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Tyndale University College & Seminary

Developing Christlike Disciples
with the Fourfold Spiritual Journey Model
at Westwood Alliance Church

A Research Portfolio
submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Ministry
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by

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ABSTRACT

In this research portfolio, the author explores spiritual formation as a deeper life journey to imitate Jesus Christ. The key question the research addressed is how Jesus' followers in Westwood Alliance Church (hereafter called WAC) can walk into a deeper life journey with Jesus Christ. Four aspects of Jesus' life on earth have been identified for the sake of living out the life modelled by Jesus Christ (Discipline, Surrender, Testimony, and Community). The author examined the question through four separate yet related dimensions: (i) the author's spiritual autobiography into the Life of Discipline, in which the author confirmed his vocational calling from God; (ii) the process of recovering from grief into the Life of Surrender, in which the author realized the valuable transformation in his life after his wife's passing; (iii) the Fourfold Spiritual Journey model into the Life of Testimony, in which the author tried to formulate a deeper life practice in WAC; (iv) and the field research project into the Life of Community, in which the author practised early morning prayer with a small group of people. The conclusion is that walking a spiritual journey with Jesus Christ in WAC is practical and achievable through practising spiritual disciplines to achieve the awareness of God's presence in one's daily life, abiding in Christ to achieve a lifestyle of surrender, sharing one's testimony to equip other disciples, and reaching out the community of faith to serve one another.

DEDICATION

This research portfolio is dedicated to my beloved wife Grace: for your steadfast love and support on earth and in heaven. I would not even have begun this journey without your warm encouragement. Since you went to be with the Lord before I finished this work, my work in the last year has seemed much harder and more overwhelming. Thank God for His mercy, that I was able to accomplish it eventually. Thank God that you are always a blessing to me.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CCM – Chinese Christian Mission
C&MA – Christian and Missionary Alliance
EE III – Evangelism Explosion III
FLC – Fraser Lands Church
FSJ – Fourfold Spiritual Journey
HCAC – Halifax Chinese Alliance Church
NCCF – Newcastle Chinese Christian Fellowship
NKJV – New King James Version
WAC – Westwood Alliance Church
VCAC – Vancouver Chinese Alliance Church

All Scriptures are quoted from the New International Version (NIV) unless specified.

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

As an Alliance pastor, I feel committed to demonstrate a commitment and lifestyle that models the life of Christ according to the Christlikeness principle (The Christian and Missionary Alliance in Canada 2012, 58). Before modeling the life of Christ, I must first be united with Christ through the Holy Spirit, resulting in a new identity in Christ. In the evangelical tradition, the term union or united with Christ is used with both the definition of salvation and sanctification.

According to the Christian and Missionary Alliance (C&MA) Statement of Faith, believers are united with Christ. “Salvation has been provided only through Jesus Christ. Those who repent and believe in him are united with Christ through the Holy Spirit and are thereby regenerated (born again), justified, sanctified and granted the gift of eternal life as adopted children of God” (The Christian and Missionary Alliance in Canada 2012, 9). Those who are united with Christ enjoy a new life. “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come” (2 Cor 5:17). The new life starts after responding to Jesus’ calling.

Jesus also invites His disciples to enjoy the journey of a new life. A new life is nurtured in the intimate relationship with Jesus Christ. Believers are members of the universal Church through identification with Christ directly and through faith. Jesus Christ is described as the head of the body of Christ, which is the Church or

family of God, while the parts of the body are described as the Church members (Eph 1:22-23). “God’s legal act of adopting into the family of God results in a new identity, in an eschatologically conditioned way. Thus, when we are given an identity in Christ, we are called to live into it” (Billings 2011, 19). The Christian who has an intimate relationship with the Father has his or her identity rooted in Christ. The adoption by the Holy Spirit into the new life in Christ results from the process of salvation.

The intimate relationship with the Father is guaranteed, nurtured, and consummated by the Holy Spirit. The lifelong process of building an intimate relationship with the Father is named sanctification in Alliance terminology. Sanctification is the sovereign act of God so that Christians are being separated from sin and the world. They are fully dedicated to God and receive power for holy living and sacrificial and effective service toward the completion of Christ’s commission. The Christian, as a follower of Jesus Christ, walks a deepening spiritual life in Christ all the time.

In order to live an intimate life with Christ, the Fourfold Spiritual Journey (FSJ) model was developed during the second year of my Doctor of Ministry (hereafter called DMin) program. When an intimate life with Christ is viewed as a spiritual journey, “the way to spiritual wholeness is seen to lie in an increasingly faithful response to the One whose purpose shapes our path, whose grace redeems our detours, whose power liberates us from crippling bondages of the prior journey and whose transforming presence meets us at each turn in the road” (Mulholland 1993, 36). The goal of the spiritual journey is to bring Christians

toward Christlikeness or wholeness in Christ. There are two reasons for using the term *fourfold*. First, it is a familiar term to Alliance people. Second, four dimensions of spiritual journey in Jesus' life were identified, and every dimension can lead to the formation of Christlikeness.

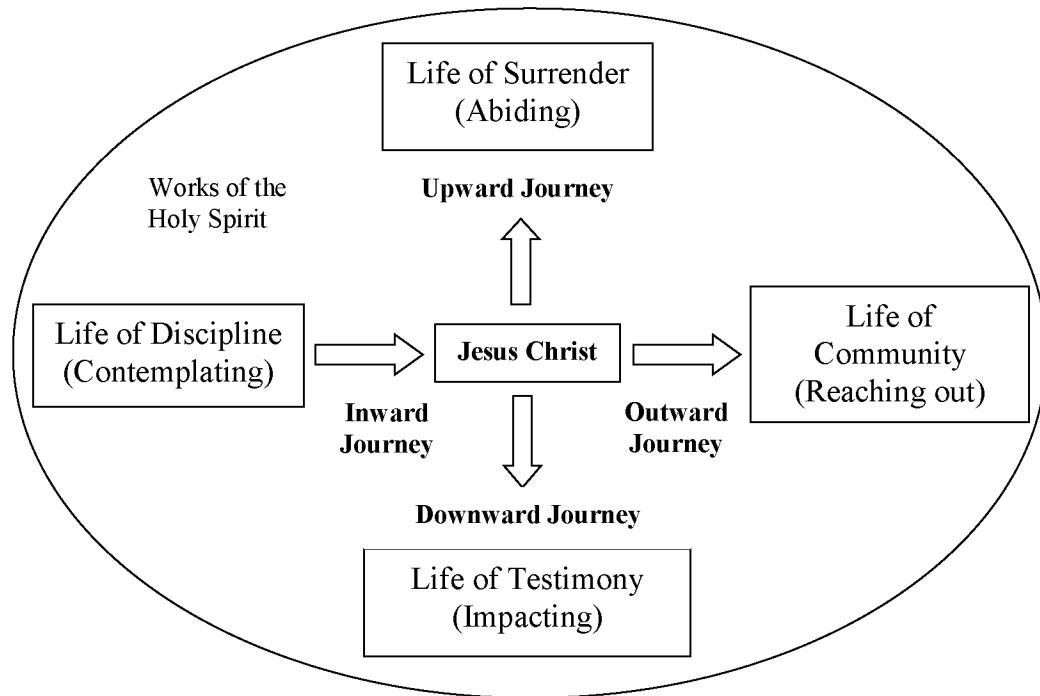


Figure 1: The Fourfold Spiritual Journey Model

The global theme of this research portfolio is based on this developed spiritual formation model. With this FSJ model, Jesus Christ is the centre of the model because those aspects of spiritual journey (inward, upward, downward, and outward) are also revealed in Jesus' life as recorded in the four Gospels. As a committed Jesus follower, I try to walk a deeper life journey like Jesus Christ did. I have researched these four aspects of the spiritual journey in my life. This research portfolio explores how I have been spiritually transformed during the journey. This chapter is an introduction to this research portfolio. The following

four chapters describe each aspect of my spiritual journey in detail. Chapter II describes my Life of Discipline. Chapter III describes my Life of Surrender. Chapter IV describes my Life of Testimony (details of FSJ model). Chapter V describes my Life of Community. The overall conclusion of my deeper life journey will be given in the Chapter VI.

The Deeper Life

Many Christians throughout church history have longed for a deeper life. “The deeper life movement (also called the Keswick movement and the higher or victorious life movement) emphasized our need for full identity in Christ, contact with the Holy Spirit at the depths of the human spirit, the potential for significant transformation in this life” (Howard 2008, 290). Christian transformation is about the changes that take place when a Christian would like to live a deeper life with God through Christ.

A. W. Tozer was a C&MA pastor, a Bible teacher, a preacher, a modern-day prophet, and the Alliance Weekly magazine editor for years. His sermons and writings about Christian living have inspired many people in the past. One of my goals as an Alliance pastor is to help my congregation to live a deeper life inspired by the legacy of A. W. Tozer. What is *deeper life* according to Tozer? “What the deeper life advocates are telling us is that we should press on to enjoy in personal inward experience the exalted privileges that are ours in Christ Jesus; that we should insist upon tasting the sweetness of internal worship in Spirit as well as in truth” (Tozer 2014, 168). Tozer confirms that a deeper life is a sweet and an internal experience in Christ through worshipping “the Father in Spirit and

in truth” (Jn 4:23). Deeper life is moving towards a deeper experience with Christ our Lord or a deeper union with Christ. “Union with Christ is a biblical, catholic, and reformational theme that has astonishing implications for our identity. It impacts the way we conceive of our identity as ones who belong to Christ” (Billings 2011, 173-174). So, to achieve this deeper life experience, we must have our identity rooted in Jesus Christ.

Tozer was an example of living a deeper life. He had a heart that sought God from his conversion. A small, unused space behind the furnace was the secret prayer corner of his home (Snyder 2009, 43). He spent time alone with God, wrestling with God in prayers. Tozer was a man of prayer. His inspiring sermons, devotional writings, and faithful service were the result of the fervent prayers. He enjoyed solitude and silence with God. He engaged in frequent reflection and meditation on the Word of God. “This devotional mindset was key, according to Dr. Tozer, to understanding and knowing God in increasing degrees of intimacy” (Snyder 2009, 16). Tozer (1978a, 112-114) found seven marks of the spiritual believer. First is the desire to be holy rather than happy. Second is to see the honour of God advanced through a person’s life even it means that he himself or she herself must suffer temporary dishonour or loss. Third is to carry Christ’s cross. Fourth is to see everything from God’s viewpoint. Fifth is to die right rather than to live wrong. Sixth is to see others advance at one’s own expense. Seventh is to be useful rather than famous and to serve rather than be served. According to Tozer, these seven marks reveal that the spiritual believer possesses Christlike characteristics.

Some people might say that Tozer was a mystic. Mysticism may refer to secret religious experience and rituals to many people. The definition of Christian mysticism has been narrowed in the last century. “The principal characteristic of such mysticism is that it involves a union with God in Christ, a pervasive awareness of the presence of God” (Harris 1992, 7). Harris observed the Christian mysticism of Tozer in his book *The Mystic Spirituality of A.W. Tozer*. Christian mysticism is about the longing of the soul for God. A mystic is not a person who practises unusual forms of prayer but a person whose life has a great desire for God. Tozer has shown his longing for God in the book of *The Pursuit of God*. God is spirit (Jn 4:24) and is present everywhere (Ps 139:7). “The world is spiritual: it originated in spirit, flows out of spirit, is spiritual in its essence, and is meaningless apart from the Spirit that inhabits it” (Tozer 1961, 81). God is everywhere; humans are invited to become aware of and respond to God’s omnipresence. One does not have to practise mystical rituals to experience God because Tozer (1948, 65) argues that it is God who seeks us: “Our pursuit of God is successful just because He is forever seeking to manifest Himself to us.” God is near and present to us, nearer than what we can often recognize. “It is an increasing degree of awareness that we pray, for a more perfect consciousness of the divine Presence. We need never shout across the spaces to an absent God. He is nearer than our own soul, closer than our most secret thoughts” (Tozer 1948, 66). According to Tozer, the term mysticism simply means “the practice of the presence of God” (Snyder 2009, 155), that the heart can commune with God directly, moment by moment, without the aid of outward ritual. According to

Tozer, this awareness of God and deep intimacy with the Spirit revealed a deeper life of spirituality than many Christians experience.

Evan Howard is a noted authority on Christian spiritual formation within evangelical circles. According to Howard (2008, 236), the span of Christian transformation has four “moments of salvation;” they are historical salvation, initial salvation, ongoing salvation, and final salvation. Historical salvation is about the finished work of Christ. Initial salvation is the life changing moment when the believer makes the decision to accept Christ. Ongoing salvation is the ongoing process through which the believer grows to be Christlike. Final salvation is the work of the Spirit, who is the guarantee of the final fulfillment of the Divine-human relationship. In Tozer’s belief, both initial and ongoing salvation are important and essential to spiritual maturity. The term *Fourfold Gospel* describes the historic emphasis of the C&MA on the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus is our Saviour, our Sanctifier, our Healer, and our Coming King (The C&MA in Canada 2012, 26). Christ saved us and continues to sanctify us in the journey of Christlikeness. The two images of Christ, the Saviour and the Sanctifier, put a clear focus on both initial salvation and ongoing salvation.

The Christian’s relationship with God may be stagnant at times. Many Christians get stuck in the stage of initial salvation (one of the four moments of salvation) for years. Christians may have developed some religious habits which have made them look religious when they are not really Christlike. For instance, some may attend Sunday worship and serve in different ministries regularly without having a close relationship with Christ. “The life died out of the habit

long ago, but the habit itself persisted in the form of a meaningless mumble” (Snyder 2009, 128). A deeper life encourages the development of ongoing salvation and prevents stagnation by promoting a more thorough understanding of the gospel, a passion for the mission of Christ, and sincere love of the fellowship. It produces a mature Christian life during the period of ongoing salvation. “In the depth reception of the gospel, awareness of God’s holiness or love, comprehension of human dignity or sinfulness, understanding of the salvation brought to us through Christ, or other themes of the faith are internalized in depth to some degree” (Howard 2008, 261). Bishop Theophan (1815-1894) shares his spiritual experience in the book *The Path of Salvation*. Theophan emphasizes the internal discipline more than the external discipline. It is obvious that only the internal should predominate since external behaviours reflect the inner status of human beings. “Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life” (Prv 4:23). All the activity of self-opposition and self-forcing is the ascetic approach of from the inside out, not only providing an opportunity for God to transform, but also pulling “the ascetically labouring spirit towards God” (Theophan 2006, 310). For all Christians, it is important to focus on ongoing salvation and continual development of internal discipline to build a stronger relationship with God, and the Christlike behaviours will naturally evolve as by-products.

Both Howard and Tozer expected Christians to progress from initial salvation and used the term “revival” to describe the renewal of Christian spirituality. Revival is a season in which a “dead” church comes alive and exhibits

growth, excitement, and movement (Howard 2008, 406). “Unless praying men [and women] have the insight and faith to amend their whole way of life to conform to the New Testament pattern there can be no true revival” (Tozer 2014, 85). Tozer realized the degeneration of Christian life in spirituality. Christians need to repent from their attempts to achieve revival through their own efforts and invite the Holy Spirit to bring the transformation. A deeper life is about the revitalization of the relationship between Christians (both as individuals and as a community of faith) and God. “Renewal is God entering into human experience once again, reopening our hearts, reconfiguring our minds, reintegrating our lives, reconciling our relationships” (Howard 2008, 407). I believe that having a deeper life represents the renewal of Christian spirituality. The overall Church revival relies on individual spirituality as Christians respond to God’s initiative and surrender to the work of the Holy Spirit, grounding this spirituality in the greater understanding of our identity in Christ.

Spiritual Formation

According to my understanding, the deeper life experience is just another term for spiritual formation. The apostle Paul encouraged the Church of Corinth to grow into Christlikeness: “And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit” (2 Cor 3:18). The word *transformed* (Greek: μεταμορφώω) is in the present tense and means changing into a form of Christlikeness from the inside out. The verse is a passive voice which means the power of transformation is an external source. The process of growing

into Christlikeness is spiritual formation. The process is spiritual because it describes the maturing relationship between the individual believer and God and it is the work of the Holy Spirit. “For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son” (Rom 8:29). It is a gradual change that involves an ongoing transformation of an individual believer into a Jesus Christ-like being. “Formation is simply drawing on the resources the Spirit provides because he has invaded our space and made it holy for God” (Pettit 2008, 108). Spiritual formation means that God is at work, moulding us into the likeness of Christ so that we can have a deeper fellowship with him and reflect the beauty of Jesus Christ. “The process of spiritual formation (the believer becoming more like Christ) is a mysterious outworking of both God's initiative and involvement over time and a concerted response of action plan by the individual believer” (Pettit 2008, 23). Although the Spirit is the agent of transformation, the individual believer who pursues formation as a key purpose in life must have an open and responsive heart.

The ultimate goal of spiritual formation for Christians is to be Christlike, which is the same goal as deeper life. According to Howard (2018, 14), “the purpose of Christian spiritual formation is relationship and likeness to the person of Christ, the conformity of our life as communities and individuals to the wonderful life and message of Christ.” The Christian’s life should be fluid or not yet finished until the soul leaves the body. God expects that the Christian will continue to grow and develop so that he or she will change and be fashioned as a Christian in maturity and Christlikeness (Tozer 1978b, 137).

Spiritual formation is a process leading the Christian to become more Christlike through different means like the Holy Spirit, disciplines, community, and trials. The Holy Spirit is the first means of spiritual formation. Tozer (1950, 91) believed in the power of the Holy Spirit: “There precisely is the wonder of the Spirit’s work in Church and in the hearts of Christians, His sure ability to make spiritual things real to the soul.” Every born-again Christian can be empowered by the Holy Spirit. The issue is how to be filled with the Holy Spirit. Scripture suggests worshipping the Lord. “Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Eph 5:19-20). Being filled with the Holy Spirit is an ordinary experience of the Christian life. Christians are controlled by the Holy Spirit and sometimes they do show extraordinary manifestations of the Holy Spirit like speaking in tongues, prophesying, performing miracles, etc. Christians can participate in the process of spiritual formation simply by surrendering our body to Him (Rom 12:1-2), asking Him for spiritual formation (Lk 11:9-13), and obeying Him (Acts 5:32). Human cooperation is essential because it makes the filling of the Holy Spirit feasible. It is a tragedy of the church if the members of the church operate largely through the inborn gifts of nature but neglect the true gifts and graces of the Holy Spirit. Only in the Spirit can the church become conformed to the image of Jesus Christ.

The second means of spiritual formation is through spiritual disciplines. Spiritual disciplines are the ways that we live out our identity in Christ. They are responses to God’s work and avenues for us to experience our identity in Christ.

Spiritual disciplines can be described as those behaviours that enable us to become more spiritually mature. Why do we need spiritual disciplines if the Holy Spirit is working within us? The old self is always the inborn barrier to any spiritual maturity. The works of the Holy Spirit are ignored. The Christian requires time to lay aside the old self, which is the former manner of life, and put on the new self, which is created in righteousness and holiness of the truth (Eph 4:22-24). Spiritual disciplines equip the Christian to say “no” to the old self. Spiritual disciplines help expose the Christian to the Divine powers which can make the transformation irrevocable.

There are many methods of disciplining oneself. The Bible reveals some fundamental disciplines like prayer (2 Thes 5:16-18), daily meditation on Scripture (Ps 1:2), and solitude and silence (Mt 14:23, Lk 5:16, 6:12). Prayer is a spiritual communication with God through means of thanksgiving, adoration, supplication, petition, and confession. Meditation on the scriptures enriches the knowledge of God since the Bible itself is a revelation of God. Christian meditation is different from other practices of meditation, as it has to be guided by the Holy Spirit. “The need for solitude and quietness was never greater than it is today. Stay in the secret place till the surrounding noises begin to fade out of your heart and a sense of God’s presence envelops you” (Tozer 1978a, 151). It takes time for spiritual fruits to be harvested through spiritual disciplines. The fruit of the Spirit is “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control” (Gal 5:22-23). Many believers have experienced the total renewal of the whole person, which may include differences in thoughts,

feelings, and characters that may be slower to be evident in our outward behaviour. Many believers, including Tozer, showed the wonderful fruits of spiritual discipline. Many believers, including myself, are inspired by Tozer's training to be godly.

The third means of spiritual formation is community. The church is a community of faith. It is not just a religious organization. "Any assembly of saints must continue in the study of the Bible to determine what the Holy Spirit wants to do in the life of the church and how the Spirit will provide the power and special abilities to glorify Jesus Christ" (Tozer 1978b, 16). Tozer called for a spiritual revival so that the community of faith would resume the responsibilities and every obligation of the apostolic church. "Churches and societies founded by saintly men [and women] with courage, faith and sanctified imagination appear unable to propagate themselves on the same spiritual level beyond one or two generations" (Tozer 1978a, 69). Over time, as a result of the influence of worldly values, the community of faith often lessens in spiritual fervour and begins to evaluate itself through measurable standards such as performance. The community of faith is no longer a holy group, nurturing the spiritual life and building the relationship with God because the focus has been shifted to be program oriented in order to increase the attendance. Many Christians start seeking spirituality outside of church, and many ugly alternatives like Christian yoga and the New Age movement have been employed. What a shame to the Church! However, the community of faith can be renewed to be a place of Christian spiritual formation.

Spiritual formation is not only an inward journey into the deeper private

self but also an outward journey into the public community. Spiritual formation seems to be merely a personal process, but it is not. “Spiritual formation is far from a private exercise between God and myself as an individual believer. Though He does the work in me, it is never just for my own benefit. God renews us, so that we can be ambassadors of renewal for others” (Pettit 2008, 115). The purpose of the private exercise is to get Christians equipped as Christ’s witnesses to the community. Spiritual formation consists of at least two orientations:

The journey inward is the journey to be aware of Christ dwelling within us. The journey outward is the journey to find the Christ dwelling among us and in the world. The journey inward calls for the disciplines of solitude, silence, prayer, meditation, contemplation, and attentiveness to the movements of our heart. The journey outward in community and mission calls for the disciplines of care, compassion, witness, outreach, healing, accountability, and attentiveness to the movement of other people’s hearts. (Nouwen, Christensen, and Laird 2010, 123)

Nouwen names the two orientations the “journey inward” and the “journey outward.” According to Nouwen, spiritual formation requires taking not only the inward journey to the heart but also the outward journey from the heart to the community and ministry. Christian spirituality is essentially communal because the triune God of community reaches out in love to incorporate others. Tozer shared a similar missional focus in his sermon (Snyder 2009, 100). It makes sense that the church becoming like Christ will become like the Father and therefore become more outwardly focused in loving sacrificial service.

Individuals’ spiritual formation leads to the spiritual formation in the community. Individualism and autonomy are two major hindrances to mature Christian life. In time, Jesus’ twelve disciples learned to put others’ needs before their own. They were able to live in such a way that their transient earthly needs

were not their highest concern. Jesus taught this principle: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself” (Mt 22:37-39; Mk 12:30-31, Lk 10:27). Loving God is the inward journey while loving the neighbour is the outward journey. Loving God is intermingled with loving others. The first and the greatest movement starts from the heart, soul, and mind before moving to the neighbourhood. Jesus taught not only the principle but also modelled the importance of the two orientations during His life journey. It is a two-way shaping process. The Christian leader is being shaped and transformed by God, and in return, he or she can form the community where he or she serves. The individual Christian is called to serve the community and is being shaped gradually to become the leader with Christian characteristics in the community. The Christian leader is empowered to help and serve others in the community in responding to the calling of God. Therefore, the community is the context where the Christian is being shaped to demonstrate the journey outward.

