D., Moavevi, A., Mustafa, N., Rees, M., Hamad, J., Silver, E., & Jerusalem. (2002). *The Legacy of Abraham*. (Cover story) (*Time*, 160(14)): 64.

reconceptualization of religious eschatological curriculum, leading to the idea of how Abraham's pilgrimage can be incorporated into autobiographical study, a pilgrimage in itself.

### **Autobiographical Pilgrimage and Curriculum Theory**

Modern curriculum theory has recently been centering on the reconceptualization of eschatological curriculum. Eschatology concerns the future, but more specifically, what happens to the human soul in death. An observable concern that would go hand in hand with this is how religious curriculum can help lead students to spiritual awareness and help in the transition to adulthood. The transition to adulthood can also be found in the quest for vocation, which has its roots in autobiographical reflection and pilgrimage. The inclusion of pilgrimage in the theory of transformative learning that was developed by Mezirow can also mark this transition, and the embracement of the term currere as it pertains to curriculum falls under this theory as well.

To start, curriculum in general has been moving toward an emphasis on personal experiences and autobiographical text:

Curriculum development in the postmodern era will see the emergence of more media, cultural studies, reflective journals, portfolios, and autobiographical methodologies...we can no longer separate the context of historical events from the autobiographical experiences of teachers and students.<sup>17</sup>

One type of curriculum theory, called eschatological curriculum theory, is at its heart a theory that embraces the past and the future to impact the present. It has come into the curriculum discussion because of this shift in focus to autobiographical experiences.

The important themes emerging in contemporary curriculum discourses...recognize the urgent need for transformative processes that incorporate an

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<sup>17</sup> Patrick Slattery, *Curriculum Development in the Postmodern Era*, 71.

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understanding of the past and future as constitutive of present experience...these themes point toward the development of an eschatological curriculum theory.<sup>18</sup>

Despite this “recent” emergence, autobiographical text as curriculum has been a topic for almost 40 years. Scholars have researched autobiography through three veins, one of which is the exploration of concepts such as *currere*.<sup>19</sup> *Currere* is a root of the word curriculum, a verb that means “to run”, and was stressed by William Pinar in autobiographical curriculum theory.<sup>20</sup> It is central to the study of autobiographical text as curriculum because it emphasizes that learning is the act of running a race, which is the inward journey. As Tony Jones puts it, “this side of Eden, we’re all wandering, trying to find our way back to that perfect place where the relationship with God is perfectly intimate.”<sup>21</sup> If the purpose of the wandering is to grow spiritually, then to run the race of our life by examining it is the act of *currere*.

How can autobiographical reflection be included in religious curriculum? The first step would be to find a prompting for such an inward pilgrimage, or a model for what pilgrimage can look like in the life of another. “... [M]any young people today journey in the dark, as the young always have, and elders do them a disservice when [they] withhold the shadowy parts of [their] lives.”<sup>22</sup> This belief supports the judgment that Abraham and other Biblical patriarchs are ideal archetypes for pilgrimage. Their journeys can be studied and begin the process of self-reflection. Additionally, their stories do not include only the good and righteous parts of their lives, but they include hardships that they encountered and missteps they

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<sup>18</sup> Patrick Slattery, “Toward an Eschatological Curriculum.” In *Contemporary Curriculum Discourses: Twenty Years of JCT* by William F.Pinar.(New York: Lang Peter, Publishing Inc. 2004), 282.

<sup>19</sup> William F. Pinar et al, *Understanding Curriculum* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc, 1995), 515-16.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid. 516

<sup>21</sup> Tony Jones, *The Sacred Way: Spiritual Practices for Everyday Life* (Zondervan: Grand Rapids, MI, 2005), 153.

<sup>22</sup> Parker J. Palmer, 18-19.

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took. In this way, one is studying the pilgrimage of these characters and following the inherent instruction present “with regard to the life of faith”.<sup>23</sup>

Following this same stream, some scholars have proposed that Abraham’s life is a fulfillment of the past, the history of all mankind beginning with Adam. While this may be true, his life is also a fulfillment for the future of mankind as well. This is why when we study the lives of Abraham and his descendants we must integrate them into our own – their journeys give direction and inspire us to evaluate our pasts so that we engage in our own inward pilgrimage. This is also why the recent reconceptualization of eschatological curriculum theory, which concerns the future, involves looking in the past.