The fourth means of spiritual formation is trials. The Christian is not immune to trials or temptation. “These have come so that your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed” (1 Pt 1:7). Trials can bring Christians onto a spiritual higher ground through sufferings, perseverance, character, and hope (Rom 5:3-5). “What the soul agony does is to break up the fallow ground, empty the vessel, detach the heart from

earthly interests and focus the attention upon God” (Tozer 2014, 357). The trials or spiritual struggles can always be turned into a blessing for the faithful believers because they can lead to spiritual growth and transformation if the believers can persevere through the trial.

Holy Invitation and Learning from Jesus

From the four Gospels, it is obvious that Jesus invites people to follow Him. Jesus uses phrases like “come to me” (Mt 11:28, 19:14; Mk 10:14; Lk 18:16; Jn 5:40, 6:37, 6:44, 6:65, 7:37, 17:10), “come with me” (Mk 6:31), and “follow me” (Mt 4:19, 8:22, 9:9, 10:38, 16:24, 19:21; Mk 1:17, 2:14, 8:34, 10:21; Lk 5:27, 9:23, 9:59, 14:27, 18:22; Jn 10:27, 12:26, 21:19, 21:22). The holy invitation is not just nurturing a new life but also living out a new life. Jesus showed His disciples how to live life by doing the works He had done (Jn 14:12). Jesus invites His disciples to share the light of life (Jn 8:12). The holy invitation is not just living out the new life but also responding to His calling. “‘Come, follow me,’ Jesus said, ‘and I will make you fishers of men’” (Mt 4:19, Mk 1:17). I was called by Jesus into fulltime pastoral ministry in 2010 (see Chapter II: Crossover (*‘abar*)), and I have responded to the holy invitation to catch the unbelievers.

Although Christ’s task assigned by the Father included persecution and suffering on earth, Jesus was willing to take it and became obedient to death (Phil 2:8). Jesus was showing the abiding experience of surrendering during his life on earth. The holy invitation requires Jesus’ followers to pay a big price too. Taking up Jesus’ cross (Mk 8:34) means that facing persecution and suffering are inevitable. Christian life is not easy. I experienced a serious setback in Halifax

(see Chapter II: The Divine Healing) and the painful event of bereavement (see Chapter III: God was Silent). I am learning from Jesus to have the abiding experience of surrendering.

The four Gospels in the New Testament depict both the private and communal lives of Jesus. In His private life, He always spent time in prayer with the Heavenly Father. The quiet time with the Father helped Him understand the will of God and submit Himself to the Father. Jesus was practising the spiritual discipline of contemplation. This contemplating practice continually strengthened Jesus' relationship with His Father. I am learning from Jesus to practise the spiritual discipline of contemplation.

Jesus enjoyed the inward experience with the Father but also the outward ministry in the community. "Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness" (Mt 4:23, 9:35). In His communal life, Jesus preached, taught, and healed. Jesus travelled throughout Galilee, preaching in their synagogues, driving out demons, and healing the sick (Mk 1:39-42; Lk 8:1-2). The love of the Father urged Him to show love to the neighbour and also the enemy (Mt 5:44-45a). I am learning from Jesus to be involved in a ministry of outreach in the community and to encourage others to join with me in outreach.

Jesus prayed with and for the disciples, served with the disciples, and lived with the disciples for three years before His ascension. Eventually, Jesus' life example equipped the twelve apostles who continued His ministry of outreach in the community. Jesus impacted the disciples with His living testimony. I am

learning from Jesus to impact others by my own living testimony.

The lifelong journey of Jesus is what Jesus' disciples should explore more in order to follow Christ more closely. Four aspects of Jesus' life journey—the spiritual discipline of contemplation (Life of Discipline), the abiding experience of surrendering (Life of Surrender), the impact of a living testimony (Life of Testimony), and the outreaching ministry in the community (Life of Community)—have been identified to fulfill the goal of deeper life. A detailed description of each aspect of Jesus' life journey will be elaborated in Chapter IV. Jesus is the Master Teacher. He has shown me how to live a better life. I have summarized my learning from the four Gospels and developed FSJ model which captures the significant four aspects of Jesus' life journey.

I have elaborated what the deeper life means in the light of spiritual formation. I have explored the four means of spiritual formation: The Holy Spirit, the disciplines, the community and the trials. I have realized that my life journey is being spiritually formed by these four means too. I believe that Jesus Christ invites each one of us to learn from Him. Finally, I have developed the global theme for this research portfolio.

Global Theme of the Research Portfolio

A Christian's life is meant to be lived as a spiritual journey on earth, becoming more Christlike. The process of becoming Christlike is a process of spiritual formation by which the individual builds a deeper relationship with God and the community. When I examine different episodes in my spiritual journey, I can see God has been working behind every one of my life events. Self-reflection

makes me aware of God’s mysterious and providential grace in my life. Life has a purpose in the eyes of God according to Scripture, and I can verify it by identifying these spiritual attractions of my life. In my FSJ model, I have identified the four aspects of spiritual journey in my life (see Figure 2: Wai Fung’s Fourfold Spiritual Journey). Each aspect relates to a respective aspect of the life of Jesus (see Figure 1: The Fourfold Spiritual Journey Model). I would like to learn from Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is alive in me. “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me” (Gal 2:20). Jesus Christ is always the center of my life.

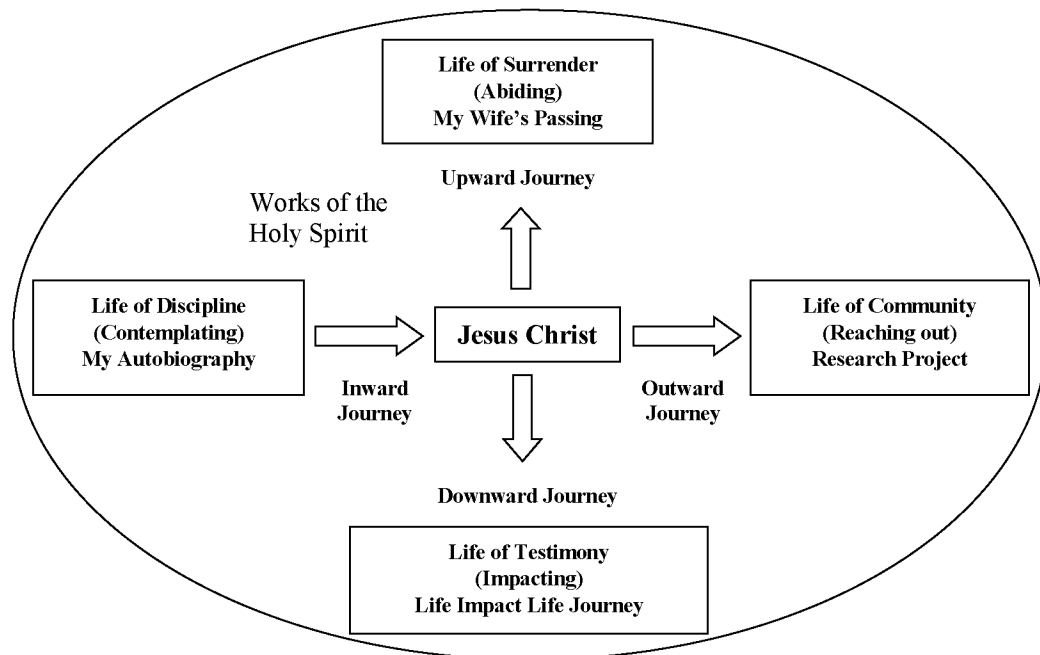


Figure 2: Wai Fung’s Fourfold Spiritual Journey

I borrowed Nouwen’s concept of journey inward (→Christ) and journey outward (Christ→) for the Life of Discipline and the Life of Community (Nouwen, Christensen, and Laird 2010, 123). Spiritual disciplines help me to be

more aware of Christ (→Christ) dwelling within me. I try to live out Christ (Christ→) by serving the community and the world. I created the concept of journey upward (↑) and journey downward (↓) for the Life of Surrender and the Life of Testimony. Many challenges strike me while I am living out Christ. I look up (↑) to the Father like how Jesus called for strength and wisdom to live in times of difficulties. As a pastor, I am a testimony of Jesus Christ. I share with my congregation how Jesus Christ impacts (↓) my life through the Word of God so that others may follow and be transformed as well.

The four actions—contemplating, abiding, impacting, and reaching out—of the spiritual journey model match well with the four means respectively—the disciplines, the trials, the Holy Spirit, and the community—of spiritual formation described above.

Contemplating the presence of God is one of the indispensable spiritual disciplines. According to the evangelical tradition, contemplation means to encounter with the presence of God (Howard 2012, 72). The Christian feels intimacy with God whenever the presence of God is perceived. The intimate relationship with the Father can only be achieved because our identity has been rooted in Christ. Being united with Christ is the formational process (ongoing salvation) of growing an intimate relationship with God. Contemplation is awareness of the Father with whom we are reconciled through union with Christ. Contemplation is an advanced form of prayer, resting in the presence of God or in communion with God.

The concept of *abiding in Christ* is developed from John 15:4: “Abide in

Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me” (NKJV). This verse describes a picture of union with Christ. Our lives are so intertwined with Christ that His obedience actually becomes our obedience. “Abiding in Christ also means reaching the point where we are constantly aware of that indwelling, in communion with Christ” (Graybeal and Julia 2006, 2630). Bearing fruit means growing in Christlikeness, in characteristics like perseverance, character, and hope (Rom 5:3-4). One way of displaying our “abiding in Christ” is to stand firm through the trials and suffering, identifying with Christ because He will stand firm even when we feel shaky and incapable of continuing. Through our life in Christ by the Spirit, Christians should “take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ” (2 Cor 10:5) and “not conform to the evil desires [they] had when [they] lived in ignorance” (1 Pt 1:14). Abiding results from the intimate relationship with the Father; the children of God can survive through the trials and suffering when they abide in Christ, which happens through our identification in Christ by the Spirit.

As a disciple of Jesus Christ, the Christian can abide in Christ and His love. By the new birth in the Spirit, the disciples are “baptized by one Spirit into one body” (1 Cor 12:13). Disciples are one with Christ. Disciples know that they are one with Him—one to be united with Christ. Disciples are made the partakers of His divine nature (2 Pt 1:4). The union that binds the disciples to Christ is as real and close as the union that binds Him to the Father. As it is the union of a divine life; it is also the union of a divine love. During His incarnation on earth,

Christ demonstrated His love for us while we were still sinners (Rom 5:8).

Disciples yield themselves to be loved by Him. From His example, He commands His disciples to love one another (Jn 13:34). When we love Christ, we do what pleases Him without thinking of our actions as following commands. Abiding in Christ means keeping his commandments (Jn 15:10) and that means loving God with all my heart, soul, strength and mind and loving my neighbour as myself (Lk 10:27).

Christians are supposed to impact one another by bearing witness to Jesus Christ and sharing testimony. The Holy Spirit is the primary agent of impacting and transforming the Christians' life. "The Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you" (Jn 14:26). Being filled with the Holy Spirit accelerates the process of conforming to God and empowers our witnesses (including both our words and our deeds). Jesus' disciples need to bear witness to the truth as Jesus came into the world to bear witness to the truth (Jn 18:37). What is truth? Jesus is the way and the truth and the life (Jn 14:6). Jesus' disciples are supposed to abide by the truth or the Word of God and share it (2 Tim 4:2) with others.

Reaching out to the community is an outward expression of an inward Christian's faith. The community of a group of Jesus' disciples invites others continually to form a larger community. The Christian is not a hermit but an ambassador of Christ in the community. Sharing our faith with unbelievers is participating in the Great Commission of Jesus Christ (Mt 28:19-20). "Always be

prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have” (1 Pt 3:15). An ambassador of Christ preaches the good news to draw unbeliever’s attention to Christ, but the Spirit of Jesus draws the believers into the body of Christ.

This research portfolio mainly consists of three papers and a research project report that are connected by the FSJ model: CHAPTER II - The Inward Journey (Life of Discipline); CHAPTER III - The Upward Journey (Life of Surrender); CHAPTER IV - The Downward Journey (Life of Testimony); and CHAPTER V - The Outward Journey (Life of Community). The portfolio comprises four main chapters that include a spiritual autobiography, a discussion of my personal transformation after my wife passed away in the third year of my DMin program, a spiritual formation journey based on the FSJ model, and a field research project report on the practice of early morning prayer.

God has called me, and the life of contemplation is a response to God’s initiative. Following the Life of Discipline enables me to contemplate the presence of God, and it is a journey inward. He calls me to come closer and become more intimate. The arrow pointing toward Jesus Christ symbolizes that I can get closer to the Son of God. I will be developing the idea of journey inward in “CHAPTER II: Life of Discipline.” The spiritual autobiography of Chapter II explores the three important stages of my life, discovering those obvious signs that God had prepared me to be His servant. This inward journey has consolidated my relationship with God and has gradually built up a Life of Discipline so that I might grow in Christlikeness.

Jesus Christ obeys His Father's commands and remains in His love (Jn 15:10). Because I have responded to Christ's call and become more intimate with the Father, I find that I long to know God's way and I want to abide in God's will, even when it is difficult to do so. Following the Life of Surrender enables me to abide in the will of God, and it is a journey upward. The arrow pointing upward from Christ symbolizes that I can rely on the Heavenly Father through Jesus Christ. I will be developing the idea of journey upward in "CHAPTER III: Life of Surrender." Chapter III is a sentimental chapter about my wife, Grace Tsang (hereafter called Grace), my best spiritual partner, who always assisted me in serving the Lord. Her death has shaped my upward journey, as I have learned to live a Life of Surrender.

Jesus Christ humbled Himself by coming down to the earth. Following the Life of Testimony enables me to impact others' lives, and it is a journey downward. The arrow pointing downward from Christ symbolizes that I am the witness of Christ during my life journey on earth. I will be developing the idea of journey downward in "CHAPTER IV: Life of Testimony." Chapter IV is about the spiritual formation model (FSJ model) I have developed. I have also developed a discipleship journey based on the FSJ model. The training program is a demonstration of my downward journey to live a Life of Testimony.

Jesus Christ left His comfort zone of Heaven and served in the community. Following the Life of Community enables me to reach out to the world, and it is a journey outward. The arrow pointing away from Christ symbolizes that through my witness, I draw attention to the fact that Christ is

already at work bringing the good news to the community. I will be developing the idea of journey outward in “CHAPTER V: Life of Community.” The field research project of Chapter V is an example of my outward journey that shows my passion to serve the community. The practice of early morning prayer has shown that prayer life can be enhanced by formational reading of Scripture and by regular communal prayer.

The concluding chapter of the research portfolio is Chapter VI. Jesus’ Great Commission is highlighted to iterate the FSJ model. This chapter will discuss how this FSJ model can benefit others, helping them to be more spiritually mature. This chapter will discuss how I as a pastor can help others follow the Great Commission. I also raise suggestions and questions that are worthy to be examined in the future.

CHAPTER II:
LIFE OF DISCIPLINE -
MY SPIRITUAL AUTOBIOGRAPHY

“There is a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot, ... a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance, ... a time to tear and a time to mend, a time to be silent and a time to speak, a time to love and a time to hate, a time for war and a time for peace” (Eccl 3:2-8). I would like to share with you these meaningful times of my life. It is not just a physical journey of life but also an inward spiritual journey with God. When I examine these past episodes, I can see that God has been working behind these events. Self-reflection makes me aware of God’s will for my life. I can see God’s purpose, drawing me closer to Him all the time. I am becoming more and more aware of His presence in my life through contemplation as in the first part of the Fourfold Spiritual Journey (FSJ) model—the inward Life of Discipline which will be elaborated in the following sections of this chapter.

I came across an exercise of self-reflection during a retreat in 2015. The facilitator used the metaphor of Jesus’ baptism (Mt 3:13-17) as the image of meditation. I also used the metaphor of Jesus’ baptism at the Jordan River as the framework for my autobiography. “Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan River to be baptized by John [the Baptist]” (Mt 3:13). I imagined that I was one of the

people in the crowd watching the baptism from the riverbank. In the beginning, I was just an observer filled with curiosity. When John tried to reject Jesus and said, “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?” (Mt 3:14), I noticed that Jesus was not an ordinary man. When “a voice from heaven said, ‘This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased’” (Mt 3:17), I realized that Jesus was the Son of God. After Jesus’ baptism, Jesus invited me to be baptized by Him. He called me into the gospel ministry, and I eventually accepted His calling after a long period of struggle and delay.

The metaphor of Jesus’ baptism reflects three important stages of my life. The three stages are as follows: (i) Walking to the river; (ii) Stepping in the river; and (iii) Walking from the river. The first stage is about the period of my life without faith. In my childhood years, I was impacted deeply by my father. In my teenage years, I searched for the meaning of life and observed Jesus at a distance. I was guided by the Holy Spirit to get closer to God. I studied the Word of God and accepted His calling to be a Christian after I realized that He was my personal Saviour. This was the first turning point of my life.

The second stage is about Jesus’ calling. Jesus waved at me from a distance, and I walked into the river to get closer to Him. Jesus invited me to get into the river to follow Him. I had several obvious callings from Him in my life; however, I did not respond immediately because either my wife or I was not prepared at the time. Through this imagination exercise, I realized that the miraculous incident surrounding Jesus’ baptism, and other earlier recorded events at the Jordan River, had deep and insightful meanings for me today. An earlier

event at the Jordan concerned Joshua as he was taking over the leadership of the Israelites from Moses (Jo 1:1-9). God empowered Joshua with the repetitious words of encouragement: “Be strong and courageous” (Jo 1:6, 7, 9). God stopped the water flowing from upstream of the Jordan River so that the Israelites could cross over to the Promised Land (Jo 3:15-4:18). Joshua was empowered by God obviously. I was empowered by God to commit the second half of my life to Him. Finally, I accepted his calling to be a full-time pastor. For me, my Promised Land was the Maritimes of Nova Scotia. This was the second turning point of my life.

The third stage is about walking from the river and moving back to the community. Jesus encouraged me to participate in the fulfilling of the Great Commission. In order to settle well in the Promised Land, I needed to face serious battles like Joshua did. The commander of the army of the LORD reminded Joshua and me that the place where we stood was holy ground (Jo 5:13-15). I had been sharing the gospel, proclaiming the Word of God, and serving the community for a few years. God had trained and polished me through times of difficulties. The Holy Spirit had transformed me into spiritual maturity through adversity. Pastoral ministry had shaped me to be a Christlike shepherd.

Each section of Chapter II represents a particular aspect of the story of my life. Each story has a unique theme from which I have been inspired by God. Each story shows God’s magnificent plan with which He has directed my path. God initiates, and I respond. My research portfolio is a presentation of the FSJ model, showing how I responded and continue to respond to God’s initiative of grace and love. “Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and lean not on your own

understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, And He will make your paths straight” (Prv 3:5-6). I believe the first stage of my life was preparation for the second while the second stage of my life was preparation for the third. The later stages depended on the training and insights gained in the previous stages. I hope these stories will inspire others to trust in the LORD and lean not on their own intelligence and understanding. The metaphor of Jesus’ baptism is a simple and concise presentation of my autobiography, easy to remember and allowing room for the readers to further reflect and imagine.

Walking to The River

The first seventeen years of my life was the period without Christian faith, and I was influenced mainly by my father and my classmates. Although my mother was a housewife during my childhood, I did not capture many inspirational moments with her. Even as a child, I was intimidated by the fear of death, human ugliness, and the feeling of emptiness. I did not have many friends because I was a shy person. My parents restricted my daily activities after school, and I was not allowed to play with classmates and neighbours. I spent a lot of time at home mingling with my own brother and sister.

God put a desire inside me to search for the meaning of life when I was young. This part of my life is described as walking to the Jordan River where I found the meaning of life. I was attracted by Jesus Christ who was baptized in the river, and Jesus Christ had become my personal Saviour by the end of this stage.

Childhood

My father was sent to study in China from Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia when

he was young. He received his education under the leadership of the Chinese communist party. He was trained to be a teacher at Changchun Normal University in China. He met my mother while he was teaching at the Commerce College in Xi'an, which was the ancient capital of China. Because of the unstable government in mainland China, my parents migrated to Hong Kong in the early 1960s. Since Hong Kong was under the British system at that time, my father's training in China was not recognized by the Hong Kong government. My father changed his career and worked as a supervisor in a leather factory. I was born on March 12, 1964, in Hong Kong. My brother was born two years later, and my sister was born six years later. Since my father was studying in China, he could not go back to his home country because the Malaysia government tried to block any influence from communism. Since my family had no relations in Hong Kong at that time, we basically had to survive on our own. We were living in a small industrial town called Tsuen Wan. My family was not wealthy, but my parents were able to provide us with everything we needed. I understand that my father was working very hard in order to provide for the family.

My father was a nice gentleman. He had a good relationship with his friends and coworkers. I remembered him bringing me to his office when I was young. I observed him treating his coworkers to meals and helping others in his workplace willingly. I could feel that his coworkers were very respectful toward him. I learned from my father how to communicate with people. He worked faithfully and conscientiously for his boss. He always reminded me to try my best to do every task no matter whether it is big or small. Although my father was not

a Christian at that time, his teaching was similar to the biblical teaching, “Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much” (Lk 16:10). I was shaped by my father to be a kind and hard-working person.

My father was a traditional male figure in the Chinese culture. He was strict and serious toward his children. His love for us was implicit. He seldom shared his feelings and thoughts with me. I grew up in a paternalistic family. My father physically disciplined me for my good. The last time he disciplined me with a rod was because I had not followed his instruction. Although he disciplined me physically, it did have lasting positive effects. “He who spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is careful to discipline him” (Prv 13:24). I believed that my father disciplined me because he loved me very much. The Scripture encourages not withholding discipline from a child (Prv 23:13-14). The paternal discipline reminded me of his teaching and advice for a long time.

My father was a good teacher. He spent a lot of time helping me study. I had a problem understanding the theory of equation for grade three mathematics. My father tried different ways to demonstrate how to resolve the equation and obtain the value of the unknown parameter. He did not get frustrated with my poor math skills but used different methods of explanation. Suddenly, my mind was opened, and I understood that the key is always to make both sides equal since it is an equation. I was very thankful that my father spent time with me, patiently helping me to understand math. His patience made a strong imprint in my life that shaped my personal character.

Although my father had taught me how to survive physically and mentally, he did not teach me how to survive spiritually. I loved asking questions when I was young. When I was in primary school, I had already started asking questions about life. What is the meaning of life? What do we live for? Why do we have to face death at the end of life? As a boy, I was quite timid and did not believe that life was filled with happy moments, but challenges. I suffered the fear of sickness, separation, and death but none of my fear was shared with my parents. I always had a question in mind: If I had to live, why did I have to die? I was studying in a Christian primary school where I learned how to pray through the public morning prayer session. The senior students usually hosted the morning service that was aired over a P.A. system, and we listened to the broadcast before the day of lectures. During the weekly worship service, we sang the classic hymns together and listened to a sermon preached by the principal. I remembered that I got very high marks in the study of the Bible. Although I was not a Christian at that time, I practised prayer and worship during the week. I remembered praying before going to bed. I prayed for myself, my parents, and all other family members. I asked God to provide good health to my whole family. I knew “someone up there” would be listening to my prayers although I was not sure who He was. My favourite hymn at that time was “God Will Take Care of You” (Teng 1986, 72). I liked the lyrics very much.

1. Be not dismayed whate'er betide,
God will take care of you;
Beneath His wings of love abide,
God will take care of you.

(Chorus) God will take care of you,

Through every day,
O'er all the way;
He will take care of you,
God will take care of you.

2. Through days of toil when heart doth fail,
God will take care of you;
When dangers fierce your path assail,
God will take care of you.
[Chorus]

3. No matter what may be the test,
God will take care of you;
Lean, weary one upon His breast,
God will take care of you.
[Chorus]

Author: Civilla D. Martin (1904)

The Fear of Death

In the 1970s, listening to the radio was a popular family entertainment in Hong Kong. One night, our family listened to a ghost story in the dark when we were in bed. The story was very horrible and frightening. I was too scared to pray that night, and I could not sleep well. The next morning, I found some blood in my ear and on my face. I had been so fearful that I must have scratched and hurt myself during the night. I suffered from the fear of death because of the uncertainty of where I would go after life. I thought the ghosts or death had visited me in the night. I felt lucky that I was still alive in the morning. The ghosts I perceived were from the dark side of death. The purpose of ghosts was to drive humans to death.

The fear of death was disturbing and harassing at my young age. I believed that nobody could return from death. My death anxiety emerged because I did not know what would happen after death. Death would bring separation from

my beloved parents, siblings, and friends. Death meant no peace, no light, no hope, no more relationship, etc. The fear of death was a package of other fears like the fear of the unknown, the fear of loss of control, the fear of those left behind, the fear of dying, etc. The fear of death attacked me from time to time, and I had to suppress it by thinking positive and intentionally injecting happy memories into my head. I did not know when the fear of death would come, but when it came, it would paralyse me for a few moments. The fear of death is a negative feeling for many people. This usually happens for adults. However, it happened to me when I was ten years old. This fear of death urged me to seek for something beyond the earthly life and question what the afterlife was about. Thank God for giving me the desire to search for the meaning of life.

Jesus' teaching has drawn my attention, and it gives me hope that I will live forever. Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die" (Jn 11:25-26). I really understood this verse after I believed in Christ. It seemed to me that Jesus was not an ordinary person. If he was not insane, then he must be a divine being. Who is Jesus? The voice from heaven at the Jordan River where I watched says, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased" (Mt 3:17). It seemed to me that Jesus is the source of all life. Jesus is the life giver. Jesus may help me in overcoming the fear of death.

Human Ugliness

When I was studying in high school, I used to be the top student in the class. I received the annual award for my good performance at the end of the

school year. At the same time, I experienced peer pressure and competition among my classmates. Many classmates were eager to beat me at the final examination. They hid the useful study materials and did not want to share with me. I experienced jealousy and contention among my peers. I became frustrated with my personal relationship with others. I could not figure out why human beings had the characteristics of selfishness and resentment. I started questioning why there were so many fights and wars among human beings. Why did people have evil thoughts? Why did people lose trust in each other? Why did people not have compassion for each other? My intuition told me that a perfect person should not have pride, hatred, envy, bitterness, etc. I was dismayed by human ugliness. I was struggling with human reality. I kept treating everyone fairly although my classmates treated me differently.

What caused human wickedness and immorality? In time, the scriptures started to provide an answer:

Since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done. They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; they are senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless. (Rom 1:28-31)

Although I did not understand these verses completely, the scriptures simply state that human's ignorance of God caused the sinful desire or the human ugliness. I looked into my own heart. There was a growing collection of sins. The biblical explanation makes sense to me, and I have kept the biblical verses in my heart.

The Young Traitor

I came across Christianity in high school. I attended the Christian fellowship meeting after school occasionally. When I was in grade nine, a senior student shared the gospel with me, and I found it very interesting and persuasive. He said, “Jesus Christ was willing to take our sin and died for us.” When he asked me whether I was willing to receive eternal life, I could not find any reason for rejecting it. I had longed for an eternal life because of my fear of death. He said I should have the eternal life right after I accepted Christ as my personal Saviour. At that time, I did not know much about the Christian faith. The senior student asked me to join the fellowship meeting regularly, but my parents would not allow me to join the extracurricular activity. I felt ashamed when the senior student kept encouraging me to attend the meeting. I realized that there was obligation and commitment to be a Christian. Accepting Jesus Christ was just the beginning of the journey of the Christian walk. I was afraid of walking into this new adventure. Eventually, the seed of the Word of God (Lk 8:11) died down without any nutrition, like the seeds sown on the rock in the parable of the sower (Lk 8:13). At the same time, studying was the top priority for me as a high school student. I then chose to fulfill the academic need rather than my religious need.

Jesus was really attractive to me when I was young. I almost walked into the Jordan River when I observed Him from a distance, but I had not really experienced His presence. I had not really felt the need of Jesus. The reason for my not responding to Jesus was that I wanted to get my life together first. I wanted to get a few things squared away, to take care of some personal issues. I wanted to walk my journey by myself rather than with Jesus.

Feeling of Emptiness

Just like a lot of young people, I did a lot of things to occupy my time, and yet there was still a feeling of emptiness inside me. I tried to look for ways to fill the emptiness in my heart. After my daily work, I took engineering courses in the evening to upgrade myself, but they often left me feeling even emptier. The true wholeness—which was found in facing my emptiness—was related to the tenacity and tenderness of Jesus Christ. In time I learned that only through Christ's salvation could I truly become full.

I worked as a mechanical trainee in a low-income community for four years. Many coworkers swore and communicated with bad language regularly. I was courteous to others and did not swear. I was perceived as a gentleman by many coworkers, but from time to time, I was annoyed by my coworkers and I wanted to reply with anger and hatred. Although my anger was not shown on the surface, I hit back internally. I smiled at them but cursed them behind their backs without showing it on my face. I felt convicted by the Holy Spirit many times. I was not better than others in God's eyes. I was moved by the Holy Spirit to confess that I was also a sinner. I talked to God in a heartfelt and unedited prayer, admitting and turning from all of my wrongdoing, receiving the free gift of forgiveness and eternal life through Jesus. I told Him that with His help I wanted to follow Him from that moment forward. I cried out to the Lord that I needed Him to save me from my hypocrisy. I made a similar confession many times during those days. I repented when I recognized the truth that I could not save myself by my own effort. I am thankful that I did not put out the Spirit's fire. I had committed my life to Christ quietly. I could not remember exactly when I

made this important decision to accept Christ as my Saviour. The Holy Spirit led me to Christ gradually. I did not experience a dramatic change after I accepted Christ. The only thing that I noticed was that I was able to hear the tiny voice of the Holy Spirit and received His grace and salvation. Jesus walked out of Heaven, was born on earth, died on the cross, and paid for my sins. By his doing so, He made a bridge for me so that I could have a relationship with the Holy Father.

Stepping in The River

The second part of my life lasted thirty-three years, and I was influenced mainly by the Holy Spirit and my wife Grace. I met Grace when I was studying at University of Newcastle Upon Tyne in England. Later on, Grace and her family moved to Vancouver, BC, and I also moved to Vancouver after marrying her. We enjoyed living in the beautiful city of Vancouver and serving in a Chinese Alliance church. After I was laid off from my workplace, I started my regular jogging exercise in 2009. God put a desire in me to live out a meaningful life after my layoff. It took me a few years to confirm my calling to be a church pastor. This part of my life was described as stepping in the Jordan River where my Christian life was nurtured and revived. I was called by Jesus Christ to serve Him passionately and wholeheartedly. By the end of this stage, my wife and I had decided to move from Vancouver, BC to Halifax, NS to start a new ministry of shepherding a Chinese church.

I found that my personality changed quite a bit after accepting Christ. I used to be an introverted person who preferred solitude to fellowship and tended toward reflection rather action (Mulholland 1993, 397). Most of the time, solitude

energized and invigorated me. I had no problem working alone on projects or activities. God changed me and balanced me so that I now enjoy fellowship with other Christians. Playing with others and serving others can also revitalize me from time to time. My communication skills have been improved. I have learned how to serve with others as a team player.

Studying in England

Leaving my birthplace to study afar was a major milestone in my life. Not only did I receive post-secondary education and learn to be more independent, more importantly, I had an opportunity to find my true faith. In the 1980s, there were only two universities in Hong Kong. Many college students had to go abroad for further studies. Britain was one of the popular places for Hong Kong people to go to further their education as Hong Kong used to be a British colony and both places had similar education systems. Thank God that I received a grant for my study in England. I went directly into the second year of the program for my first degree. I did my bachelor's degree in mechanical engineering at the University of Newcastle upon Tyne from 1988 to 1990.

On the first day of arriving in Newcastle upon Tyne, I was greeted by a sister in Christ from Newcastle Chinese Christian Fellowship (hereafter called NCCF) at the door of the university apartment. She showed me the way to my apartment unit. On the same evening, NCCF offered me a welcome dinner, and I attended the Bible study meeting after the meal. On the next day, other Christians accompanied me to take care of my banking, buy groceries from the local market, and give me a tour of the university campus. That made me feel loved, and after

that, I attended NCCF for all my years in Newcastle. I was invited to serve as the vice-chairperson of NCCF during my second year of study.

It was my first Christmas holiday in England. NCCF organized a gospel retreat for the students. During the retreat, I met Grace who later became my wife. At that time, Grace was studying at a high school in the neighbouring city of Durham. I still remembered that we were checking out the meal schedule, which was posted outside the kitchen. We greeted each other and introduced ourselves. Somehow, she gave me a good impression, and we continued to see each other after the gospel retreat. I started praying for her. Quietly, I asked God to give me a sign whether I could date her. I suggested that we could go to church together on Sunday. If she accepted my invitation, I would consider that it was the sign from God. Thank God that Grace agreed to go to church with me for the first Sunday. I enjoyed the time of worshipping together because they were precious moments with the presence of God.

Grace and I usually ate together during the weekends. She would drive to my apartment and cook a meal for us. One evening, I shared with her about my vocational calling. I felt that God was calling me to serve him in a full-time fashion. Her reaction was so negative that she ran away from my apartment immediately. I ran after her to calm her down. Her reaction left me a strong feeling that she really did not want to be the wife of a pastor. Chinese Christians have a common belief that pastors usually suffer as servants of God. Grace, like other Chinese Christians, believed that a pastor might suffer like Jesus by taking the cross to follow Him (Mk 8:34).

I did my master's degree in computer science at Staffordshire University in Stafford, England from 1990 to 1992. Stafford was a small town, and there was not a large Chinese population. I attended Church Lane Evangelical Church while I was studying in Stafford. Church Lane Evangelical Church was a small Caucasian church with just over a hundred people on a regular Sunday. The church showed great hospitality to all the students and newcomers. I realized that the love of Christ could be practised across cultures. I was invited to join their Sunday lunch with different families every week. As an international student, I looked forward to attending church on Sunday. Not only could we worship God together, but I enjoyed the fellowship afterwards. The Sunday lunch was usually the best meal of the week, with a lot of food. The main course may be roast chicken, beef, pork, steak and kidney pie, etc. I particularly loved the roast beef and Yorkshire pudding.

It was early Sunday morning on February 16 in 1992 when I received a long-distance phone call in England from my father. He told me that my mom had passed away in Hong Kong on Valentine's Day. She had suffered from lung cancer for a year. My mom did not let me know about her sickness because she did not want to interrupt my study. I was so shocked and greatly saddened. I was helpless at that time, and I went to church for consolation, hope, and help. I continued to attend the Sunday service that morning. I shared the bad news with Rita Godwin, one loving sister in Christ, before the Sunday service. Rita talked to me like an angel after the service. She had collected enough donations from the church to buy me a round-trip ticket to attend my mom's funeral in Hong Kong.

The church had arranged for a couple to give me a ride from Stafford to Heathrow Airport in London. We were riding a big container truck since the couple was on their way to distribute donations to an orphanage in Romania. The couple comforted me a lot during the three-hour trip to airport. What a benevolent love from Church Lane Evangelical Church in England!

When I lost my mother, there was a void that could not be replaced. It created a big regret in my life that was hard to deal with. I asked God why He took my mom away when I was not with her physically. I did not even see her before her passing. I knew disappointment was a part of life and nobody was immune from its effects. Thank God for His promises, hope, and encouragement that transcend this world and its disappointment. He consoled me with the hope of meeting my mom again in heaven. My sister's friend from her church had shared the gospel with my mom. My mom did accept Christ when she was hospitalized for the treatment. My father also accepted Christ while he accompanied her going to church. This was great news of consolation at the time of recovering from sadness.

My father became a Christian in the early 1990s when my mother got sick. He accompanied my mother to church and accepted Christ after my mother did so. He also learned how to pray. At a family reunion meal years later, I asked him to give thanks for the meal. He started the prayer by giving thanks to the Lord. He thanked God for the food, physical health, fellowship, and the church he was going to. He asked God to bless me and my family and my living in Vancouver. He asked God to bless my brother because he was working hard to become a

chartered engineer. He asked God to bless my sister and her family since they had two young kids. The prayer went on for about ten minutes. God must have been laughing. Although my father was a young Christian at that time, he still taught me the lesson of patience. I thank God for my father that there was always something that I could learn from him.

Migrating to Vancouver, British Columbia

I walked similar paths as my father. Both of us studied overseas and migrated to a new city after marriage. Both of us settled well in the new environment after years of working hard. Grace's family migrated to Vancouver, British Columbia in the early 1990s. I migrated to Vancouver, BC, and we married in 1994. I began working with a start-up software company in the same year. It was a small company in downtown Vancouver with only twenty employees. After a few corporate merging and integrations, I became the employee of SAP Software, which was the third largest software company in the world. God blessed my career in the software industry. I was rewarded with corporate stock options a few times. After the company became public, I made a fortune selling the stocks. The profit was good enough for us to buy a single detached house in Vancouver at that time. I had worked in the same company for seventeen years; I expected to retire from SAP Software without regrets.

Grace and I settled well in Vancouver. Grace was a real estate agent. We both had good careers and enjoyed the good life in Vancouver. I focused more on my career rather than God and I became lukewarm in a prosperous generation (Rv 3:16). Lukewarm Christians rely upon themselves and forget about their surrender

to Christ. Instead of living by the will of God, I lived according to my own will and ignored the fellowship with God.

In 1996, my father, my brother, and my sister came to visit us from Hong Kong. It was a wonderful family reunion. I served as a tour guide, showing them around in the city of Vancouver. We shared with one another about our personal plans. My father continued to work for the same employer but in a different context. He had been working with the same boss for many years. The boss appreciated him for his good working attitude. Since my father was aging, his boss moved him to serve as a custodian in the school rather than working in the factory. My sister was going to get married soon. My brother planned to go to church after we shared the gospel with him. My brother was the last unbeliever in the family at that time. God blessed my family and kept His promise: “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household” (Acts 16:31). My brother believed in Christ after attending my sister’s church for a while. My father and my brother got baptized together at Christmas time in 1999.

I attended Vancouver Chinese Alliance Church (hereafter called VCAC) after moving to Vancouver because Grace used to attend it. It was a medium-sized church with fifteen hundred people. There were English, Cantonese, and Mandarin congregations in the church. Grace and I attended the Fraser Lands Church (hereafter called FLC), which was a church plant of VCAC. There was only one elder board taking care of the two churches. Since not many people from the mother church wanted to commit themselves to the church plant, I was given many opportunities to serve. I am gifted in mercy, service, and teaching. I was

involved in ministries like teaching adult Sunday school, visiting the elderly and infirmed, greeting the newcomers, coordinating fellowship activities, helping in the Alpha program, etc. In order to equip myself to be more competent in teaching the Word of God, I completed my part-time theological training at seminary. I received a master of Christian study from Canadian Theological Seminary in 2007. Although my mother tongue is Cantonese, my senior pastor gave me the opportunity to preach to the Mandarin congregation. Because of the needs of Mandarin congregation, my Mandarin improved a lot in a short time.

Although I considered myself a lukewarm Christian, I kept serving at my church in order to fulfill my Christian obligations. After I attended VCAC for ten years, I was elected the elder of the church in 2004 when I was forty years old. In the past, only the candidates nominated by the church nominating committee had been elected. I was the first one elected from the floor nomination (nominated by the congregation directly and not by the committee), and I was also the youngest elder of VCAC at that time. The elder board consisted of twelve elders with the senior pastor as the chairman. Pastor Ivan Leung was the senior pastor, and I served with him for six years on the board. I learned a lot from him and from my fellow elders. The most important project within the six years was the setup of the Multi-Sites Church Model (MSCM) with VCAC. We attended the Leadership Summit Conference at Willow Creek Church. We worked together for two years in order to construct a workable implementation of the model. I really enjoyed the time we served together as a team.

The General Assembly is a national gathering held every two years by the

C&MA in Canada. In July 2004, I, as a delegate of VCAC, attended the General Assembly at Convention Centre in Winnipeg. This five-day gathering was a fresh reminder of who we were and what our purpose was. It was a time when our whole community came together, and we breathed the same air. Just days before the event that drew hundreds of delegates from across Canada, 21-year-old James Pyles, the son of the C&MA president Franklin Pyles and his wife Gay, was killed in a car accident while serving on a short-term mission trip in Israel. The death came as a shock to the Alliance community as they rallied not only to conduct church business but also to launch a new initiative aiming to make missions an even higher priority. I was very touched by the message to rekindle my passion for missions. Two critical steps had to be taken to revitalize the passion for missions, the rekindling of a deep biblical conviction that people really were spiritually lost and the regaining of a bold confidence in the power of God to transform lives. I called my wife after the service and shared the inspirational messages with her. My heart was burning for God. I felt the vocational call from God again. I wanted to sacrifice for God. Unfortunately, my spirit of revival died down after the conference. Because I loved the world more than God, I did not respond to His calling. I decided to keep the status quo; it was just too expensive to give up anything to respond to God's calling. Therefore, I chose to keep my lukewarm status rather than following His call.

The Unforgettable Year of 2009

Grace and I visited my relatives in Malaysia with my father and my brother in early 2009. We had a great time in Malaysia. It was a journey exploring

my family of origin. My father grew up in a big family. He had ten brothers and sisters. He was the only one to leave the country and lived in Hong Kong. It was so memorable because I met many uncles and aunts for the first time in my life. It was so memorable because my father and I were able to share many stories. I learned a lot of the stories from my father's life.

It was my first day back to work after the month-long vacation in Asia. I was called into a meeting room to meet the senior management people in the early morning. The bad news came to me as a big surprise. As a result of the company's organizational restructuring, I was laid off from the company where I had worked for fifteen years. I was presented with a severance package to go. After I left the meeting room, all I could do was go back to my desk and pack up my personal belongings. I was supervised by the security personnel and had to leave the office right away. At that time, I felt helpless and sad to be treated in such a rude and insensible way. Now when I looked back, I believed that with a dramatic and unexpected ending of my fifteen years of employment, God prepared me to receive the calling to become a pastor.

The bad news came one after the other. My father went home to be with the Lord on New Year's Eve, the last day of 2009. My father passed away because of a stroke. He was in a coma for a few days. I was able to sit by his bedside in Hong Kong while the Lord brought him home. I saw his heartbeat dropping all the way from sixty to zero. I could feel his body temperature cooling slowly. I know my father enjoyed my company before he left the world, and I too wanted to spend the time with him as I had already missed the chance of being

with my mom before she passed. There was no doubt that I experienced the biggest pain in my life. I walked through the valley of the shadow of death. Nothing could be worse than what I experienced in 2009. I had the opportunity of writing the eulogy for his funeral service. What I wrote about were his visible achievements in life: his graduation from Changchun University, his workplace achievements, his family commitment, etc. I had missed his spiritual achievements. When we ate with others after the service, a lady who was from the same church as my father shared with me how abundant the spiritual life of my father was. Her husband did not know Christ, and she remembered one time my father had shared the gospel with him persistently. I was so convinced what would happen in heaven: our Lord would reward more what we had achieved in our spiritual life than in our earthly life. “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad” (2 Cor 5:10). Christians need to grow in spiritual maturity in order to receive the rewards.

I had been plucked out of my job unexpectedly, and I felt heartbroken at the loss of my beloved father. I was wondering why God allowed this difficult, scary, frustrating, life-upending situation. God might be teaching me something that I could not comprehend in the middle of suffering and pain. Could I trust Him that He still loved me and that He was still in control? What was His plan for me? During these unpleasant events in my life, I was so frustrated. I wanted to bargain with God, but this was not a street market. I might beg God for a different outcome: heal my father, have the employer admit a mistake and rehire me. I

could request, and God certainly had the power to do whatever He wished, but His ways were not mine. His perspective transcended anything I could possibly realize for His perfect strategy. My vantage point was very limited, and I could not see into the future. When, in my imagination, I encountered Jesus at the Jordan River, I glimpsed the victorious life He wanted me to follow and enjoy. At the same time, I discovered my weak places: places inside me that made me wonder if I could live out the victorious life, places that made me feel less than victorious, less than a conqueror, and less than strong. I wondered what God's purpose was for me.

High Blood Pressure

My father suffered a fatal stroke in 2009. He had had a long history of suffering from high blood pressure. He did not take western medication like drugs but the traditional Chinese treatment of *Gua sha*. *Gua sha* involves repeated pressured strokes over lubricated skin with a smooth-edged instrument. Skin is typically lubricated with massage oil and rubbed with a ceramic Chinese soup spoon, a well-worn coin, or even honed animal bones. My father believed that *Gua sha* could stimulate blood flow and reduce the blood pressure. I believed that I had inherited the problem of high blood pressure from my father.

Many young people, including me, rushed into the software industry because of the high compensation and incentives. The software industry was fast paced and highly competitive. Meeting deadline after deadline gave me less and less time to rest. High blood pressure tends to develop gradually over years. I definitely paid the price as I was getting older. I started regularly taking the

medication Ramipril when I was under consistent and tremendous stresses from my workplace. The problem of high blood pressure was not just a warning signal of my physical health but also of my spiritual health. The secular business had deviated my attention from the divine business. When I was distracted by the secular business, I stopped walking with Jesus Christ. He still loved me. He despised my behaviour, but He wanted to restore fellowship with me. Jesus was standing in the Jordan River and waving at me. Jesus was gentle and quiet, and He never barged into my life. Instead, He knocked at my door and softly whispered His offer.

After I was laid off from the software industry, my blood pressure returned to a stable condition. In order to maintain the stable condition, I was required to take a minimal dose of blood-pressure-lowering drug Ramipril, but the problem never went away and it did come back when I became the solo pastor in Halifax. I was under tremendous stress in my pastoral ministry too. The stress happened because I had expectations that were unrealistically high. I realized the problem after my physical body had made many complaints like constant headaches, sleeping problems, feelings of depression, etc. Then I needed to increase the dose of drugs in order to eliminate those symptoms. The high blood pressure was a thorn in my flesh so that I would not become conceited because of my profession. I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me like the apostle Paul, but the Lord said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness” (2 Cor 12:9a). I will probably have to live with Ramipril for the rest of my life. Every time I take the Ramipril, it reminds me that

my body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in me, whom I have received from God (1 Cor 6:19). Since I am no longer on my own, I have to honour God with my body.