Abraham’s journey [comes] to an end. But the end is also a beginning – a new beginning for Abraham, his people and all of humanity. Abraham has restored to mankind its authentic being and the original possibilities which God granted to man and to the world at creation...The Abraham narrative presents a microcosmic description of the history and destiny of Israel and its future relationship with God.<sup>24</sup>

Thus, taking the stories of the Biblical patriarchs and evaluating them as they relate to the future can be incorporated into the religious eschatological curriculum and produce an effective way to begin spiritual transition.

However, sometimes studying the story of someone’s life does not give the whole picture. The stories in the Bible – those of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph – although omniscient in their point-of-view, do not look as deeply into their lives as it could. One knows what these characters are thinking in a limited sense, but unlike Paul or Timothy’s letters in the New Testament, not much is revealed about who the character is and why they react the way they do to their environment and relationships. In other words, the telling of the stories in the third person limits the knowledge one has compared to a story told in the first person. One must

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<sup>23</sup> Oswald Chambers, 19.

<sup>24</sup> Bernard Och, 309.

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accept their actions with no insight into perhaps what happens internally and their thought processes as they relate to their struggles, their pasts, and their futures. This is where the reconceptualization of eschatological curriculum provides a natural context for looking at the past in order to point toward a more hopeful vision of the future. This can happen when one takes the stories of the Biblical patriarchs into the context of one's own autobiographical narrative. Questions of how one would react in the character's situation can be answered from critical reflection of one's own life. In this way, studying the journey of Abraham, for example, can prompt a student to examine their own lives in order to answer questions regarding that of Abraham's emotional, spiritual, and mental processes. Oswald Chambers provides the reasoning that "The personal private life of faith of each one of us has its source and explanation in the life of the Father of the Faithful, Abraham. Abraham's call, with his limitations as well as his obedience, is full of minute instruction with regard to the life of faith."<sup>25</sup> If autobiographical reflection is included in the religious eschatological curriculum as part of the studying of Abraham and other biblical patriarchs, then it can help students find a vision of the future by looking into their pasts.

The taking a story of an Old Testament patriarch and putting it into the first-person perspective has been done with the story of Jacob: a better understanding of the journey of Jacob in the context of his social, religious, and cultural setting has been explored by author Frederick Buechner. In his novel Son of Laughter, he uses Jacob as a narrator. Jacob is looking back at his life and observes during his retelling that "by nature we are all wanderers".<sup>26</sup> Although he is referring primarily to the nomadic lifestyle of his people, this observance goes deeper to the fact that we are all searching for something, perhaps who we are or a deeper spiritual knowledge.

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<sup>25</sup> Oswald Chambers, 12.

<sup>26</sup> Frederick Buechner, *The Son of Laughter* (Harper: San Francisco, 1993), 61.

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However, Jacob is the narrator not just his own life, but for some of his grandfather Abraham, father Isaac, and son Joseph's lives too. By displaying his life in a context that placed him as a relevant and continuous figure in the Old Testament historical narrative, he then becomes so much more a part of the journey of those before him and after him, and it gives insight and ideas of how autobiography can be used as a pilgrimage itself. Buechner effectively took what little is known about Jacob from a biblical standpoint and by exploring the cultural, religious, and social norms of his times, was able to paint a picture of who Jacob was.

A similar perspective is learned by Cousineau. He describes his unexpected trip to a family reunion, how he prepared by discovering the roots of their Canadian homeland, and how on arrival being surrounded by 1500 of his relatives and being at the source of his history brought to him the sense of belonging on a continuum.<sup>27</sup> By looking into his past, not just personal but familial as well, he was able to affirm his place in his family's story and to include it into his own. This is in line with the view of Abraham and Jacob's stories being a part of not just their own histories, but the history of the peoples of faith.

A natural effect of Buechner and Cousineau's observations is that looking back into one's past is critical to the discovery of one's true self. If one examines the events and facts of one's life, then it can lead to the knowledge of a true calling. Parker J. Palmer makes the assessment that

From the beginning, our lives lay down clues to selfhood and vocation ... trying to interpret them is profoundly worthwhile – especially when we are in our twenties or thirties or forties, feeling profoundly lost, having wandered, or been dragged, far away from our birthright gifts .<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Phil Cousineau, *The Art of Pilgrimage*, 60.