I have developed the habit of jogging after my unexpected layoff. I need the regular exercise in order to keep my body healthy. I jog practically every day if it is not a rainy day. After I have practised it as a physical discipline, I try to get the awareness of God through jogging. My sacred space is the time of jogging. It has become my spiritual discipline. This creates time and space for renewal and refreshing in the busyness of my life. It gives opportunity for solitude to become a powerful source of energy for my spiritual life. I like to memorize a few Bible verses before going out. They are usually related to the sermon I will preach or the Bible study I will lead. I enjoy meditating on the verses and asking God to inspire me with what to share with the congregation. My experience so far has been very encouraging and inspiring. I get used to listening to God's desire and allowing the desire to guide me beyond my task-oriented and problem-solving patterns. There are many challenges to my daily habit of jogging. The cold and snowy winter makes jogging difficult. I use a smartphone app to track my jogging records. The app tells me how long I have jogged for that day. The app tells me how many times I have jogged for the year. It makes jogging a bit more fun. It is so tempting to quit the health struggle entirely and pretend it does not really matter spiritually, but it does matter, and God has mixed the physical discipline with the spiritual discipline for me.

Crossover ('*abar*)

A message from the book *Borderland Churches: A Congregation's Introduction to Missional Living*, written by Gary V. Nelson, struck me in 2010. "Early in the morning Joshua and all the Israelites set out from Shittim and went to the Jordan, where they camped before crossing over" (Jo 3:1). The Hebrew word עָבַר (transliteration - '*abar*'; translation – crossover) captured the finality required to cross over a boundary (Nelson 2008, 28). I had probably lived an '*abar* moment at some points in my life. Sometimes, I had willingly sought an '*abar* time. Some '*abar* times had been thrust on me. I might even be facing a personal '*abar* now. These frightening crossover moments were times of standing fearfully at the edge of my "Jordan River" with the knowledge that the issues and experiences ahead were unknown. I received a strong calling from Jesus Christ. He was standing in the midst of the Jordan River, waving at me and calling me to follow Him closely. Jesus Christ not only wanted to baptize me, He wanted to send me out with the Great Commission. What was the "Jordan River" to me? The "Jordan River" was the threshold at which I had to fully surrender to God in my life journey. God was encouraging me to cross over from lay ministry into fulltime pastoral ministry. I asked God to give me further confirmation.

In July 2010, my senior pastor informed me that I was scheduled to have a church interview for the process of C&MA accreditation. Accreditation was the process of officially recognizing me as a licensed worker with the C&MA. I was encouraged to serve wholeheartedly during the interview of accreditation. During the same evening prayer meeting with the VCAC North Burnaby congregation, my pastor presented the video *That the World May Know*. It was all about

Israelites crossing over the Jordan River. The ancient priests had to show their faith and make the first step into the Jordan River; God would do the rest. God answered my prayer while I was waiting for His confirmation. It reminded me that God had called and it was time for me to respond to His call.

On August 4, 2010, the online news from the HK Bible conference drew my attention. The speaker of the conference was Pastor Albert Ting (Chinese: 陳世協牧師) from Singapore Bible College. It was the fourth day of the seven-day conference. It surprised me that the theme of the day was “How to cross over the Jordan River of our ministry (Chinese: 如何越過事奉生命中的約旦河)?” I was pretty sure that it was another confirmation from God to serve Him in a full-time fashion.

While I was standing at the riverbank of the Jordan River, Jesus waved at me from a distance. Jesus invited me into the river to follow Him by showing me what happened on the east side of the Jordan River in ancient times. God knew Joshua was struggling, and instead of just giving some words of encouragement, He came Himself and reminded the young Joshua that there was no need to be afraid because he was not alone. Joshua had no idea how he would lead Israel, but God knew and promised to guide him. The absolute Ruler of everything was with him, and he was not going to fail. The triple confirmation of “crossover”—(i) Scripture Joshua 3:1 discussed in Gary Nelson’s book; (ii) the story of crossing the Jordan River from the DVD video; and (iii) the HK Bible conference message of crossing the Jordan River—was a divine invitation to me. I could not ignore it anymore. I really felt that God wanted to communicate with me. I found this one

fact very persuasive. The almighty God of the universe wanted to know me, spoke to me, and helped me understand how to live meaningfully. When my heart was weary and I wanted to give up, His words of encouragement gave me the strength to go beyond what I believed I could do. I had been invited explicitly a few times in my life before this final one. There was no doubt that I was empowered by Jesus Christ to commit the rest of my life to Him. Finally, I accepted His calling to serve Him in a fulltime fashion. I wanted to be equipped and prepared for more effective service to Him. After long discussion and prayer with Grace, God removed her strong resistance and changed her mind. She accepted my calling and explored how God led us. Grace and I decided to study in the MDiv program at Carey Theological College. We started doing the theological training together in 2010.

Rejected by Fraser Lands Church (FLC)

In mid-2010, one Cantonese-speaking pastor resigned from my home church, FLC. This appeared to be a perfect timing from a human perspective for me to step in and serve at FLC. At that time, I had just confirmed and accepted the calling of God. I asked Pastor Ivan's opinion whether I should apply for the position. He encouraged me to go through the official hiring process. I had been with the Cantonese congregation of FLC for seventeen years since the first day of moving into the brand-new church building. I knew the congregation well, and we had served together for a long time. I imagined that I was the perfect candidate for the congregation. I went for the official interview with the elder board of VCAC on April 19, 2011. I did not feel comfortable after the interview since they had

questioned my vocational call. Even though I had been on the elder board for years, I did not gain any advantage. In May 2011, I talked to the chair of the pastoral search committee, and he let me know I had been rejected from the hiring process. The board preferred a female pastor from the United States. I was in shock and felt abandoned by the elder board and the church congregation. I resonated with what Jesus said when his hometown people took offence at him: “Only in his hometown and in his own house is a prophet without honor” (Mt 13:57). I had been frustrated by a season of waiting and the Lord’s apparent silence. I was standing in the midst of the Jordan River and was not sure where to go. My faith was diminishing and getting weak.

I almost gave up and lost heart. I needed to beg the Lord again and asked for another dose of faith. I was running out of faith. Faith is equally about what I believe and what I do with what I believe. If what I believed about Jesus did not translate into how I lived, what was the point of having faith in Christ? Belief has to affect the behaviour. “We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed” (2 Cor 4:8-9). I had been on the bridge of despair for some time in my life. The answer was not looking down at the waters below but looking up at the heaven above.

Halifax Chinese Alliance Church (HCAC) First Offer

In 2002, Grace and I had joined an organized tour from Toronto to see the Maritimes. Although Halifax was an interesting city, we never expected to visit again in the future. Nine years later, Grace and I went to visit the HCAC

congregation in September 2011. I was interviewed by the church advisory committee and preached at the Sunday service. Pastor Daniel Ting had shepherded HCAC for almost ten years. He was a well-known pastor in the Halifax Chinese community. He was going to leave the church and they were looking for a new pastor. (Surprisingly, Pastor Ting died during a snorkelling accident a few months later). My wife Grace and I had a good time of fellowship with him and the HCAC congregation during the visit. The hospitality of HCAC impressed us very much. After we returned from Halifax, Grace realized that she needed to have a biopsy because of suspicious findings in a previous test. Her family doctor worried about Grace's health. Grace had another mammogram after the trip, and the result confirmed the need to do a biopsy. At the same time, HCAC had given me the first offer to be their pastor. What a dilemma I had in making the decision whether to accept the offer or not! I had a big struggle. I wanted to go, but I knew that it was not the right time. First, Grace needed time to do further examinations, and she might need treatment depending on the results of the test. Second, I really did not have peace of mind accepting the offer. After praying, we decided to turn down the HCAC offer. I felt consolation after making the decision. What a humour from God with this offer! God was teaching me how to make a God-pleasing decision.

After another month, Grace had the biopsy done at Vancouver General Hospital. In a few days, we received the call from Grace's family doctor in the evening. Her doctor was excited to let Grace know that the result was good and there was no precancerous condition. Grace and I knelt down and gave thanks to

God for the result.

I was perplexed by these two interesting incidents: HCAC's offer and Grace's biopsy. Was it an obvious block from God? After three years of waiting, I had caught a glimpse of the future, but it faded away very soon. What was God's plan for me? I needed to be patient and be still in the Lord always. Prayer is pressing into the relationship with God, focusing on Him more, adoring Him, thanking Him, asking for my needs, and learning His rhythms. I was experiencing more in-depth the peace with God through prayer. Especially during the time of waiting for God, God spoke to me through prayer. His inspiration in me was confirmed most of the time through prayer. I started to focus less on my abilities and attempted to listen to God's voice and follow out of a desire to be with God.

The Divine Intervention at the Jordan River

God's planning and timing were the best for me. I experienced His miracle of stopping the water flow at the Jordan River, and He led me to serve with HCAC. When I was actively looking at another ministry opportunity, He opened the opportunity of HCAC to me again at the right time.

Pastor Ivan Leung was not only the senior pastor of VCAC, he was also my spiritual mentor. I shared with him about my calling of God in early 2010. After he knew my passion for serving the Lord in a fulltime fashion, he encouraged me to listen to the voice of God patiently. In October 2011, he introduced Tom Tung from Chinese Christian Mission (hereafter called CCM) of Canada to me. Tom was looking for his successor in the rural mission. The rural mission reached out to small towns that had no known local Chinese Christian

fellowship or regular church support. CCM recognized this need and resolved to organize visitation teams to reach out to rural Chinese people with the love and the gospel of Christ. I traveled with Tom and visited the Chinese diaspora living in the remote areas of British Columbia and Alberta from December 7 to December 16, 2011. Since it was a faith ministry where the workers raised their personal financial support, Pastor Ivan would apply the church mission funding to me. I found that the Holy Spirit was also working among others' hearts in order to confirm my calling of serving Him.

Things moved interestingly after my short-term mission (STM) trip in late 2011. I received an unexpected email from John Healey. As the District Superintendent of the Eastern Canadian District of the C&MA, he wanted to learn about my status. I replied to him that I was still looking for an opportunity to serve. On the following day, I was supposed to have the formal interview with the CEO of CCM at ten in the morning, but the meeting had been delayed to eleven. I got John's phone call right before the interview. He wanted to present the offer from HCAC to me again. During the meeting with the CEO of CCM, I shared the interesting situation with her. She understood my situation. I needed time to pray about it and to confirm God's guidance. It seemed to me that God had opened another door for me at this critical time before I officially accepted the CCM offer. I shared the dual offer situation with Pastor Ivan. Pastor Ivan shared with me the difficulties in pastoring a small church in a small town. After praying with my wife, we accepted the HCAC offer before Christmas for the following reasons:

- I could feel peace and consolation after taking the second offer. I did not believe I would have had the same feeling if I had taken the first offer.
- I was quite sure leaving for Halifax was what God was guiding me to do. I had turned down first offer from HCAC in September because of Grace's health issue. We had thought we would be disconnected from the church after that, but the obituary news of Pastor Ting had reminded us of the needs of the church. Right before confirming the CCM opportunity, John Healey had presented the offer of HCAC to me again. Grace and I felt that we had built a wonderful relationship with HCAC. Because of Pastor Ting's fatal accident, it seemed God wanted to put the burden on us.
- With this second offer, Grace had much less reluctance toward the relocation. I believed that God had trained both of us how to move closer to each other so that we could reach a consensus in making a decision.
- We were ready to receive the challenge that was mentioned by Pastor Ivan, ready to face the solo pastor's loneliness. Most of the time, church problems would drain most of the pastor's time and energy. I believed Grace and I were ready to handle this.
- Compared with the CCM rural mission, going to Halifax would not require me to make many trips away from home throughout the year. As I get older, I was afraid that I might not have enough energy to handle the travelling.
- Compared with the CCM rural mission, it would give me more opportunities to build relationships with the people while taking care of the congregation. It would be quite hard to build relationships in a rural mission since we could

not see each other very often. My spiritual gifts are teaching, caring, service, etc. The CCM rural mission needed a person with a bigger heart for evangelism.

- I had been rejected by VCAC during their hiring process. On the contrary, HCAC had accepted me twice during their hiring process.

I was appointed by the Eastern Canadian District Superintendent of the Christian & Missionary Alliance to be the senior pastor of HCAC. I remembered King David's story. He was marked by God as the right person for the right job at the right time. God had designed me and knew how and where I fit perfectly into His body so that I would reach my optimum potential. I had to have confidence in God's design and placement in order to embrace my vocation.

Besides this interesting development of second offer, there was an untold story of divine intervention, a miracle, which I learned of later. In the book of Joshua, the Israelites marched down to cross the Jordan River with the Ark of the Covenant. The Jordan River water stopped flowing and the people crossed over to the other side of the river (Jo 3:15-16). In my situation too, God really stopped the flowing of the Jordan River so that I could do the crossing on dry ground. God intervened in the HCAC hiring process. A member of the pastoral searching committee shared the story with me. In between the first offer and the second offer, there had been another potential candidate going through the hiring process. She had visited the HCAC congregation, and the congregation had no problem receiving her. The pastoral search committee had even given her an oral offer. Before the search committee could send out the official letter of offer, the church

became busy with the memorial service of Pastor Daniel Ting. John Healey was one of the speakers at the memorial service. The female candidate was not recommended by the District Superintendent because he preferred male senior pastors in the Alliance churches. He asked the committee for other potential candidates, and they mentioned me. John Healey suggested contacting me again to find out my availability. It was really an intervention of God during the hiring process. God had clearly set me up for HCAC.

Moving from Sea to Sea

There are a thousand things I can do with my life: a thousand ways I can spend it and a thousand ways I can waste it too. But how many of them will enable me to have no regrets at the end? I believe that obedience to Jesus is the only path of no regrets. Moving from the Pacific Ocean to the Atlantic Ocean (from sea to sea) stretched me to reach out in boldness. “Sea to Sea” (Ps 72:8) is a declaration that Canada should be a church missional focus of the church within the family of the Christian and Missionary Alliance. I have dedicated myself to this desire. Not all of us are called to the mission field overseas. I was called to the mission field of Halifax within the territory of Canada after having lived in Vancouver for over eighteen years.

After I had accepted the second offer of HCAC in December 2011, I was scheduled to move to Halifax in April 2012. Grace was planning to move two months later in order to have time for the packing and shipping of our vehicle and household furniture. There was no direct flight flying from Vancouver, BC to Halifax, NS. I needed to switch to another flight in Toronto. My mind was really

mixed during the journey. As a Chinese immigrant in Canada, I preferred to stay in Vancouver, Calgary, or Toronto, where the biggest Chinese communities are located. There are many Chinese supermarkets and decent Chinese restaurants in the big cities. For the sake of spreading the gospel, the needs were bigger in those cities. If I had been given a choice, I would not have gone to Halifax. The second offer from HCAC was such a clear indication from God that I had to leave the land of familiarity behind. “In his heart a man plans his course, but the LORD determines his steps” (Prv 16:9). I was so excited with this opportunity of pastoral ministry. At the same time, I was anxious about the challenges to be faced in Halifax. As my mind climbed its upward stairs of obedience, the unfolding of reality was yet to come.

From my own viewpoint, I wanted God to reveal the next step before I took the first step of faith. Although God seemed to graciously offer me the first step over and over again, I have discovered that if I do not take the first step, God generally will not reveal the next step. Grace and I took the first step of accepting God’s calling in 2010. It was two years later that God showed us the next step of moving to Halifax. I have to be obedient to the measure of revelation God has given me if I want more of it, and that is why I get stuck spiritually. I want more revelation before I obey more, but God wants more obedience before He reveals more. I am afraid of doing what I have never done because it is unfamiliar territory. If I want God to do something new, I cannot keep doing what I have always done. I have to push past the fear of the unknown. I have to do something different. I have to leave my comfort zone, my cultural and social bubble. True

faith is not just lip service. True faith is believing and surrendering to God, offering myself as a living sacrifice to God and allowing my life to be used for His purpose.

Walking from The River

My spiritual journey has moved to a mature stage after responding to God's calling to become a pastor. I have applied my theological knowledge to church ministry. I submitted to the will of God and left my comfort zone. I used to serve in Chinese churches, and I was invited by Jesus Christ to serve the Chinese community in a bigger context. I was ordained as an Alliance pastor at the age of fifty.

This part of my life is described as walking from the Jordan River; my Christian life was disciplined and transformed. My wife and I spent five years shepherding a Chinese church in Halifax, NS. It was a training ground for me to become a better servant of God. I learned a lot through ministry challenges and difficulties. I started the Tyndale DMin program in 2015. I became passionate about helping people to grow in spiritual maturity as I was being transformed by the Holy Spirit. We decided to move back to Vancouver, BC after a church ministry opportunity with WAC came up in 2017.

The Alliance Ordination

The purpose of ordination with the C&MA in Canada is the public confirmation of a portable licensed worker for career ministry in the Alliance family. In other words, the portable license (valid across Canada) is reserved for people who are in ministry for the long haul. Therefore, the two-year process of

ordination is a time when skills, gifting, and calling are watched, examined and then, at the end, confirmed, not just by the local church but by the family of churches. “Ordination is a solemn observance whereby representatives of the church corporate, together with the elders representing the local congregation to set apart and charge those persons whom God has called already and equipped for ministry, through the laying on of hands and the offering of prayer for spiritual endowment” (The C&MA in Canada 2012, 46). I started my ordination process with the C&MA in April 2012, and I was ordained in August 2014.

There were academic commitments, preaching commitments, ministerial commitments, and an oral examination that needed to be fulfilled within two to three years. Since I was not well prepared for the oral examination, I failed my first ordination interview on June 21, 2013. It was a big blow to my ordination process but an important lesson for my spiritual growth. While I doubted whether I was a qualified pastor, God re-confirmed my calling through a hospital visitation. I visited an elderly sister, Mrs. Szeto, who was one of the founding members of the church. She was hospitalized because of a heart problem. When I visited her the day before she went to be with the Lord, I read Scripture and prayed for her. She could not talk, but the eye contact we made was profound. Her eyes were speaking to me, telling me that she experienced peace and comfort inside. Her facial expression confirmed that I was her pastor and she was one of my sheep in the pasture. This positive experience helped me to handle the disappointment of not doing well in the ordination interview.

After another year of preparation, I passed the oral examination in June

2014. During my ordination ceremony on August 8, 2014, Dr. John Healey shared the following verses: “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor” (Lk 4: 18-19). Jesus quoted these verses from Isaiah 61:1-2. Jesus had set the great example of preaching to those who are needy. Healey explicitly said that the baton was handed to me and it was my turn to preach to the needy.

The two-year process of ordination was an important milestone in my life. It was a transition from the career of engineering to pastoral ministry. It gave me time to adapt to the service of the kingdom of God. It gave others time to accept me to be their pastor in a local church context. It gave God time to examine and discipline my serving heart. It gave my supervisor the time to discover my spiritual gifts and personal character traits. It was definitely a memorable period in my life!

A Chinese Community Pastor

My experience of being a Chinese community pastor in a small city—which is part of my outward Life of Community—shaped me to be a more well-rounded pastor, to understand the needs of different people and become equipped to provide them with practical and emotional support. Some of the things I learned in those years act as a reminder of being righteous and a pastor of integrity.

I served as a community pastor in Halifax, NS. There were only a few

thousand Chinese people living in the city. Although I was not the only Chinese pastor, many people did know me. I certainly got to know many people as I became actively involved in community service. A pastor in a small Chinese community had many roles. The pastor did not just focus on prayers and the ministry of the Word (Acts 6:4). The Pastor was also a matchmaker, an English-Chinese interpreter, and a last-mile companion.

Many Chinese might think church attendees were good people and that the pastor must know many good people in the church. While this was true, I also had several unusual and apparently less spiritual requests during my years in Halifax. One time, a young female non-believer came to our Sunday service. When I greeted her after the service, she asked me to find a boyfriend for her with a few criteria. The man had to be taller than her, his age had to be under thirty, and he had to have a similar education background as her. It was funny that the church became a matchmaker club rather than a fellowship for the believers. It was a pity that she did not come to church very often. I also assisted a few couples by officiating at their wedding ceremonies.

Other situations of service embarrassed me. I was interpreting for a new Chinese immigrant doing an oral driving test in town. I did not know the lady very well. During the test, she hid a cell phone behind her bag and browsed for answers. Eventually, the officers discovered her cheating behaviour and called off the test. I was so embarrassed with her delinquent conduct. I might be considered her accomplice. The officer trusted me and let me go at the end. Sometimes people utilized the pastor for their own benefits, and the pastor's reputation was

damaged. The good intention of the pastor might end up with a negative testimony to others. It reminded me that I needed to pray for the people who I was helping. I needed to ask God to give them righteous hearts.

Living in the aging city of Halifax, I officiated funerals more often than weddings. God was training me to be a last-mile companion. A pastor walks alongside the patient right up until the end of his or her life. The journey of spiritual life begins with the baptism, when the believer is added into the body of Christ (1 Cor 12:13). The journey of life ends with the funeral, during which the pastor passes the souls of the believers to Christ. If it was an unbeliever, I would try to present their souls to Christ and hopefully, He would accept them. With my cases, many deceased were unbelievers, but their family members preferred me to officiate the funerals. They thought the deceased might have a better chance going to heaven. Mrs. Yeung was a patient with terminal cancer, and I had introduced her to Christ. I baptized her in her bed. It was my job to walk with her the rest of her journey. It was a journey of following and trusting God as He had planned for her, and then I would let Christ get hold of her when she left for heaven. Christ had taken Mrs. Yeung home. That was an honourable moment for a pastor to be able to walk with someone in the very last moments of life.

The Divine Healing

HCAC faced a big ministerial crisis in 2015, and I experienced divine healing at the end of it. The HCAC advisory committee received an English ministry proposal in May 2015. Our lay pastor had conducted a survey questioning whether the church met the needs of English-speaking people in my

congregation. She sent us the outcome of the survey that was completed by only the English-speaking people. The survey outcome revealed positive needs, and the lay pastor suggested separating the existing congregation into two groups during the sermon. The English-speaking people would listen to an English sermon instead of an English interpretation of the [Mandarin/Cantonese] sermon. This proposed a great challenge to our church because the suggestion would make a big change to HCAC. The advisory committee responded to the lay pastor's proposal in about a month after serious consideration. The advisory committee had consulted with other Chinese church pastors, and, after much prayer, suggested a bilingual approach; however, the English-speaking group did not accept the different approach. They blamed me, saying that it was my decision to go against the proposal. They dispersed rumours and slander about me on purpose. As a pastor, I desire to "make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord" (Heb 12:14). As a senior pastor, I had to be accountable to the church congregation and the governing board. I had to be careful with my words and reaction. It was hard for me to defend myself during the dissension. Although I was suffering a lot under the condemnation, I could hardly share my feelings with others. I tried to ignore the pain and suffering, and to shove them down into a deep and dark place. I tried to ignore the slander and persecution, but they festered and swelled until they consumed my joy and hope.

I was accused of not taking care of the young people who were the majority of the English-speaking people. I was perceived as an unloving pastor.

The heat was sickening, and I wanted to escape. I wanted to escape from this slander and persecution. I wanted to quit this hostile environment. I tried desperately not to face the pain. If you were to ask me how I felt in the painful moments, I would tell you that I felt abandoned, empty, and sick. I was in a spiritual war (Eph 6:12). I desperately needed help and encouragement. My help comes from the LORD of the creation (Ps 121:1-2). I needed to face the pain rather avoiding it, and even more importantly, I needed to see how the immortal God could meet me in the pain.

The church governing board had the responsibility to protect me from the condemnation, but they did not. On July 19, 2015, I humbled myself and discussed these misunderstandings and ruthless comments in details with the advisory committee. The committee came to a consensus and made an announcement on Sunday as follows:

The board discussed and clarified many misunderstandings among brothers and sisters concerning the senior pastor. Pastor Chow is entrusted continuously by the board in pastoring the HCAC congregation. In the meantime, the board encourages brothers and sisters to make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit, accept each other, watch for each other, and constantly pray for the unity of the church.

Having the board's support was an important aid and helped me in my perspective. However, the problem persisted and so did my trauma. The divisive group of people despised God, not me. They were fighting hard for the English ministry, but I wondered whether the proposal was the will of God. I was frustrated with their grievances. The divisive group had caused tremendous damage to the church and me. After the troublemakers left the church, it did not release me at all. I actually fell into a deep and dark pit. My soul was deeply hurt

internally. I was thrown into a hole of depression and mental collapse. I was in a deep agony. I was angry with the troublemakers. I was in a mode of inertia. I suffered from a lot of anxiety with the church ministry. The hole was a kind of death, helpless and exhausting. Life was reduced to one quest: get out and never be hurt again. Pits have no easy exits. At that time, I did not even have the energy to question God or make a complaint to God.

I resonated with the experience of the prophet Elijah. Elijah experienced God's supernatural strength in doing the extraordinary in 1 Kings 18. Elijah was bold and courageous, victoriously facing all kinds of odds, and he won the spiritual war with the prophets of Baal. However, in chapter 19, we found Elijah fearful, running scared, exhausted, depressed, and wanting to die. I was fearful, running scared, exhausted, depressed, and wanting to die during the incident of the church split. The Word of God came to me: "But the Lord is faithful, and he will strengthen and protect you from the evil one" (2 Thes 3:3). I then realized it was the scheme of Satan to draw me away from God (1 Pt 5:8-9). Being safe against Satan is putting on the full armour of God. God clothes us in His own armour (Is 59:17; Eph 6:10-17). The armour is not just for defence against Satan but gives us the strength of Christ to live out our identity in Christ. "We should live into this new life in Christ with boldness, losing our lives for his sake. And we should bear witness to Jesus Christ to those around us" (Billings 2011, 34). The divine healing started after I reconfirmed my identity in Christ.

Thank God that He has strengthened me with a few verses from Joshua chapter 1 (Jo 1:6, 7, 9, 18). "Be strong and courageous" is the key phrase for me.

Wherever I go, God is with me watching over me, protecting me, and providing the truth I need for every situation. Will I open my heart to His Word, apply it to my life, and allow God to change me so that He can use me in ways far greater than I can imagine? The Word of God revives me if I follow the directions for the medication that God has prescribed to me for the life and health of my body. “My son, pay attention to what I say; listen closely to my words. Do not let them out of your sight, keep them within your heart; for they are life to those who find them and health to a man’s whole body” (Prv 4:20-22). With Grace’s tremendous encouragement and support, I recovered. I was recovering from the depression gradually while I surrendered myself to Him again and again.

Spiritual Transformation and Discernment

Spiritual transformation also came as I reflected upon what had happened in the ministry of the church over the previous couple of years. I was spiritually transformed after the leadership crisis. The divine healing described above actually inspired me to seek for spiritual discernment before any decision needed to be made for the church. Self-reflection had drawn me closer to God as I came to realize His purpose for me, and self-reflection is a characteristic of the Life of Discipline.

After the English ministry crisis, the church was about to split. My wife and I were so frustrated with the divisive group. We had been called to move from Vancouver, BC to serve the church in Halifax, NS. We had tried our best to serve the church. Why would God allow the division to happen? The church was broken under my leadership. I had not expected this to happen. Things happened not

according to my plan. I was so stressed that the only thing left to do was pray. I looked spiritual to many people but actually lacked the humility to be a servant leader. Although I had asked the board to seek for His will, did I set the right example in seeking discernment? Before the spiritual transformation, discernment seemed to be a onetime effort of seeking divine guidance. Because of crises or serious problems, I had cried out to God like the psalmist, but discernment is actually a continuous practice in the Christian life. “Discernment is a spiritual understanding and an experiential knowledge of how God is active in daily life that is acquired through disciplined spiritual practice. Discernment is faithful living and listening to God’s love and direction so that we can fulfill our individual calling and shared mission” (Nouwen 2013, 3). It gave me a new concept of Christian discernment.

The leadership crisis reflected my poor relationship with God at that time. “The transformation of a church is rooted more in spiritual dispositions than in leadership qualities. Whenever you are in doubt or struggle, go back and work on your relationship with God. That is the key. Then you can work on your leadership” (Standish 2005, 190). A pastor with spiritual maturity will have worked on his or her personal dispositions first and then on his or her leadership skills (Standish 2005, 117). The apostle Paul prayed for the holy and faithful brothers in Christ at Colossae to be filled “with the knowledge of His will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding” (Col 1:9). Our advisory committee should have prayed earnestly to be filled with these spiritual dispositions.

The advisory committee tried to talk to our lay pastor, but she refused to

talk for a while. On August 29, 2015, we had a meeting with her in order to resume the communication channel. The transforming moment happened on August 29 during the conflict resolution meeting. After the opening prayer, everyone read through Psalm 46 in turn with a moment of silence in between. We had some quiet time after everybody had done the spiritual reading. The purpose of the scriptural meditation was to switch our focus from us back to God. “Be still, and know that I am God” (Ps 46:10). We needed to be aware of God’s presence in the meeting. Otherwise, the meeting might have ended up with coarse arguments, strong words, emotional complaints, lengthy discussions, etc. When everyone was ready, our lay pastor was the first to share her thoughts, followed by advisory committee members; her husband and I were the last ones to share. God surprised me a lot during the meeting. Our lay pastor just shared a few words, saying that after months of praying, her family had decided to try a Caucasian church. She had attended a Caucasian church a few times during the break. Much to my surprise, she did not argue with the committee about the English ministry decision. Even further to my surprise, nobody tried to keep her at the church. She had been with the church for five years. The committee members simply concurred with her decision and expressed their appreciation for her service. Her husband also consented that it was not an easy decision for his family. I had not expected this dramatic development. God inspired me to share with her that she had picked an easy solution by walking away from the conflict. I suggested that we should go into further prayer and seek spiritual discernment. I started praying, and everyone prayed in succession. Our advisory committee had listened

prayerfully to God and felt peaceful with her decision. The prayer time was inspiring, and it was moving that we all had come to a consensus. The board wanted to sift out the emotion before the final movement. Our lay pastor wanted to take a few days more before sending out the formal letter of resignation. The meeting was adjourned with the Lord's Prayer.

The senior pastor of an Alliance church is usually the chairman of the advisory committee. The chairman can decide how to run the board meeting. The leader's role is not to discern for the group but to set the context for discernment. The conflict resolution meeting became a meeting of group discernment in this scenario. I helped to clarify the issue. I had clearly expressed to them that the meeting was to focus on God and to discern His will on the divisive issue of the English ministry. I created an environment of free exchange of ideas and thoughts. Everybody could share, and they felt free to share before I shared so that my opinion would not influence theirs. I cultivated listening to God in everyone. God had urged me to spend more time in prayer rather than discussion. Wherever there was human disagreement, we needed more prayer. Seeking a discerning consensus was more important than just moving things forward.

What had kept our church functional was our reliance on an informational approach to ministry, rather than a formational approach (Carlson and Lueden 2011, 128). The informational approach intends to nurture the congregation with a lot of information or knowledge. The formational approach intends to transform and reform life according to God's will. The pastor would invite people to spiritually reflect on events, information, and life in a way that allows the Spirit to

speak through and lead our lives. Christians engage with God not only in the religious gathering but in every moment of life including the church meetings.

At the beginning of the meeting, I expected every one of the advisory committee would be standing on my side to defend the board's decision. Sometimes I wanted to get God on my side, but the Holy Spirit was definitely working among us during the process of spiritual discernment. The Holy Spirit had united our hearts and moved all of us to God's side. God was indwelling every Christian. He never stood on one side and fought against the other. Instead, we would always be on God's side. I talked to our committee members after the meeting. They all concluded that God had provided the best solution. When the advisory committee did not insist on its own way, God showed us His way.

After the transformation, I continued to practise spiritual discernment in both my personal life and our congregational life. I had to clarify God's purpose for me. God created everything with a purpose. I needed to walk my life in sync with God's calling. As the pastor of HCAC, I needed to encourage the church to follow God's call and make spiritual decisions rather than functional decisions. So, the spiritual model of congregational discernment had been promoted and would be adopted by our church ministry teams gradually.

Discernment is also not a one-time process. It requires that we constantly refine our discernment. Even when we have discerned what God is calling us to do, we have to return to discernment again and again to discover what new and wonderful things God may be calling us to do. Discernment is a lifelong commitment for the blessed church and its members.
(Standish 2005, 63)

I had experienced the benefit of spiritual transformation. I was passionate to embrace the process of spiritual discernment within our church context. I had

assumed that the blessed Chinese church must be prosperous with a large congregation. The church leaders would work perfectly with the senior pastor. My mentality was to have every decision being made in consensus and the healthy church would grow naturally. However, consensus is not easy to achieve: “God’s will is not always found in the consensus. The process of spiritual discernment values consensus not for its own sake, but for the purpose of seeing God’s will. Consensus reflects a sense of harmony through interaction - a first step toward corporate discernment” (Morris and Olsen 2012, 14). Prayer to God and human interaction are prerequisites to corporate discernment. A blessed church does not run without conflict or problem. A blessed church is not identified by the size of the congregation. A blessed church is not led by pastors but by the head of the church, our Lord Jesus Christ. “Becoming a blessed church means discerning and doing what God is calling us to do, and some churches simply aren’t called to grow. In fact, sometimes churches are called to die” (Standish 2005, 20). If it was the will of God to have a church conflict, there had to be a purpose for the church. Sometimes there is a lesson for the pastors and the congregation to learn. Sometimes it was a temporary retreat before spiritual revival can come. Sometimes it is the initiation of God for the church to go through spiritual transformation so that the church can please Him. I believe that God promoted the spiritual transformation and discernment for me.

Living Signpost

I had served with our lay pastor for more than three years. She used to serve with the young people in church while I had mainly served with the adult

congregation in church. Our ministries had a bit of overlap but not too much in the past. It used to work well because of the clear job descriptions. The English ministry issue had pushed us to work together closely. She always had strong opinions. Our working relationship deteriorated a lot in 2015. Through the crisis, I realized that she was to me what Henri Nouwen (2013, 80) called a living signpost: “God speaks regularly to us through people who talk to us about the things of God. Certain people become living signs that point us to God. Whether in life or in memory, the people God puts in our lives can help guide us and show us the way.” I was a faithful gentleman, merciful caregiver, well-educated teacher, genuine counsellor, passionate preacher, and humble pastor to many people; but the conflict with my coworkers had put a big question mark on my Christian characteristics. Was I really a pastor with deep dispositions of faith, hope, love, discernment, prayerfulness, humility, and servanthood?

Real theological reflection is thinking with the ‘mind of Christ’ (1 Corinthians 2: 16); it is reflecting on the painful and joyful realities of each day with the mind of Jesus, thereby raising human consciousness to the knowledge of God’s gentle guidance. This is hard discipline, since God’s presence is often a hidden presence that needs to be discovered. (Standish 2005, 161)

Personal reflection must precede action. I became more sensitive to my relationship with God through the sign of relationships with others. I believe that these relationships, for better or worse, can lead us to a more intimate communion with the triune God. I needed to pay attention to God’s possible guidance as it emerged from my mind, my life circumstances, others like families or coworkers, and the world around me. I needed to prayerfully appraise and affirm whether the guidance or inspiration was congenial to my call, compassionate toward others

and myself, and compatible with my situation and my competence. I needed to follow the divine guidance if I find that it is truly a calling from God.

The English ministry crisis had also served as a signpost pointing to the will of God for our church. I shared with the advisory committee how God was working among us at the meeting of group discernment. The HCAC leaders had realized the need to discern the will of God in order to follow closely with what God wanted our church to do in the future. I started embracing the spiritual model of congregational discernment within HCAC. I wanted to train our leaders to practise discernment in every church ministry meeting. I sought leaders who were willing to seek God's will over their own, willing to be transformed by the Holy Spirit, and willing to serve with their spiritual gifts over their functional abilities. The most important agent of transformation in believers is the Holy Spirit. Before the English ministry was ready to be launched, the right leader with the willingness to seek God's will and passion needed to be identified. I felt positive about the resolution of the concerns with the English speakers in my congregation. Thank God that those living signposts appeared with my ministry in Halifax.

The Dark Place

In the book of Exodus, one of ten plagues applied to the Egyptians was darkness. Total darkness covered all Egypt for three days (Ex 10:23). The darkness implied no light and separation from God. The Maritimes is described as a dark place according to my fellow pastors who were also serving in the Maritimes. There was a Caucasian Alliance church in the nearby city of

Dartmouth. The church pastor was one of my prayer partners. I prayed regularly with him at the McDonald's restaurant. I still remembered his sharing about a church split a while ago. The Dartmouth church had to close down due to the shrinking families and the financial shortfall after the split. There was another Chinese Alliance church in the adjacent province of New Brunswick. The church had gone through a church split recently and the Sunday service attendance had gone down fifty percent. Although Nova Scotia embraced a rich history of Puritan settlers, the faith communities experienced a dramatic decline of churchgoers. Churches in Nova Scotia were facing hard times. Attendance was dwindling. The population was declining because the province was one of the most economically disadvantaged regions of the country. Many churches were selling their properties because they did not have enough church members.

As previously mentioned, the Maritimes was the Promised Land to me. There was spiritual warfare in the Maritimes similar to in ancient Israel. Thank God for protecting HCAC. We had a few prayer warriors praying unceasingly every weekday morning for the church. Church adversity can be counteracted through prayer. Prayer is the light of the darkness, giving us the true hope of God. Let the light of prayer shine out of darkness (2 Cor 4:6). Our enemy Satan is reigning in the darkness. The fight is fierce on the battlefield of prayer. Many Maritime people have lost their interest in the Word of God. Maritime people are seeking spirituality outside of Christianity. Maritimes churches operate very independently due to the geographical limitation. God reminded me while preaching messages from 2 Corinthians, not to lose heart. We "are a chosen

people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that [I] may declare the praises of Him who calls [me] out of darkness into His wonderful light” (1 Pt 2:9). As the children of light, we should strive to drive away the darkness.

I have gone through some dark places in my life. The church dissension was one. The fear of death was another one. The most terrifying was the one with my wife’s passing, which will be discussed in greater detail in CHAPTER III: LIFE OF SURRENDER - MY WIFE’S PASSING. Although I know that I am a child of God and that He loves me, the fear of death has occasionally threatened to overwhelm me. Some people say it is hard-wired into human systems to avoid death. Death was not supposed to be part of God’s plan for His creation. The fear of death is not new to me, but it does come back from time to time. The fear intensifies when I am in times of depression. The fear happens more often when I am physically exhausted and in times of hardships. I have even felt the temptation to take my own life. The spiritual battle still continues today, but there is something different about the way I now face the struggle. Since I know I will be with God forever, there is no more fear of death for me in eternity. In fact, death is even beneficial to a Christian, because it sends me to God, with whom I am longing to be. I know that God still has plans for me while I am living on earth. “‘For I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the LORD, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future’” (Jer 29:11). I know that I am not done yet.

There is one more plan God has for me: to grow in spiritual maturity while

walking the journey of darkness. Saint John of the Cross (2003, 1) described the spiritual crisis as the “dark night” in his life journey. The “dark night” is a period of spiritual crisis without any sense of consolation. It can help the Christian moving towards a close relationship with God. “Who among you fears the LORD and obeys the word of his servant? Let him who walks in the dark, who has no light, trust in the name of the LORD and rely on his God” (Is 50:10). Trust the Lord in the darkness until the light returns. The Lord renews my tired spirit and continually puts before me the hope that each new day brings.

The everlasting truth to me is that the commander of the Lord’s army is with me all the time. The English ministry issue described above was an example of a dark place for me. The dark place becomes holy ground if the Holy Spirit is present. The dark place becomes a training ground if the Holy Spirit is teaching and guiding me. The dark place becomes a place of victory if the Holy Spirit is fighting the battle for me.

Moving Back to the Pacific Coast

Westwood Alliance Church was looking for the Cantonese pastor in early 2016. One of my fellow pastors from Vancouver let me know about the opportunity in September 2016. Grace and I visited WAC in late November 2016. We spent a few days meeting the elders, pastoral staff, and different church groups. We were greeted by quite a few VCAC friends who had moved to WAC. Grace met her former family doctor who promised to accept her again if we moved back to Vancouver. A new public transit line was officially opened during our visit, and it would shorten the commuting time from my home to WAC. We

had not sold our house in Vancouver when we left for Halifax, and we could stay at the same place after moving back. God had given me a few good signs about moving back to the Pacific coast. Everything went smoothly, and we had peace of mind after the visit. By God's grace, the pastoral offer came just two days after we got back to Halifax. Both Grace and I embraced God's calling again and accepted the offer gratefully.

The transitional period with HCAC before leaving Halifax went well. A Chinese pastor from Toronto would help HCAC temporarily before a permanent pastor was hired. Grace and I moved back from Halifax on the Atlantic coast to Vancouver on the Pacific coast in March 2017. We were welcomed and well accepted by the WAC congregation. The installation service was held at WAC on June 11.

Postscript

I had experienced a gloomy stage of my life after my unexpected layoff. It was easy to panic in the midst of the storm as the disciples did in the boat, with blank minds. I forgot who was by my side and assumed the absolute worst, but God would use the mess for good. I saw a perfect mess; God saw a perfect chance to train, test, and equip a future pastor. I saw an exile; God saw a promised land. I saw isolation; God saw the relocation of my mission field. I saw Satan's tricks and ploys; God saw Satan tripped and foiled. God's ways and thoughts were higher than my ways and my thoughts. Grace and I eventually moved to the Promised Land of Halifax, Nova Scotia because of the needs of the Chinese church. It may have been an incomprehensible and challenging move to many

people, but it was God's plan for me to experience the blessings of seeing beauty, truth, and God at work when I had never noticed it before. What a masterpiece of the work God was doing in my life!

After I walked across the Jordan River, I faced many difficulties and temptations in the Promised Land, like Jesus did (Lk 4:1-2). One of the temptations was trying to fix the financial crisis (because of the church split) by myself rather than relying on God. After the lay pastor left HCAC, the church expected a budget deficit in the following year. As a responsible pastor, I was eager to solve the problem with human wisdom. I suggested cutting all kinds of expenses from the church operation. I suggested a salary reduction for the pastor in order to save up for the church. However, the church advisory committee expressed a bigger faith in God. Jesus responded to the first temptation in the desert with the Word of God: "Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God" (Mt 4:4). If man does not live on bread alone, the body of Christ—the church—does not live on the bread alone either.

Jesus was the bread of life (Jn 6:35). Jesus wants me to understand that He is not only the Creator of life but the Sustainer of life. Jesus knows that my deepest needs are not physical but spiritual. Of course, He can provide the physical bread to the church too, but the physical bread is not the top priority. What is important is Jesus Himself, who is the source of all spiritual life. Jesus can do much more than multiply the bread. He is the bread, the spiritual bread from Heaven that gives spiritual life to the world. My spiritual life should also be nourished by the Sustainer of life. My spiritual life should grow in the likeness of

Christ. Christ is the transforming agent, like the heat required to grow bread dough. Without Christ, the spiritual life is inactive and sluggish. The spiritual life is not a performance, an acting out, or a profession, but the living of a godly man, no longer I but Christ who lives in me (Gal 2:20).

Jesus faced many challenges during His ministry on earth. In John chapter 10, Jesus faced the hostile Jews and escaped from their grasp. Jesus went back to the place where His ministry started (Jn 10:40). It was the Jordan River where He was baptized by John of the Baptist and confirmed by voice of Heavenly Father. After a short retreat from the crowd, Jesus continued to bear fruits with His ministry. The Jordan River to me was also the place where I received the calling from God. I learned from Jesus that I needed to revisit and review my vocational call when I faced challenges with my ministry.

What is God's calling for me? I am certain that God was calling me to serve the Chinese church in Halifax, but God does not guarantee that everything will be smooth for His children. It is not the will of God to live without struggle and tests. Sometimes a leadership crisis happens so that the work of God may be displayed in one's life (Jn 9:3). Sometimes a leadership crisis happens in order to achieve particular tasks. The apostle Paul had many struggles and tests during his missionary trips. Paul saw his being in prison as an opportunity to spread the gospel rather than as a hindrance to his ministry. Many saints have shared great testimonies about suffering and persecution. Actually, the Christian lives between the struggle of following God's purpose and forging our own purpose. Struggles or trials definitely help to shape my inward Life of Discipline and my upward Life

of Surrender. We are running back and forth to respond to God's call and our own interests. God still calls us even when we walk on our own way. "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose" (Rom 8:28). God's calling for me is to achieve His purpose.

What matters is how close we are with God. If I am close to God, I am more sensitive and responsive to His call. In order to keep in pace with God's will, I keep asking myself, "Am I able to give up my will for the sake of discerning God's will?" Humility, which is one of Christ's attributes, is a foundation of discernment. Church leadership requires humble or servant leadership. Humble leadership is leading out of spiritual discernment and God's power since I have given up my old self and am willing to work with God. Jesus Christ demonstrated humble leadership by washing the disciples' feet before the Passover Feast (Jn 13). Jesus Christ set me an example that I should follow. I strive to learn to have the same attitude as Jesus Christ. Writing this spiritual autobiography has given me the opportunity of revisiting and reviewing my vocational call. It gives me the opportunity to count the blessings of the Lord by looking backward from the current moment of my life. It also provides me enough wisdom and strength to move along the spiritual pilgrimage by looking forward from the current moment of my life. How did Jesus Christ call me in the very beginning? It was so impressive that I could be reconfirmed and strengthened when I remember it. "I can do everything through him who gives me strength" (Phil 4:13). Now I am proud to witness that God did empower me to go through

the struggles and tests. Sharing with people about God's calling is part of my downward Life of Testimony.

I have experienced miraculous guidance from God during the writing of my spiritual autobiography. I am going to provide an example of God's guidance. I reflected on the metaphor of Jesus' baptism and the crossover (*'abar*) experience, two separate incidents in my life. These two incidents were a few years apart. I had not noticed the link between the two until in the later stage of writing while I tried to connect them. The perfect connection was at the "Jordan River." The incidents happen at the Jordan River. The two unrelated incidents in my heart become so meaningful to me suddenly. Although the "Jordan River" is symbolic, it serves as the reminder from God for my spiritual revival. I visited the Jordan River in 2004. It is a popular place for baptism and sightseeing. The image of the Jordan River is very clear in my mind. Joshua, Jesus, and I are inspired, encouraged, strengthened, reconfirmed, and revived at the Jordan River. Jesus was much closer to me than I thought. The insight of the Jordan River from God gives me the strength to overcome any fear and the darkness in my life. I may feel disappointment and despair at times, but I can be joyful and give thanks in all circumstances (1 Thes 5:16-18). While I may not always feel joyful, God asks me to give thanks in all circumstances because He knows that the feeling of joy begins in the time of thanksgiving.

During the writing of my spiritual autobiography, I found that I have asked many thought-provoking questions during my life. These questions not only urged me to look for the answers, they led me into a deeper meaning of life. A

deeper life is rooted in the design of the Creator. In order to live a deeper life, I have to be aware of the Creator, my heavenly Father. My spiritual autobiography revealed the progress of my awareness of the heavenly Father throughout the three stages. This contemplating practice continually strengthened my relationship with the Father through Jesus Christ. Contemplating the presence of God is the primary spiritual discipline in my Life of Discipline.