<sup>28</sup> Parker J. Palmer, *Let Your Life Speak* (Jossey-Bass: San Francisco, 2000), 15.

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The interpretation of our past can begin the transition to adulthood and can continue on through it. Alone, this is evidence enough that autobiographical reflection is a form of pilgrimage – examining one's life reveals clues about who one is and what one can change, which has its essence in spiritual transformation. Furthermore, Palmer supports this idea with his claim that “[m]ost of us arrive at a sense of self and vocation only after a long journey through alien lands...akin to the ancient tradition of pilgrimage – ‘a transformative journey to a sacred center’ full of hardships, darkness, and peril.”<sup>29</sup>

Overall, what better way is there to learn how our future can be than looking at our past? If we ruminate on who we were when we were younger, our “childhood memories... [will] help tell us who we are or who we will become if we are unfolding spiritually.”<sup>30</sup> Usually this search for identity begins when one is transitioning from youth to adulthood. Taking this into consideration, adult learning theory will be looked at next as it relates to spiritual transformation and autobiographical text.

### **Transformative Learning Theory**

Specific types of learning have been identified that can only happen after or during the maturation from youth to adult. One type is called transformative learning and was first conceived by Jack Mezirow in 1975. Mezirow conducted a study on college students that led to the development of a new theory on the process of personal perspective transformation.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Parker J. Palmer, 17-18.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, 50-51.

<sup>31</sup> Patricia Cranton, *Understanding and Promoting Transformative Learning* (Jossey-Bass: San Francisco, 2006), 20.

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Mezirow named this new theory transformative (or transformational) learning theory and specified ten phases that construct the basis for the process:

1. The experience of a disorienting dilemma, such as a loss of a job or a loved one, a significant failure, or simply the loss of meaning in life.
2. The beginning of self-examination.
3. The conducting of a critical assessment of internalized assumptions and feeling a sense of alienation from traditional social expectations.
4. Relating discontent to the similar experiences of others.
5. Exploring options for new ways of acting.
6. Building competence and self-confidence in new roles.
7. Planning a course of action.
8. Acquiring the knowledge and skills for implementing a new course of action.
9. Trying out new roles and assessing them.
10. Reintegrating into society with the new perspective.<sup>32</sup>

The overall picture of transformative learning is that it "...is defined as a process by which previously uncritically assimilated assumptions, beliefs, values, and perspectives are questioned and thereby become more open, permeable, and better justified."<sup>33</sup> The notion that transformative learning is a form of adult learning means that it can serve as an indicator of the transition into adulthood, and the phases that construct the theory support the idea that pilgrimage, specifically through autobiographical reflection, is a form of transformative learning

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<sup>32</sup> Patricia Cranton, 20.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, vi.

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that can aid in spiritual transformation. It is also important to note that a trend in adult learning literature has been the exploration of the spiritual aspects of transformative learning.<sup>34</sup> This means that the idea that spiritual transformation is a form of transformative learning is relevant to where the discussions on this topic are headed.

If transformative learning theory is looked at with regards to autobiographical reflection as a form of pilgrimage, it becomes clear that it fits into the phases that have been specified. A quick outline of the ten phases mentioned emphasizes that transformative learning begins with a disorienting dilemma, which leads to critical self-examination and reflection, and ends with the reentering into society with the new perspective that has been formed. The first step in the process, an experience that changes one's life drastically, can begin the autobiographical journey. Patricia Cranton summarizes that

[t]hroughout their lifetime, people make meaning out of their experiences...People do not stop to question everything that happens to them or everything they see and hear...[they] have a set of expectations about the world that are based on formative childhood experiences...When something unexpected happens...the choices are to reject the unexpected or to question the expectation. When people critically examine their habitual expectations, revise them, and act on the revised point of view, transformative learning occurs.<sup>35</sup>

The "habitual expectations" that one revises in the transformative learning process have been shaped by one's past. Therefore, the examination of one's past is crucial to transformative learning and means that autobiographical reflection can result in transformative learning. This examination may result in a questioning of one's previous assumptions and beliefs, but ends with an adult perspective.

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<sup>34</sup> Baumgartner, Lisa M., Rosemary S. Carafella, and Sharan B. Merriam. *Learning in Adulthood: a Comprehensive Guide* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass), 2007.