I am not different from many Christians. Spiritual reality can be like that. Many see without seeing, hear without hearing, and smell without smelling. After all, in my natural mind, I simply cannot comprehend certain spiritual realities. However, Jesus invites my contemplation and reflection. He gives me new eyes to see, new ears to hear, and a new nose to smell. The person who has met Christ and in whom the Holy Spirit dwells sees things differently; I can now see what I never saw before, I can now hear what I never heard before, and I can now smell what I never smelled before. Now I realize that the inward Life of Discipline helps me to live in my identity in Christ by the Spirit. This Life of Discipline shapes me into spiritual maturity because Christ lives within me. On my own, I can never understand the things of God, but when Christ lives within me, He gives me new eyes to see His truth. However, I need more than the Life of Discipline to experience all that God has for me. There are other parts of the model still to be discovered.

CHAPTER III:
LIFE OF SURRENDER - MY WIFE'S
PASSING

The life of my wife, Grace Tsang, also has a purpose in the eyes of God according to Scripture, and I can verify it by identifying those life events while we walked together. Our marriage lasted twenty-three years, from 1994 to 2017. I can see that she was not just a wife but also a spiritual companion, a coworker, a helper, and a coach to me. After my wife's passing, I have been getting more and more awareness of God's sovereignty in my life through surrendering to God. As previously mentioned, the second part of the Fourfold Spiritual Journey (FSJ) model is the upward Life of Surrender. I am going to elaborate my upward Life of Surrender in the following sections.

I give thanks to God for my wife, Grace, that we walked the spiritual journey together with a united spirit. We shaped one another for years. We did the theological training together from 2002 to 2012 with Alliance Bible Seminary and Carey Theological College. We learned together and discussed all the time how to write the theological papers. We enjoyed the times of studying the scriptures and the times of struggling with those assignments together. We encouraged one another to equip ourselves in order to make a bigger life impact on others. We both received our Master of Divinity from Carey in 2012 before heading to Nova

Scotia. Moving from Vancouver on the Pacific coast to Halifax on the Atlantic coast was a hard decision for Grace because she had to leave the city we had lived in for eighteen years. The city of Vancouver was a comfort zone for both of us. Eventually, we trusted and obeyed God and followed His will. We both learned a lesson of surrender during the church split in Halifax. Her heart of obedience set an example for me to live a Life of Surrender after she went home with the Lord. Grace submitted herself to me as she did to the Lord (Eph 5:22). I loved Grace very much, and I would like to learn from her heart of submission.

In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus asked His Father twice to remove the cup of suffering He was supposed to drink, but He submitted to the Father's will. It was an example of Jesus' Life of Surrender. I learned from Jesus Christ. I asked my Father many times why He took away my beloved wife, but I submitted to the Father's will. Suffering from the loss has been a valuable lesson for me of how to live a Life of Surrender.

The Beautiful Life Ended with Prayer

Prayer was an indispensable part of our life of marriage. We believed that God united and shaped us in prayer. We used to hold hands and pray before meals every day. We used to pray together before going to bed occasionally. We had attended the weekly church prayer meetings together since our marriage. The evening before Grace's passing, we still attended the church prayer walk in the church's neighbouring community. Although Grace and I were not arranged into the same group, we both walked and prayed for an hour. Before going to bed on the night before Grace's passing, we prayed together for the church and ourselves.

I really felt blessed that we ended our earthly interaction and ministry with prayer.

It was about two in the morning on July 14, 2017, that Grace woke up and threw up everything. She fell unconscious and was sent to the Vancouver General Hospital (VGH) emergency room by ambulance. While waiting at VGH emergency, Grace was basically unconscious. From time to time, I called her name to see whether she was regaining consciousness. At one time, I could feel that she gave me a few gentle grips with her left hand. I believed that her right brain was still working at that time. Now I realize that it was her indication to say goodbye to me and to ask me to take care of myself. It was not a desperate and hopeless grip but a warm signal to me. Although I am still frightened when I think about what happened that night, the grip was a memorable and precious moment for me to hold onto in the future. As a pastor, many dying church members have responded to my voice while I visited them in the last stage of their lives. Again, it worked for Grace, she was my sheep listening to Jesus' voice as her shepherd (Jn 10:2) and saying goodbye to me as my wife and dearest love. She responded to me by giving me a final greeting.

After having an MRI (Magnetic Resonance Imaging), she was diagnosed with serious bleeding of the left brain (aneurysm). Detecting an aneurysm beforehand is difficult since the symptoms are rare. The specialist told me that Asians are at a higher risk of getting one. He talked to me in a private room and told me that nothing could be done from a medical perspective. I felt really hopeless and asked God why He had allowed this to happen to me. Grace's sister, my senior pastor, and a few church members of WAC accompanied me during the

final hours. The life support machine was removed before noon. My beloved wife Grace went with the Lord peacefully at about one in the afternoon. Although Grace is temporarily separated from me, our spirits are still connected through the Lord Jesus Christ. My wife, who is one of “The Signs of Grace” from God, cannot be taken away from me through death. “Once we are willing to see human persons as living signs and all of life as the continuing manifestation of God’s love, we can begin to see through the relationships in our life as gifts of God that help mold and shape us, reminding us of the inner quality of God’s own love” (Nouwen 2013, 68). I believe that Grace’s spirit continues to mould and shape me through her personal legacy, our memorable events, and our spiritual journey.

The Celebration of Life Service

On July 28, 2017, over one hundred people attended Grace’s visitation. On July 29, 2017, there were about four hundred people attending Grace’s celebration of life service as well. The theme of the memorial service was “The Signs of Grace.” There is a Chinese song with the same name. I appreciate what the church did for Grace and me with the celebration of life service. I would like to share a few comments from the community of faith:

Pastor, good morning, I just didn’t know what I could say to you, so I decided to keep silent for a while. But they asked me to share about something memorable about Pastora Grace. I spent some time to think... but almost the conversation between her and I was: I asked her how you know that you were called by God to be a pastor? She said, she did not get the call from God, but Pastor Wai Fung did. So, she decided to go to seminary with you to assist you. And she helped you quietly with her devoted heart. She demonstrates godly humility to me and she is indeed a good woman and a good wife.

Grace and Wai Fung dined with us the weekend before Grace’s passing. After they had moved back from Halifax, Grace had to readjust the new life

in Vancouver and she did not have any idea what the next step is for her. We prayed together, asking God for His guidance. Now I realize what Grace's next step is. Grace has finished her earthly assignment. God had brought her back to His place and assigned a new task for her in heaven.

The last few months were the sweetest months that I have ever had in my spiritual journey. David and I have been longing for a couple to be our close spiritual buddies who can be our mentors, teachers, friends and peers to guide us and walk with us in our spiritual journey. We were thankful that God answered our prayers to bring us Wai Fung and Grace. Although the time was short, we had some good quality time together. The dinner we had the weekend before was a beautiful enjoyable evening that we could enjoy good food with each other's company. From what I knew, Grace was a gentle and caring soul. She was like a big sister who took care of me. She always smiled. As you all know that I love to talk. She turned out to be a great listener. Many times, before I finished telling my random jokes, she had already started giggling very hard. She was truly a great sister. I was amazed that I could still learn from her after she left. Shortly after Grace left, WF said he had no idea how to use the washer and where to get the hair product after he finishes the one he has. This tells me what a great wife Grace was that she took care of WF very well. I need to learn from her to become a good wife. Grace's life has a strong impact on many people's lives including mine. I am glad that her impact continues even after she left, as I learned more about her history. God is good and I thank Him for letting WF and Grace to come into my life.

I have seen many signs of God's grace in my life, and there is no doubt that my wife, Grace, is the biggest sign to me. She is a sign of God's grace leading me to God. She had been my sweetest partner for years. She took care of my daily routines for years. We served together at VCAC, FLC, and HCAC for years. We received theological training together for years. She responded to my calling and moved to Halifax with me in 2012. She supported my ministry with WAC till the very last day of her life. She is a forever sign living in my heart like Christ, abiding in me until eternity.

God was Silent

During the first few months after Grace passed away, I kept asking God

why He was so ruthless towards me. “Out of the depths I cry to you, Lord; Lord, hear my voice. Let your ears be attentive to my cry for mercy” (Ps 130:1-2). I made complaints to Him, asking why He took my only partner away and we had no children. Sometimes I stayed in bed and did not want to get out of the bed. Sometimes I just kept running outside for hours in order to release my affliction so that I could sleep well when I was tired. Sometimes I just wanted to give up the things I was doing. I thought about dropping out of the DMin program. I thought about leaving Vancouver, BC because I felt a sentimental attachment to the city. I thought about moving back to Hong Kong to get closer to my other family members. God seemed very quiet those days. I received no answer to my questions, complaints, and affliction. I prayed to God, “O God, do not remain silent; do not turn a deaf ear, do not stand aloof, O God” (Ps 83:1). I prayed to God, asking, “What you wanted me to do in the next step of my life?”

Grace went to be with the Lord in July, and my senior pastor took a planned sabbatical leave from September to December. Since I was the only remaining pastor of the congregation, I needed to officiate three funeral services and two weddings. Some church members asked whether I could manage them. I went twice to the same funeral home and crematorium where Grace had gone. Grace and I had done the premarital counselling for one of the young couples. When I married the couple, I felt sad that Grace could not attend the wedding. I was told that the message of encouragement during the wedding ceremony touched many people since I shared a few examples of my own marriage. I was strong outside, but actually my soul was extremely delicate. Many things evoked

emotions inside me. I kept asking God why He was so harsh with me. I acknowledged to God that He wanted to shape me through this hardship, but why me? Again, God was silent in those days.

On September 25, 2017, when I searched over my bedroom for our safety box key, I could not find it, but I accidentally found a Valentine's Day card I had given to Grace in 2004. Since it was well kept in her bedside drawer, it must have been precious to her. The picture on the front page was a broken heart, and the text said, "This is me without you." I crashed, and my heart was really broken at that moment. I sat down by the bedside for a few hours and stared at our wedding pictures hanging on the wall. I cried to the Lord, "You were so cruel; why do I continue to follow you?" Again, God was silent, but David's Psalm 39 came to me: "But now, Lord, what do I look for? My hope is in you.... I was silent; I would not open my mouth, for you are the one who has done this" (Ps 39:7, 9). I became silent too because I knew He was the one who allowed all these things to happen to me. God must have a purpose for me. Maybe it was a test of faith to make me a better pastor. I have surrendered myself to Him since then.

The Fourteenth Day of February, May, and July

A few memorable days in my life fall on the fourteenth day of the month. My mom passed away on February 14, 1992; February 14 is easy to remember since it is also Valentine's Day; Grace and I got married on May 14, 1994, at VCAC; May 14 is easy to remember since it was also the day of Israeli independence in 1948; and the biggest impact to my life was on July 14, 2017, when Grace went to be with the Lord unexpectedly. July 14, it is hard for me to

believe because my marital status has changed to “widowed.” The first Valentine’s Day after Grace’s passing threw me into the valley of depression since it brought back the heartbroken memories of the two important women in my life: my mom and my wife. Surviving those holidays was not easy for the first year. I felt an incredible loss in my soul on the fourteenth day of every month. I knew that my normal life would not be restored. My life would not be like it was. I had to learn to live a Life of Surrender like Jesus Christ. I look upon the Lord always for His strength and wisdom in this new normal life.

Less than a year has passed since the loss of my wife, and it is true that my life is never going to be the same. My life is never going to work out as I had dreamed it would. I am still living with intense grief, still missing Grace deeply, although I have passed the stage of being numb. My prayer is not that my wife would be restored to me. The passing of Grace reminds me that God has control of life. My prayer is simply that I need to be obedient to God. I have found Jesus to be close to me in my journey. I realize that Jesus is my best friend, walking with me for the rest of my life.

My Spiritual Family Support

I was commissioned by WAC to be the pastor of the Cantonese ministry on June 11, 2017. Grace passed away a little more than a month after the commission. I was a new pastor to WAC, and I was supposed to shepherd the congregation, particularly the young families and career group. Instead, I needed holistic care from my spiritual family. The WAC community had a joint prayer meeting on the evening of July 14 to pray for the church and me. I was

accompanied by two brothers in Christ for the first few nights after Grace's passing. My parents had passed away years ago, and my siblings are living in Hong Kong. I do not have many relatives in Vancouver except Grace's sister's family. Although I am living alone in Vancouver, my spiritual family (WAC) takes care of me well. Grace and I used to provide hospitality to the church congregation; I have learned a valuable lesson about hospitality. "It is not the movement from weakness to power, but the movement in which we become less and less fearful and defensive and more and more open to the other and his world, even when it leads to suffering and death" (Nouwen 1975, 108). Although I was weak and vulnerable, I became less defensive and more open to the care offered by my shepherded flock. I accepted the church's scheduled meal plan from different families for the first month after Grace's passing. I feel much more comfortable going to have meals at church members' homes now.

I am back to single again. One of my job descriptions with WAC is to shepherd the young families. I was supposed to care for the husbands while Grace was supposed to care for the wives and the kids. I felt disabled and incompetent without the help of Pastora, as the church called her. I felt ashamed that I might not be able to do young family ministry anymore. However, God's work is amazing, and His thoughts are not my thoughts, neither are His ways my ways (Is 55:8). There was another similar accident that had happened about a year prior to Grace's death. A husband of the family of four went into coma for a month after brain bleeding. However, they were able to stop the bleeding, and the man lived and returned home after months of hospitalization. Today, the husband is still

meeting with us in the fellowship group. The fellowship group learned a great lesson. My tragedy had also united the young family fellowship group to support me, the disabled pastor, and they are becoming mature through the time of adversity. I am well accepted by the fellowship group, and I continue to serve the group wholeheartedly today. "Training for service is not a training to become rich but to become voluntarily poor, not to fulfill ourselves but to empty ourselves; not conquer God but to surrender to his saving power" (Nouwen 1975, 108). I have learned how to surrender myself to His thoughts, His ways, and His will.

Since I was so reliant on Grace's cooking, it took me a while to begin to feed myself properly. For the first month after Grace's passing, the church arranged for me to eat with a different family of WAC daily. The bonding with a few church families was getting stronger. After a few months, I started dining with the same family every Wednesday night. The family consists of three generations: a couple with two kids and the mother's parents. I love eating dinner with this family because I feel like part of the family. I cannot eat together with my immediate family members because they are not in town. Since I eat alone most of the time during the week, I look forward to eating with the church family every week. They brought me into their normal week and conversation. I feel loved by the Lord through these loving families. I did not ask for these offers, but God arranged them and all I needed was to trust and obey.

Jogging as a Therapy of Grief

Grace and I both believed that daily exercise is important to our health. I used to jog outside while she liked to use the treadmill daily. It was a physical and

spiritual discipline for both of us for years. The time when I jog has to be flexible because of the impromptu schedule of the pastor. I love jogging because it offers me the time of solitude and silence. I do prayer, meditation, and contemplation of my Lord during jogging. I am a deeply sensitive, tender, and nostalgic person. During those days of deep sorrow, I lost most of my desires and interests. My soul was wandering in an emotional elevator. My emotions kept going up and down like an elevator. My soul fell to the very bottom if I was touched by any memorable episodes with Grace. My soul might be lifted when I felt the love of Christ through others. Jogging became the best therapy for my grief since I could move my focus from Grace to our Lord.

God opened the door of binding me together with others through jogging with them. I was glad that some WAC people shared my spiritual discipline of running. A team of six runners from the Love Fellowship group was formed before the Vancouver Eastside 10K race. They surprised me by giving the team the name “Run with Grace” in memory of my wife Grace. We dressed in the specially designed pink running t-shirts and ran together on September 16, 2017. A few more people were added to the group after the 10K run. The “Run with Grace” team did another run on May 6, 2018. The “Run with Grace” team with the pink t-shirts did a hymn presentation on July 14, 2018, to remember Grace after a year (see Figure 3: “Run with Grace” Team Presentation). I was surprised that over a hundred people attended the death anniversary gathering at WAC.



Figure 3: “Run with Grace” Team Presentation

In the beginning, the purpose of the team was to remember Grace by running together. I realized that there is a lot of personal reflection or *Examen* being made during jogging. *Examen* is a spiritual exercise introduced by Ignatius of Loyola. Ignatian spirituality can be described as an active awareness of God with an ongoing dialogue with God. *Examen* is a daily prayerful reflection in order to be aware of God’s presence and to discern God’s will. Later, I found that these insights might enrich my sermon messages which benefit others. I started sharing my spiritual reflections with my “Run with Grace” teammates through the WhatsApp Messenger platform. I hope that we can shape one another through the deep sharing of our spiritual life experiences.

My brother, Wai Ching, in Hong Kong ran for over twenty years. I shared my jogging experiences with my sister, Carol, in Hong Kong. It was so amazing

to me to learn that Carol and her husband are also running these days. After I shared my habit of jogging through my Sunday sermon, I was approached by a few other runners from the congregation, and they showed interest in running together in the future. These days, I am well connected with the Cantonese congregation through the spiritual discipline of running. As I remain obedient in the care of my body, I believe that Grace's spirit continues to shape me, my immediate family, and the churches that we both attended.

Running the Marathon

I am a runner, which is the fruit of my Life of Discipline. I have participated in three Halifax Half Marathons, one Vancouver Half Marathon, and one Vancouver Marathon in the past. I try to run daily in order to train for a long-distance run. It took me eight months of training to finish my first official full marathon. During the run, I imagined Grace was running with me, and I kept asking God to grant me the strength to finish it. By His grace, I finished it without injury in four hours and twenty-five minutes. I have started running longer distances since Grace's passing. Running has become a sign of self-control, the spirit of Grace, and God's empowerment. I am now running for Grace because she would like to see me both physically and spiritually healthy. I am running for God, like Eric Liddell. Liddell's Olympic event, and his Christian faith that honoured God, are described in the Oscar-winning 1981 film *Chariots of Fire*. God makes me run for Him, and I would like to dedicate my gift of running to Him.

When I run alone in a marathon, it is called a RACE, but when God runs

with me in the marathon, it is called GRACE. A RACE becomes GRACE because the purpose of running is not medals but for God's presence. I encountered God through the running GRACE. GRACE to me is as follows: Gratitude, Resting, Adoration, Confession, and Examination. The first four components are related to God while the last one is related to myself. Gratitude to God is a feeling flowing from my heart during running. Every day is a blessing from God if I can wake up, eat, work, study, run, serve, sleep, etc. Every day is an opportunity to build my faith, love other people, and place my hope in the Lord. Every day is a spiritual race towards the goal where I shall get the rewards and meet my beloved wife. Resting in God is a promise of Jesus Christ. "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest" (Mt 11:28). I can cast all my stress and anxiety on Him, and He gives me rest. Adoration of God is a natural response while observing nature during running. I love running in nature and admiring God's creation. I do a prayer for confession of sin regularly during running after self-examination. My favourite verse of self-examination is "Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting" (Ps 139:23-24). God has called me to draw close to Him, seeking His forgiveness. Sin separates me from God; He is perfect and cannot tolerate the existence of sin. I am so blessed to receive this running GRACE while running marathons.

I would like to share one more insight from doing the marathon run. There were many volunteers on both sides of street cheering me on and motivating me to keep going. Sometimes they yelled my name enthusiastically, and I really felt

the encouragement. Similarly, I needed someone to encourage and motivate me in my life journey. God sent Grace to me as my lifetime coach and motivator. She always stood by me and was a silent support. Without her coaching, I might not have a healthy body for running. Without her coaching, I might not have been able to run through those spiritual struggles. Without her coaching, I might not have been able to finish my theological training. Thank God for both His amazing grace and my beloved Grace.

How Grace Has Shaped Me

After Grace's passing, I realized that I had suffered from the illusion of immortality. "When we load our fellow human beings with immortal expectations, separation or the threat of it can release uncontrollable sentiments" (Nouwen 1975, 119). I realized that all my retirement planning with Grace had become futile and meaningless. I could not hold my tears whenever I thought of her. The tears I have dropped in the last few months are significantly more than what I had wept in my whole life preceding Grace's death. I was challenged to convert my protest against God's sovereignty into a prayer, lifting myself beyond the boundaries of my existence to Him who holds my life in His hands and heart with boundless love and mercy (Nouwen 1975, 131). Grace's passing helped to break my hidden illusion of immortality by moving my focus from my earthy treasures to eternal treasures. Mortality is an earthy curse while immortality is an eternal treasure. I need to "turn [my] eyes upon Jesus and look full in His wonderful face. And the things of earth will grow strangely dim in the light of His glory and grace" (Teng 1986, 396-397). When I focused on the Lord's hope, I felt

joy again, and one day the Lord will wipe away every tear (Rv 21:4). I started turning myself away from the illusion of immortality and enjoying God's eternal presence. Prayer helped me to gently empty myself and offer more room to God. "The prayer of the heart requires first of all that we make God our only thought. That means that we must dispel all distractions, concerns, worries and preoccupations, and fill the mind with God alone" (Nouwen 1975, 147). Again, prayer works perfectly because it provides the opportunity for God to shape me during the time of suffering. "Yet you, Lord, are our Father. We are the clay, you are the potter; we are all the work of your hand" (Is 64:8). I trust that our Father can use these struggles and my response to shape me into an instrument useful to the Master.

Sometimes since Grace's passing, I have felt ashamed to pray for the sick to be healed. I did not feel that my prayer had been heard, especially since it had not worked with the case of Grace. Why do they continue to trust and allow me to pray for and comfort others? I believed it was my calling of God to comfort others. During the church staff retreat in November 2017, the speaker shared seven biblical images of the Holy Spirit: Wind, Water, Oil, Fire, Comforter, Dove, and Cloud. At the end of the session, we were asked to stand up and to be empowered by the Holy Spirit through a particular image. I stood up for the image of Comforter. I asked to give up my grief and be comforted by the Holy Spirit. I was empowered to provide comfort to others while I received comfort. I am grateful to everyone for shaping me into a pastor of comfort. "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of

all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God” (2 Cor 1:3-4). This comfort is not just the biblical words but how God has fortified me by filling me with the everlasting assurance of His sovereign grace during my grieving. I have received His comfort these days, and it is my turn to help those in need.

I have started sharing a bit more about my personal stories of spiritual formation through the Sunday sermon these days. I have preached on how God transformed me spiritually after Grace’s passing. I have noticed that my message has moved from a mostly informational to a formational approach. An informational message is more about the exegesis of Scripture, the doctrine of Christianity, the theological concepts, etc. A formational approach is more about the daily life application of the scripture, the pragmatism of Christianity, and the theological reflection. A formational approach promotes spiritual growth. My congregation may be inspired to be transformed after seeing my transformation. The theme of spiritual formation has become obvious now in my Sunday sermons. I used to preach Roman 5:3-4, “Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope,” with the example of the apostle Paul. Now I can preach with my own example of suffering from loss, persevering through running, building a Christlike character, and hoping to see Christ and Grace in heaven.

My wife’s passing has introduced me to suffering. Although my sufferings are small compared with Job, I experienced a similar encounter of God. “My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you” (Jb 42:5). The sufferings had

disturbed my communication with God. Actually, God was not silent but speaking to me through this suffering. I learned to be silent because God had allowed this suffering to happen to me. God has a purpose for me through sufferings. I have learned to persevere, to rejoice in suffering, and to hold tightly the hope provided by my Lord Jesus Christ. Since I have experienced the spiritual formation of abiding in Christ, I am able to share my transformation with others. However, I need more than the Life of Discipline and the Life of Surrender to experience all that God has for me. There are other parts of the model still to be discovered.

CHAPTER IV:
LIFE OF TESTIMONY -
LIFE IMPACT LIFE JOURNEY

My life is a testimony of Jesus Christ. It is not just a verbal testimony but a living testimony. A living testimony is not only words that openly acknowledge my personal experience of following Jesus Christ but a Christian lifestyle. A living testimony must be public because its purpose is to let others know what has taken place. Every moment of my life should be a testament or evidence to other people that Jesus is alive and is changing my life. I testify by my words and actions. If my life is a testimony for Jesus Christ, then I should reflect the image of Christ as I follow Him. My Life of Testimony is giving opportunity for the Spirit of God to impact the lives of others as I bear witness to Jesus Christ. As Jesus transforms others and me by the Spirit, I draw attention to that work of God. Others are invited to come, notice, and be surprised and amazed by what God is doing. Hopefully, this causes them to question what God is like and how they might get to know Jesus Christ. Jesus did not make impact in the classroom but in His daily life. The disciples followed what Jesus Christ was doing, and I try to ask young believers to follow me as I follow Jesus Christ. "Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did" (1 Jn 2:6). I designed the Life Impact Life concept to help others apply Jesus' Life of Testimony. My vocation is to simply show others

how to walk a Christian life.

The Life Impact Life journey is designed to imitate the four aspects of Jesus' life journey and to live out these four aspects in order to be like Jesus Christ. Both training and practice are essential to the success of the Life Impact Life journey. The Life Impact Life journey is envisioned as a spiritual journey more than just a discipleship program. A spiritual journey may give a less legalistic impression than a discipleship program. The journey is to help others walk a Christian life with the FSJ model. The journey consists of the component of four-dimensional life journey and the component of celebration retreat. Each life journey orientation laid out in the model comes with a set of spiritual disciplines in order to help walking the respective journey.

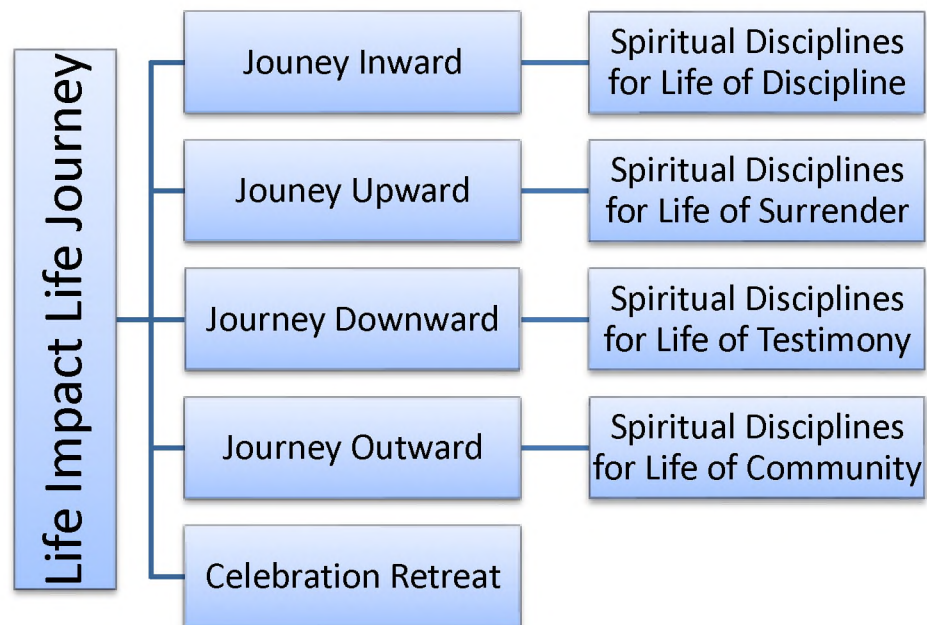


Figure 4: Life Impact Life Journey Chart

I am going to elaborate Life Impact Life journey in terms of both the

C&MA global context and the WAC local context. Following the sections on context will come the details of the FSJ model, the Life Impact Life journey manual, and the instructions for those trying the spiritual disciplines.

Christian & Missionary Alliance (C&MA) Tradition

The C&MA grew out of the vision of Rev. Albert Benjamin Simpson. “What motivated Simpson was the unquenchable thirst for more of God. As Simpson went deeper in Jesus, he was compelled to go further on mission” (The Christian and Missionary Alliance in Canada 2018, 4). He had a passion for serving the poor and neglected people in New York City and around the world in the late nineteenth century. It began as parent and child organizations in 1887: the Christian Alliance and the Evangelical Missionary Alliance. The two organizations used to have their own focuses. The Christian Alliance focused on fostering a deeper spiritual experience, particularly with regard to holy living and healing. The Evangelical Missionary Alliance focused on foreign missions, preaching the gospel to the neglected millions of unreached people groups. The two groups eventually merged in 1897.

The logo of the C&MA (see Figure 5: The Fourfold Gospel) reminds us of the four important identities of our Lord Jesus Christ. The cross typifies Jesus Christ as our Saviour. He died on a cross for our sins, and only through Him we can be reconciled with God (Jn 3:16). The laver or the basin illustrates Christ as our Sanctifier. The laver, used in God’s temple for washing, represents being cleansed from sin by the power of the Holy Spirit (1 Thes 5:23-24). The pitcher symbolizes Christ as our Healer. It speaks of oil for divine life and physical

healing (Is 53:4-5). The crown stands for Christ as our coming King. He will come back to this earth and reign forever (Acts 1:11). The Fourfold Gospel is the Christological summary on which the core values of the C&MA are based. Christ is not only our Saviour but also our Sanctifier, Healer, and coming King. There is no doubt that the supremacy of Christ is an essential doctrine of Alliance tradition. The doctrine of Christ affirms that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. “The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word” (Heb 1:3a). Jesus Christ is one person of the triune God. “For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and you have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority” (Col 2:9-10). Alliance people share this rich legacy, as well as our founder’s passion for participating in Jesus’ Great Commission.



Figure 5: The Fourfold Gospel

(Extracted from the website of C&MA in Canada with written permission on Jun 21, 2018)

The distinctive teachings of C&MA are mission (reaching out) and deeper life in Christ (reaching in or growing deep). “The unique vision of the Alliance has been to marry mission and the deeper life. Emphasis on the deeper life did not cause the early Alliance to become so inwardly focused on holiness that they

neglected mission” (The Christian and Missionary Alliance in Canada 2018, 15). On the contrary, deeper life stirred passionate mission focus. The Alliance family is a very young denomination. The Alliance legacy from Simpson and other leaders is rich, but it has not yet been well implemented in the local Alliance churches. Both deeper life and mission are the right emphases but there is no consolidated model for the deeper life emphasis in the local Alliance church, such as WAC. With the FSJ model, I try to address the needs of the deeper life emphasis in WAC.

The deeper life and mission intertwine with one another. “Spiritual formation must never be a private experience or an entirely interior experience. It should express itself in an active love for others” (Pettit 2008, 175). The deeper life concerns inward spiritual experience while mission concerns outward spiritual experience. To love God and our neighbour is the way of practising Christian spirituality as an outward behaviour. As an Alliance pastor, Tozer (1978a, 373) shared a similar thought:

We should repent of our lack of love and determine from this moment on to make God the object of our devotion. We should set our affections on things above and aim our hearts toward Christ and heavenly things. We should read the scriptures devotionally every day and prayerfully obey them, always firmly willing to love God with all our heart and our neighbor as ourselves.

Tozer’s life reflected a climate of love in the C&MA, undergirding the outreach. The demonstration of love is the jewel of spiritual formation. The Alliance people have worked hard to live out both the deeper life and mission. In general, the deeper life is always the prerequisite for mission.

The Alliance family has tried to develop a culture in each of the local

churches that leads to the development of disciples who produce other disciples. The development of disciples is not just their receiving the cerebral knowledge of Scripture but a holistic transformation to become a person of deeper life. A person of deeper life must have a regular practice of spiritual disciplines. “Whereas discipline without discipleship leads to rigid formalism, discipleship without discipline ends in sentimental romanticism” (Nouwen, Christensen, and Laird 2010, 18). In order to do a better job in spiritual formation, the Alliance family could learn from other spiritual traditions.

The wholehearted devotion towards the goal of Christlikeness is also the key purpose of contemplative traditions. Many of the Desert Fathers had a single-hearted devotion toward the goal of Christlikeness (Foster 2001, 26). The role of spiritual discipline is prominent in the contemplative tradition. “The purpose of discipline is not only moral perfection (development of virtue for its own sake) but self-transcendence, transformation in Christ from glory to glory, as by the Spirit of the Lord” (Merton 1973, 117). I have talked about contemplation and the deeper life experience in Chapter I. By constant attention to the intimate relationship with the Lord through the pursuit of the deeper life practices, divine transformation will automatically follow. The spiritual disciplines give time and space for divine transformation. When the heart is right with the Lord, right action will automatically follow because the obedient heart will listen to the Lord and please the Lord with the right action.

I find that many Christians are struggling to live differently than the secular world. Jesus is our Sanctifier who can grow the individual believer

spiritually, but the emphasis on the deeper life of individuals is comparatively lacking. There is a big need for discipleship training in the local church so that the believers know how to follow Jesus Christ closely. When the believers are not disciplined in the local church, they may become lazy in their personal journey with God. If the church is not encouraging them to grow in their spiritual maturity with God, they are likely to become slack in building a close relationship with God. They can grow unhealthily in the church. Such spiritual laziness may lead to temptation and stumbling. On the contrary, a proper discipleship training may lead one to enter into greater heights in their journey with God.

While the Fourfold Gospel model focuses on the roles of Jesus Christ, the FSJ model focuses on how to follow Jesus Christ. The FSJ model tries to focus on the spiritual growth of the individual believer within the setting of the local church. The FSJ model tries to present the two distinctive aspects of the Christian life (mission and deeper life) clearly.

The Context of Westwood Alliance Church (WAC)

After I moved back to Vancouver in March 2017, I began serving at WAC in Coquitlam, BC. WAC is a typical Chinese Alliance church in Canada. There are three adult congregations—multicultural, Cantonese-speaking, and Mandarin-speaking—worshipping under the same roof. All three congregations are growing, and I am currently the pastor of the Cantonese congregation. The average Sunday attendance of the Cantonese worship service is three hundred people (noted in Sep 2018). The church is running short of volunteers and helpers across the church ministries. The church leaders always encourage volunteers to serve rather than to

spend time with God. The church leaders from my congregation shared with me that they would like to develop an intimate relationship with God. The component of reaching in or growing deep is generally overlooked in the church ministry.

I am accountable to the senior pastor, Rev. Paul Chiu, who oversees all three congregations. Basically, my role with the congregation is to oversee various ministries, to provide pastoral care, and to promote spiritual formation. It is my responsibility to grow our church members into spiritual maturity. I am passionate to develop a model of spiritual formation for my congregation. After I accepted Christ in a Hong Kong church in the 1980s, I did not have the opportunity for discipleship training. I felt the need to develop a kind of discipleship training program to help young believers with WAC. The Life Impact Life Journey, based on the Fourfold Spiritual Journey (FSJ) model, tries to help believers from my own congregation in Vancouver. I have developed the FSJ model in order to share a better representation how to walk a spiritual journey with our Lord Jesus Christ. The FSJ model lays a solid framework from which the Life Impact Life journey was built.

The Fourfold Spiritual Journey (FSJ) Model

Jesus' life is a perfect demonstration of the spiritual journey. Four aspects of Jesus' life on earth have been identified for this model of spiritual formation. Each aspect of Jesus's life is a particular kind of journey. The four aspects of Jesus' life are (i) the Life of Discipline, (ii) the Life of Surrender, (iii) the Life of Testimony, and (iv) the Life of the Community (see Figure 6: The Fourfold Spiritual Journey Model). After washing the disciples' feet, Jesus says, "I have set

you an example that you should do as I have done for you” (Jn 13:15). The apostle Paul asked his readers to follow Jesus Christ like he did: “Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ” (1 Cor 11:1). He wanted to finish the race well and complete the task the Lord Jesus gave him (Acts 20:24), and he did. Paul said, “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith” (2 Tm 4:7). There must be a goal set for the race. The FSJ suggests a four-dimensional goal: (i) inward (→Christ), (ii) upward (↑), (iii) downward (↓), and (iv) outward (Christ→). The one walking the life journey with Jesus will definitely be transformed gradually. Sometimes change is instantaneous, and sometimes it is slow and challenging.

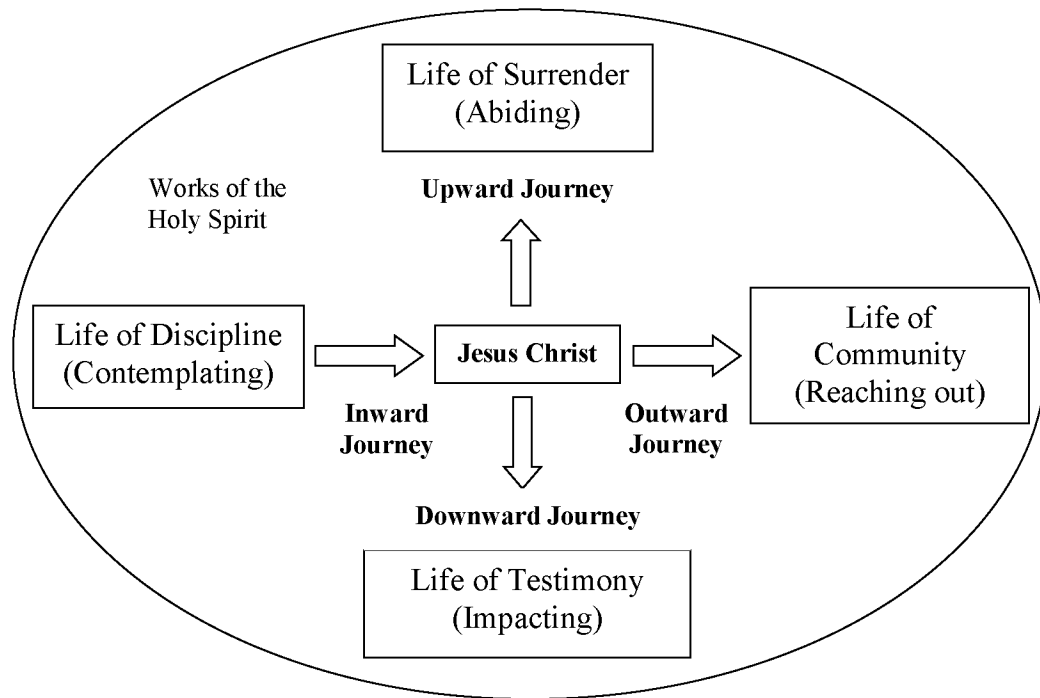


Figure 6: The Fourfold Spiritual Journey Model

Each dimensional goal relates to a respective aspect of the life of Jesus.

First, Jesus Christ and the Father are one (Jn 10:30). Following the Life of Discipline helps the Christian to contemplate the presence of God, and it is a journey inward. The arrow pointing toward Jesus Christ (→Christ) symbolizes that disciples get closer to the Son of God. Second, Jesus Christ obeyed His Father's commands and remained in His love (Jn 15:10). Following the Life of Surrender helps the Christian to abide in the will of God, and it is a journey upward. The arrow pointing upward from Christ (↑) symbolizes that the disciples can rely on the heavenly Father through Jesus Christ. Third, Jesus Christ humbled Himself by coming down to the earth. Jesus Christ bore witness to His Father, and he declared that His Father also testified about Him (Jn 8:18). Following the Life of Testimony helps the Christian to impact others' lives, and it is a journey downward. The arrow pointing downward from Christ (↓) symbolizes that the disciples bear witness to Christ by their lives on earth. Fourth, Jesus Christ left His comfort zone of heaven and served the community. Following the Life of Community helps the Christian to reach out to the world, and it is a journey outward. The arrow pointing away from Christ (Christ→) symbolizes that the disciples bring Christ, or the good news, to the community.

This model of spiritual formation, which captures the significant four aspects of life journey of Jesus, is supported by rich scriptural reference (see the four following sections of Jesus' Life). Individual spiritual growth is feasible by living the life that Jesus Christ modeled for His disciples. This model works well with the Alliance model of the Fourfold Gospel. As an Alliance Pastor, I have realized my spiritual journey has a fourfold pattern similar to Jesus' journey of

life, and this finding became the framework of this research portfolio. I am going to elaborate each aspect of Jesus' life journey in the following paragraphs.

Jesus' Life of Discipline

Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed. (Mk 1:35)

Each day Jesus was teaching at the temple, and each evening he went out to spend the night on the hill called the Mount of Olives, and all the people came early in the morning to hear him at the temple. (Lk 21:37:38)

Yet the news about him spread all the more, so that crowds of people came to hear him and to be healed of their sicknesses. But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed. (Lk 5:15-16)

Jesus Christ lived out the Life of Discipline because He had a close relationship with the Father. At the heart of Jesus' life ministry was self-discipline. His devotional life or ministerial life starts with an inherent ability for self-control through discipline. He leveraged the art of self-discipline by creating a daily habit that helped Him to have a balanced life during His earthly mission. In the daytime, Jesus was busy with his ministry in the community. He prayed regularly during His earthly ministries. He modeled for us how to do early morning prayer (Mk 1:35). In the early morning and the night-time, He withdrew to quiet places and prayed. Jesus withdrew regularly and intentionally. Jesus usually began the day with the prayer. The Mount of Olives or the Garden of Gethsemane seemed to be a quiet place for Him and His disciples to pray (Mt 26:36; Mk 14:32; Lk 22:39).

Withdrawing does not mean moving to the desert and becoming a hermit. Withdrawing reconnects the Christian to the heavenly Father in prayer. Jesus reconnected with Himself through reflection and reconnected with His disciples

by spending time with them. Withdrawing recharged His physical and spiritual energy from depletion. His body needed food, water, and sleep; and His soul needed rest too. He went away refreshed and refilled, ready to face the daily demands of life. Withdrawing reengages life with new vision, new passion, and new strength. It gave Jesus' soul breathing room and propelled Him to new heights and greater adventures.

Jesus' life demonstrated the valuable practices of the contemplative tradition. Jesus practised various spiritual disciplines during His incarnation like solitude, silence, prayer, fasting, meditation, contemplation, and attentiveness to the movements of the disciples' heart. Jesus enjoyed the solitude and silence in the midst of a busy schedule of ministries. He spent the night in prayer before choosing the twelve apostles (Lk 6:12-13). He fasted for forty days and forty nights before facing the satanic temptation in the desert (Mt 4:1-11). Jesus might have been meditating on Deuteronomy while fasting in the wilderness because that was the Scripture from which He framed His answers to Satan. Jesus read the scriptures regularly on the Sabbath in the synagogue (Lk 4:16). He had to have spent much time in meditation on the Law of Moses before He could summarize the first and greatest commandment in the Law for the Jewish scribe (Mt 22:37-38). When Jesus saw the two disciples with anxious faces on the way to Emmaus, He responded with a deep knowledge of the scriptures that allowed the thinking of the disciples to be transformed. Jesus was attentive to the movements of His disciples' hearts. The spirit of attentiveness resulted from the Life of Discipline through which Jesus could read God's heart and His disciples' hearts. A spirit of

attentiveness works well with stilled and quieted souls (Ps 131:2) but not with irritable souls. Jesus has lived out the journey inward in terms of the Life of Discipline.

Jesus' Life of Surrender

As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love. (Jn 15:9-10)

“Abba, Father,” he said, “everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will.” (Mk 14:36)

Jesus Christ lived out the Life of Surrender because He obeyed the Father's command to fulfill the mission of redemption. “Think first of the origin of that life of Christ in the Father. They were ONE—one in life and one in love. In this His abiding in the Father had its root” (Murray 1979, 100). Christ's abiding in the Father is rooted in the triune union of the Divine Being. During Jesus' incarnation, He knew that He was one with the Father. With this immortal fact, the Son's abiding in the Father and His love would have been perfectly possible. He knew that the Father loved Him. Jesus Christ was not afraid of losing the Father by giving up all to the Father. The Son has total dependence and obedience on the Father. “The Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does” (Jn 5:19). The Father designed the plan of redemption, and the Son implemented the plan of redemption according to the Father's will. The Father is the designer while the Son is the implementer. They work together to accomplish the task.

Jesus Christ alone is God. He is all-present, all-knowing, and all-powerful. His divine attributes seem abstract to human beings. Jesus made the abstract

concrete through the incarnation because He appeared to the world (1 Jn 1:1) two thousand years ago. “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth” (Jn 1:14). Jesus “did not consider equality with God but made himself...in appearance as a man, he humbled Himself and became obedient to...death on a cross” (Phil 2:6-8). Jesus’ life of surrender could not be questioned while He was dying on the cross. The Son did not grasp the Father’s glory. “Think of the glory of this life of Christ in the Father’s love. Because He gave Himself wholly to the Father’s will and glory, the Father crowned Him with glory and honor” (Murray 1979, 101). Because the Son was so humble, the Father “exalted Him to the highest place and gave Him the name that is above every name, that...every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father” (Phil 2:9-10). The Son submitted to the Father’s authority without any questions for the sake of bringing all the glory back to the Father. The Son submitted to the will of God even at the time of persecution and suffering. “Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done” (Lk 22:42). The incarnate Christ had a divine nature but had laid aside His glory in order to achieve the task of redemption. Jesus Christ was willing to give up His high position and privileges in heaven. He chose to limit the use of His divine powers, which were given up when He came to earth as a human being. Jesus has lived out the journey upward in terms of the Life of Surrender.

Jesus’ Life of Testimony

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. (Jn 1:1,

7a)

Jesus answered, “Even if I testify on my own behalf, my testimony is valid, for I know where I came from and where I am going. But you have no idea where I come from or where I am going. You judge by human standards; I pass judgment on no one. But if I do judge, my decisions are true, because I am not alone. I stand with the Father, who sent me. In your own Law it is written that the testimony of two witnesses is true. I am one who testifies for myself; my other witness is the Father, who sent me.” (Jn 8:14-18)

A light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel. (Lk 2:32)

Great crowds came to him, bringing the lame, the blind, the crippled, the mute and many others, and laid them at his feet; and he healed them. The people were amazed when they saw the mute speaking, the crippled made well, the lame walking and the blind seeing. And they praised the God of Israel. (Mt 15:30-31)

Jesus Christ lived out the Life of Testimony; He said so publicly in the Gospel of John. The Pharisees challenged Jesus, saying that He appeared as His own witness and His testimony was not valid (Jn 8:13). However, Jesus said, “I am one who testifies for myself; my other witness is the Father, who sent me” (Jn 8:18). Since Jesus is the Son of God and was sent by the Father, He has the ultimate authority to testify to Himself and the Father. The Pharisees and the world did not know Jesus and His Father. Therefore, Jesus Christ came to the world to preach the gospel and asked them to repent. Nicodemus was a Pharisee, and Jesus told him that the world did not accept His testimony (Jn 3:11). Jesus clarified His mission to Nicodemus and the world saying, “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him” (Jn 3:16-17). Unfortunately, the Jews considered Jesus’ testimony perverse and put Him to

death on the cross. Jesus' Life of Testimony did not end on the cross but pushed to the climax as He rose again and appeared before His disciples. For forty days, the resurrected Jesus visited His followers, encouraged them, and prayed with them. As He told them about the persecution and suffering yet to come, He gave them an everlasting promise: "Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Mt 28:20). Jesus' life impact did not stop after He returned to heaven. Soon afterward, He sent the Holy Spirit to help to strengthen His disciples. Jesus Christ successfully testified to Himself by revealing His divine nature as the Son of God and successfully bore witness to His Father by accomplishing His assigned mission on earth.