<sup>35</sup> Patricia Cranton, 19.

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Summarily, “transformational learning has to do with making meaning out of experiences and questioning assumptions based on prior experiences.”<sup>36</sup> A brief example will put this into the context of the transition from childhood to adulthood. Say that someone has been a Christian from a very young age, mostly due to the influence of their parents, grandparents, and other adults in their life. When they are a child, they usually do not question why they believe in God and go to church. However, as they get older, perhaps starting in middle school and high school, they encounter other influences that may cause them to question their beliefs. If they get over those first hurdles, they may still encounter more doubts as they get older. To overcome these doubts, they may examine their childhood selves and determine why they believed what they believed and form a new perspective on their spirituality. This perspective can be the beginning of their life as an adult and be a beacon for their future. The psychocritical lense of transformative learning holds that the “process of using a prior interpretation to construe a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of one’s experience in order to guide future action.”<sup>37</sup> Additionally, Marcia Mentkowski writes in *Learning that Lasts* that “self-reflection involves distinctive affective processes and necessarily views the past but also envisions a future self.”<sup>38</sup> Thus, the learner becomes engaged in a narrative or storytelling mode of making meaning. This is the autobiographical text that becomes central to transformative learning. *The Sacred Journey*, *Now and Then*, and *Secrets in the Dark*, all by Frederick Buechner make this evident. He directly says that he wanted to find theological truth as he described his life, that he was “determined to try to describe [his] own life as evocatively and candidly as I could, in the hope that such glimmers of theological truth as I believed I had glimpsed.”<sup>39</sup> So it could be said that

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<sup>36</sup> Patricia Cranton, 8.

<sup>37</sup> Lisa M. Baumgartner et al., *Learning in Adulthood: a Comprehensive Guide*, 132.

<sup>38</sup> Marcia Mentkowski, *Learning That Lasts* (Jossey-Bass: San Francisco, 2000), 186.

<sup>39</sup> Frederick Buechner, *The Sacred Journey* (Harper and Row: San Francisco), 1982.

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the process he underwent in writing these novels caused him to experience transformational learning. Of course, Buechner was not a child when he wrote these books, which is indicative that transformative learning is not just a transition state of learning but can be indicative of a spiritual pilgrimage at any age.

Generally, it has been established that autobiographical reflection is a form of pilgrimage. One way that this pilgrimage can begin progression is through the study of the life and pilgrimage of Abraham. Looking into the past is also a crucial part of the transformational learning process, which is a gateway into adulthood. In all, the transformative learning process can occur during a pilgrimage that is undertaken through the study of one's autobiographical text.

### **Conclusion**

As stated, the primary aim of this research was to seek and find connections between the Biblical patriarchs, autobiographical reflection, and spiritual transformation. This was done by focusing on three interrelated topics. The life of Abraham was first examined and the aspects of pilgrimage were associated with his journey. Religious curriculum, (specifically eschatological curriculum), was then discussed in relation with autobiographical text as a method of pilgrimage. Autobiographical pilgrimage was then looked at as a transformative learning process that can achieve spiritual transformation. An appropriate thought to end with comes from a passage from Buechner's autobiographical novel *The Sacred Journey*:

What each of them [specific events in a whole lifetime] might be thought to mean separately is less important than what they all mean together. At the very least they mean this: they mean listen. Listen. Your life is happening ... a journey, years long, has brought each of you through thick and thin to this moment in time as mine has also

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brought me. Think back on that journey...the question is not whether the things that happen to you are chance things because, of course, they are both at once. There is no chance thing through which God cannot speak...We cannot live our lives constantly looking back...but to live without listening at all is to live deaf to the fullness of the music. He says he is with us on our journeys. Listen for him.<sup>40</sup>

What better way to listen for God than to first listen to him in the life of Abraham, the original pilgrim? It can lead to a greater purpose of examining our own lives and setting off on our own autobiographical pilgrimage. One does not have to travel far. "If the treasure – the truth of our life – is so close at hand, why is it so difficult for us to wake up, rub our eyes, and reach out to find what is within arm's reach?"<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Frederick Buechner, *The Sacred Journey*, 77-78.

<sup>41</sup> Phil Cousineau, *The Art of Pilgrimage*, 34.

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