A testimony should be public because its purpose is to let others know what happened. Jesus Christ is "a light for revelation to the [unbelievers] and for the glory to [the believers]" (Lk 2:32). Jesus Christ is God's living and active Word that brings life. His incarnation, or appearance in the world, was public and impacted many others' lives implicitly. Many people were amazed "when they saw the mute speaking, the crippled made well, the lame walking and the blind seeing" (Mt 15:30), and they praised God the Father. Jesus' divinity drew the attention of the crowd. Jesus generated a dynamic process of life transference, which was meant that He grew His followers into spiritual maturity and facilitated them towards servant leadership in the future. The principal aspect of Jesus' plan was to recruit men and women who could bear witness to His life and carry on His ministry after His ascension. Other than the implicit impact, Jesus also had an explicit impact through teaching and preaching. After Jesus preached the Sermon

on the Mount, “the crowd were amazed at his teaching, because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law” (Mt 7:28-29). Again, Jesus’ preaching testified to Himself as the Son of God. Jesus has lived out the journey downward in terms of the Life of Testimony.

Jesus’ Life of Community

Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. (Mt 9:35)

After this, Jesus traveled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. (Lk 8:1)

When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, “Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today.” (Lk 19:5)

Jesus Christ lived out the Life of Community because He served the community to meet their needs. He is the second person of the triune God. “The inner dynamic of the triune God is love—the relationship shared between Father and Son which is the Holy Spirit. But the Creator is none other than the triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—the divine community of love” (Grenz 2000, 489). He loved and cared about the community very much. Jesus often visited the home of the siblings Martha, Mary, and Lazarus in Bethany (Lk 10:38-39). Because their village was only a couple of miles from Jerusalem, Jesus could find refuge among trusted friends when He encountered hostility in the capital. Jesus probably ate with the family regularly because Martha was gifted in hospitality (Jn 12:1-2). Jesus praised Mary because she chose to draw close to Him. Mary anointed Jesus with perfume and wiped His feet with her hair (Jn 12:3). Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead in order to show the glory of God (Jn 11:40-44).

Jesus also visited Peter's house and healed his mother-in-law (Mt 8:14-15, Mk 1:30-31). These are the great examples of Jesus meeting needs of the community.

Jesus was the rabbi, or the teacher, of many of His followers. "Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside. He taught in their synagogues, and everyone praised him" (Lk 4:14-15). Jesus taught on a mountainside by the Sea of Galilee (Mt 5:1-2). Jesus taught His followers how to pray the Lord's Prayer (Mt 6:9-13, Lk 11:1-4). Jesus was a willing teacher. He was willing to go anywhere, like to the Samaritan well (Jn 4:6) or the road to the village of Emmaus (Lk 24:13). Jesus loved using parables to teach His disciples. Jesus depicts the story of a friend who has knocked his neighbour's door at midnight and asked for three loaves of bread (Lk 11:5-13). The story drew a sharp contrast between the reluctant neighbour and the Father. If such a neighbour eventually rouses, how much more will the Father respond to persistent prayer? Jesus praised the boldness of the one who is not afraid of asking. "For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened" (Lk 11:10). Jesus encouraged his disciples that they should always pray and not give up (Lk 18:1). These are the great examples of Jesus teaching among the community of God.

Jesus did not just visit His friends and His followers. He also visited the outcasts of society who were not accepted in the Jewish community. The outcasts of society included the Samaritan women at the well (Jn 4:7), the sinful woman (Lk 7:39), the leper (Lk 5:12), and Zacchaeus, the chief tax collector (Lk 19:2). Jesus visited and ate with the tax collectors and sinners all the time (Mk 2:15; Lk

19:5). He was willing to meet anyone like Pharisees (i.e., Nicodemus in John 3:1) or tax collectors (Lk 19:2). He was willing to go anytime like at noon (Jn 4:6) or at night (Jn 3:2). Jesus transcended the Jewish tradition and spent time with the sinners. Jesus came to save the sinners (Lk 19:10). The sick person needs a doctor. The sinner needs a saviour. The lost sheep needs a shepherd. These are the great examples of Jesus reaching out to the rich, the powerful, those on the margins and the world. Jesus has lived out the journey outward in terms of the Life of Community.

The Life Impact Life Journey Manual

Jesus invites His disciples to walk in His footsteps toward spiritual maturity. Although the Life Impact Life model is envisioned as a spiritual journey more than just a discipleship program, a journey structure is designed to help achieve the goal. The Life Impact Life journey was created to help WAC people living out Christ during their journey of faith. The rationale behind the training program is to get familiar with and practise the fourfold spiritual journey: the journey inward (\rightarrow Christ), the journey upward (\uparrow), the journey downward (\downarrow), and the journey outward (Christ \rightarrow). It is always reminded that the deeper life is always accomplished with the work of the Holy Spirit. The goal of the training program is to enable believers to walk a Christian journey with a balanced and holistic spirituality. This program manual includes the following six subchapters: (i) The Inward Journey; (ii) The Upward Journey; (iii) The Downward Journey; (iv) The Outward Journey; (v) A Day Retreat; (vi) Revision of the Life Impact Life journey. Each journey consists of the description of the monthly theme and

the instruction of the related spiritual discipline.

The horizontal journey is moving from inward to outward, from self-oriented to community-oriented, and from being to doing. The theory behind the journey inward and outward has been discussed in chapter one. The vertical journey is emitting from the center into the surroundings, to spread the fragrance of Jesus Christ, to reflect the beauty of Jesus Christ, and to let God receive the glory through Jesus Christ. The journey inward and upward are more private while the journey downward and outward are more communal. This model gives a complete presentation of spiritual formation, both private and communal aspects. This program puts emphases on both theory and practice. The mentor undertakes the different practices along with the mentees. For each month, this program introduces a spiritual discipline that may not match the monthly theme completely. However, the monthly spiritual discipline matches well with the journey in orientation. The respective fourfold spiritual practices are contemplating (\rightarrow Christ), abiding (\uparrow), impacting (\downarrow), and reaching out (Christ \rightarrow). Solitude & silence, meditation, and self-reflection are grouped in the category of the journey inward. The theme of the inward spiritual practice is contemplating. Prayer, fasting, and worship are grouped in the category of the journey upward. The theme of the upward spiritual practice is abiding. Sharing testimony, devotional reading, and inductive Bible study are grouped in the category of the journey downward. The theme of the downward spiritual practice is impacting. Simplicity, fellowship, and visitation are grouped in the category of the journey outward. The theme of the downward spiritual practice is reaching out. In general,

the spiritual disciplines help to consolidate the respective life journeys. For each practice of spiritual discipline, helpful instructions will be given for the purpose of demonstration.

The Life Impact Life journey is designed as a one year program. The enrolment is not limited to young believers. As long as one has the heart to be a true Jesus follower, he or she is welcome to join. It is suggested that the group of mentees meet every two weeks. They are encouraged to practise the spiritual disciplines. The spiritual disciplines practised in the first three months should continue to be practised all the way to the end of the training. Starting from the sixth month (spiritual discipline of worship), the mentee is expected to attend a corporate worship service regularly. After learning the proper methods of studying Scripture, the mentee is encouraged to study the scriptures systematically and theologically. Both theory and practice are important to the success of the program. Theory provides understanding of the Biblical foundation and what the right practice is. Practice helps the mentee to understand the theory and implement the theory to achieve the deeper life desired. Spiritual formation began this way with Christian belief and then the practice of the spiritual disciplines.

Table 1: The 12-Month Life Impact Life Journey

12-Months	Journey Orientation	Theme (Theory)	Spiritual Discipline (Practice)
Month 1	Inward	Jesus' Life of Discipline	Solitude and Silence, Meditation, Self-Reflection
Month 2	Inward	Seeking Holiness	
Month 3	Inward	Enjoying the Presence of God	
Month 4	Upward	Jesus' Life of Surrender	Prayer, Fasting, Worship
Month 5	Upward	Submitting to Parents and Earthly Leaders	
Month 6	Upward	Observing the Church Ordinances	
Month 7	Downward	Jesus' Life of Testimony	Sharing Testimony, Devotional Reading, Inductive Bible Study
Month 8	Downward	Engaging the scriptures	
Month 9	Downward	Teaching the Word of God	
Month 10	Outward	Jesus' Life of Community	Simplicity, Fellowship, Visitation
Month 11	Outward	Building the Church	
Month 12	Outward	Caring for the Needy	
End of Year	All	A day retreat is to celebrate and summarize the FSJ.	Sabbath

Contemporary discipleship training is very different from in the time of Jesus. Contemporary disciple training is conducted in the classroom, happens at a fixed time, and follows a predefined curriculum. On the other hand, the consociational discipling model of Jesus emphasizes the relational over the pedagogical (Krallmann 2002, 58). Jesus spent three years building a close relationship with the Twelve. “The basic leadership role which Jesus adopted for the process of discipling the Twelve was not one of a task-oriented supervisor, but rather a person-oriented mentor” (Krallmann 2002, 60). Life is not the offspring of the program or task but the offspring of life. Jesus pursued shoulder-to-shoulder mentoring because formation is much larger than information. Jesus mentored the Twelve as close companions or friends. Jesus nurtured them into spiritual maturity in their daily lives. Jesus’ life impacted their lives in a natural

and gradual fashion. After three years of relational discipling, the immature and timid men had become spiritually led apostles.

The mentor of the Life Impact Life training program is expected to imitate Christ's model of discipleship and increase their interaction with the mentees outside the classroom. For example, if the mentor had to do some visitation, he or she could bring his or her mentees along during the visitation, like Jesus did. The mentees learn from the mentor how to care for the sick or the poor. This is why the program has dual focuses, both theory and practice together. It tries to embrace the skill of "shoulder-to-shoulder mentoring." It tries to empower mentees to serve in their journey of faith. The Life Impact Life journey is not just classroom training. It provides the opportunity of practising spiritual disciplines and serving the community.

The Inward Journey

And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory. (Eph 1:13-14)

Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit. (Eph 2:19-22)

Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest. (Mk 6:31)

It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God--that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. (1 Cor 1:30)

Make every effort to live in peace with everyone and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord. (Heb 12:14)

The purpose of the journey inward is to draw close to God. The right to be with God is based on the new identity in Christ. Christians have a new identity in Christ since they placed their faith in Jesus Christ. Having been “baptized into Christ” (Gal 3:27) means that they were identified with Christ, having left their old sinful lives and fully embraced the new life in Christ. Ephesians 2:19-22 describes a picture of union with Christ. “In Christ,” all Christians are living in the same household, having the same access to the Father by one Spirit (Eph 2:18). “In Christ,” all Christians receive the spiritual blessing (Eph 1:3), the promise (Eph 3:6), and the hope (Eph 1:12). Christians have a longing to be in Christ because Christ is the source of blessing, promise, and hope. Christians are supposed to live godly lives in Christ in any circumstances (2 Tm 3:12). A godly life in Christ means God is always present in Christians’ lives.

God put us into Christ when we were born again. In Christ, we became one with the living Person (Christ) of wisdom, righteousness, holiness and redemption. “Here is the preciousness of 1 Corinthians 1:30. God has not only given us Christ but Christ’s experience; not only what He can do but what He has already done. From His death onwards, all that He has is ours” (Nee 1974, 80). Christ is the Saviour, the Sanctifier, the Healer, and the Coming King. Christ in us can make us wise, righteous, holy, and saved. Therefore, Christ through the Holy Spirit is working inside us all the time.

God is spirit (Jn 4:24) and is always present inside the believers (Eph 1:13-14). One of the divine attributes is omnipresence. “Where can I go from your

Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence?” (Ps 139:7). The jewel of the contemplative life is being aware of God’s presence at all times. The awareness of God’s presence simply means spending time being with God. It means putting our focus on God rather than ourselves during the day. Jesus invites His disciples to take a break at a quiet place during a long day. The quiet time creates time and space for Jesus Christ, who is the Sanctifier, to consecrate His disciples. It is good to embrace the practice of daily devotionals. Seek quiet time to reflect on Scripture, express gratitude for the blessings of God, and invite God into challenging relationships and decisions. Withdrawing and focusing on God is what the one should be doing because the one needs to continue to function properly in the future. As Jesus’ disciples practise the contemplative life, they will find themselves gradually transformed by the triune God who they contemplate.

The work of the Holy Spirit is indispensable when disciples want to live a contemplative life. The contemplative life is also the Spirit-filled or the prayer-filled life. The Holy Spirit is the third person of the triune God. “Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption” (Eph 4:30). Throughout life, many temporary things could fill up the inner being of disciples, but Christians are commanded to “instead, be filled with the Spirit” (Eph 5:18). It is a discipline that allows this filling up. The inner being of the disciples should be filled with the everlasting Spirit.

Month One: The Life of Discipline

Jesus’ life is a perfect demonstration of the spiritual journey. Four aspects of Jesus’ life on earth have been identified for this model of spiritual formation.

Each aspect of Jesus's life is a particular kind of journey. The four aspects of Jesus' life are the "Life of Discipline," the "Life of Surrender," the "Life of Testimony," and the "Life of the Community." During the first month, this Life Impact Life model introduces Jesus' Life of Discipline and the practices of solitude and silence.

Ezekiel 36:16-38 discloses God's initiative to restore Israel. For the sake of God's holy name, He would bring His people back from exile and He would transform them. The Sovereign Lord promised, "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws" (Ez 36:26-27). In the New Testament, the church is God's people. God has the same initiative to restore His people and transform them. The church has received the Spirit, and the Spirit urges the church to follow His guidance. Jesus Christ calls His disciples to submit to God's way of discipline.

"The life of discipleship is a life of discipline—the two words come from the same root. A disciple is a disciplined person" (Henrichsen 1988, 18). Spiritual discipline can help in building an intimate relationship with the Father. "In the spiritual life, the word 'discipline' means the effort to create some space in which God can act. Discipline means to prevent everything in your life from being filled up" (Jones 2005, 32). With less spiritual hindrance, a disciple can build an intimate relationship with the Father. "Spiritual discipline means making less of ourselves, so we can be more aware of what God is up to" (Jones 2005, 32). The

awareness of God's presence is the heart of the Life of Discipline. "Within spiritual formation, a spiritual discipline is something we offer to God as a means of God's grace in our lives" (Mulholland 2001, 114). Because of God's grace, a disciple can offer the Life of Discipline to please Him.

No set of spiritual disciplines would be complete without persistence. Persistence is that which helps a person, with the aid of the Spirit and the community of faith, not to give up. Even though failure is common, persistence allows one to get back up again. Without the character of persistence, self-discipline would be largely impossible. Therefore, spiritual discipline is indispensable to a disciple. Here is an overview of the spiritual disciplines included in this FSJ model: (i) Journey inward: solitude and silence, meditation, and self-reflection; (ii) Journey upward: prayer, fasting, and worship; (iii) Journey downward: sharing testimony, devotional reading, and inductive Bible study; (iv) Journey outward: simplicity, fellowship, and visitation; (v) Sabbath.

Solitude and silence are introduced in the first month because they help bring back the awareness of God's presence, which is essential to the success of other spiritual practices. In solitude, God frees the believer from human interaction and reorients the believer to focus on God. "Silence deepens the experience of solitude. In silence we do not withdraw from the demands of life in the company of others but also allow the noise of our own thoughts, strivings, and compulsions to settle down so we can hear a truer and more reliable Voice" (Barton 2010, 138). Solitude complements silence as an instrument of the awareness of God.

Instruction of the Spiritual Discipline

In *Invitation to Solitude and Silence*, Barton (2010, 68) outlines a useful guide for the daily practice of solitude and silence. It is recommended that those following the Life Impact Life journey use the same procedure:

- Identify your sacred space and time. Consider whether there are any spiritual symbols or artifacts you would like to bring into this space to help you to be present to the spiritual reality of God's presence with you.
- Settle into a comfortable yet alert physical position.
- Ask God to give you a simple prayer that expresses your openness and desire for God.
- Take three deep, slow breaths—long inhalations as well as exhalations. Close your eyes if that helps you to relax into your breathing. Let your intent be to rest your whole self into God, knowing you are as safe with Him as a baby is with his mother.
- Allow yourself to rest in God in this physical, tangible way for as long as you can in your time of solitude.
- Close your silence with a brief prayer of gratitude for God's care experienced in these moments. Ask Him to help you to remain in this resting stance in whatever activity you enter next.

We are coming into this time of quiet to accept God's initiative. We are not coming to this time of quiet because we are working for our sanctification and we think that God will love us more if we do the right spiritual things. We enjoy the presence of God through the experience of solitude.

Month Two: Seeking Holiness

As an Alliance pastor, I am familiar with the term “sanctification” since Christ is my Sanctifier. My spiritual journey is also a process of sanctification. “Sanctification is the activity of God through the Holy Spirit by which He makes the individual believer holy (Jn 17:17; Acts 20:32; 26:18; 1 Cor 1:2; 1 Thes 5:23)” (Grenz 2000, 442). Sanctification is the sovereign act of God whereby the Christian is being separated from sin and the world and fully dedicated to God, receiving power for holy living and sacrificial and effective service toward the completion of Christ’s commission. Although it is the work of the Holy Spirit, it also requires personal cooperation. “Continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose” (Phil 2:12-13). The Christian life is a mutual effort toward the goal of glorifying God. God works in, and the believers work out. “Here is a blending and interacting of God’s sovereign grace and power and man’s free will. God works in us but we dare not be passive. We work, too, and our work and the exercise of our wills are never at greater liberty than when thus engaged in doing His good pleasure” (Strauss 1959, 123). The believers cultivate a submissive mind by responding to the divine grace God makes available to us.

The disciples have to be aware of the old sinful nature (Gal 5:17), temptation (1 Cor 10:13), and sin (Rom 8:12-14) (Grenz 2000, 444). This is accomplished through being filled with the Holy Spirit, which is both a distinct event and a progressive experience in the life of the believer. In order to defend against spiritual attack, disciples need to be equipped with spiritual weapons, which include the full armour of God (Eph 6:10-17), fervent prayer (Mt 26:41,

Eph 6:18, 1 Thes 5:17), and *agape* love (1 Pt 4:8). Month Two provides an opportunity for the participants to focus on holiness by asking themselves questions about issues of holiness:

- Why seek holiness? “But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do” (1 Pt 1:15). Holiness simply means setting apart from sin and reserving myself for a sacred purpose.
- How do we achieve holiness? Although holiness is a gift from God (Eph 1:4), we need to try our best “to offer [our] bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God” (Rom 12:1).

The second spiritual discipline associated with the journey inward is meditation. Meditation is “essentially described [as] a period of interior reflection and repetition, at times employing particular mental processes, with the aim of bridging the horizons of text and reader” (Howard 2012, 67). Scripture is obviously the text while the Christian is the reader. “What happens in meditation is that we create the emotional and spiritual space which allows Christ to construct an inner sanctuary in the heart” (Foster 1998, 20). Meditation helps the Christian be attentive to God with emotional and spiritual involvement. “We live in a universe created by the infinite-personal God who delights in our communion with him, you will see meditation as communication between the Lover and the one beloved” (Foster 1998, 23). Christians study Scripture to know how God speaks into our lives. Scripture is “the central reference point by which all other forms of meditation are kept in proper perspective” (Foster 1998, 29). God speaks to us through text, and through the meditation, we can speak to God because

mediation is a bridge leading us from Bible study into prayer. Christian meditation is different from the Eastern meditation. “Eastern meditation is an attempt to empty the mind; Christian meditation is an attempt to fill the mind” (Foster 1998, 20) with the Word of God.

Instruction of the Spiritual Discipline

I would like to introduce the mindfulness meditation of the body and breath developed by Williams and Penman at Oxford University (Williams and Penman 2011, 1105):

- First, breath is something that you probably take for granted despite the fact that you cannot live without it. You can live without food for weeks, without water for days, but you cannot survive without the nourishment that the breath provides for more than a few seconds. Breath really is life.
- Second, attending to breath reminds us that at the core of our being, something is happening that depends very little on whom we are or what we want to achieve.
- Third, the breath provides a natural, gently moving target to focus on in your meditation; it grounds you in the here and now. You cannot take a breath for five minutes ago, or for five minutes from now. You can only take a breath for now.
- Fourth, breath can be a sensitive monitor of your feeling. If you can sense more clearly when the breath is short or long, shallow or deep, rough or smooth, you can begin sensing your own internal weather patterns, and

choose whether and how to take skilful action to look after yourself.

- Finally, breath provides an anchor for your attention in the present moment, so that you can see more clearly when your mind has wandered. Come back to the breath if the mind wanders again. Start reading the scriptures you selected and listen to the divine inspiration.

The purpose of the breathing exercise is to calm our inner beings. We can use the breathing exercise alone or as a preliminary practice to reduce our distractions. It is very important that the practice of meditation may not have instant benefits. Please persist with the practice and pray for divine inspiration.

Month Three: Enjoying the Presence of God

In the third month, the notion of enjoying the presence of God connects with the practice of self-reflection and builds on the practice described by Brother Lawrence. Brother Lawrence (1614-1691) was a layman serving as a kitchen helper and a cobbler in a Carmelite monastery in Paris. He was emphatic about the practice of the presence of God. His unique spiritual journey with God drew many visitors seeking his spiritual direction. His classic Christian book *The Practice of the Presence of God* presents a unique way of enjoying the presence of God. The awareness of God's presence is the prerequisite of many spiritual disciplines including the self-reflection.

Brother Lawrence formed a habit of conversing with God continually (Lawrence 2011, 3). In order to be aware of the presence of God, one of the recommended practices is to have a regular conversation with God or unceasing prayer during the day. It does not matter whether you are working in the kitchen,

if you are in a quiet time, or even if you are talking to other people, God is always available to be consulted and He is willing to work together with us. God is always ready to have a conversation with us, but most of the time we may not be attuned to hearing His voice. It was clear to Brother Lawrence that conversation with God is a habit. This means it must become a natural and self-indentured behaviour of the Christian. What is the practice of constant prayer? It means the Christian needs to put effort into praying in the very beginning until it flows out naturally. Self-discipline under the leading of the Holy Spirit is needed for all spiritual disciplines. Our mindset needs to be trained until the habitual sense of God's presence is found. The wandering thoughts and personal lusts or desires are interrupting all the time. The practice will result in persistence and perseverance. God will have pity on His followers. This was very clear to Brother Lawrence. The outside behaviours, like all forms of devotion and prayers, are the responsibility of persevering in His holy presence. The inner motivation of practising is most precious. It is because of God's love.

God's love compels Christians to serve Him. The purpose of life is to do things for the love of God. It does not matter whether we do big things or small things, like Brother Lawrence serving as a cook in the kitchen. Brother Lawrence shared his inspiring motto: “‘The time of business,’ said he, ‘does not with me differ from the time of prayer; and in the noise and clutter of my kitchen, while several persons are at the same time calling for different things, I possess God in as great tranquility as if I were upon my knees at the blessed sacrament’” (Lawrence 2011, 12). No matter what we are doing, it should be for the glory of

God (1 Cor 10:31). The service is to please God rather than people. “Am I now trying to win the approval of men, or of God? Or am I trying to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ” (Gal 1:10). Many Christians may serve to please human leaders. This is why they will not grow in spiritual maturity even though they have been serving years in the community of faith. “Many do not advance in the Christian progress, because they stick in penances, and particular exercises, while they neglect the love of God, which is the end. That this appeared plainly by their works, and was the reason why we see so little solid virtue” (Lawrence 2011, 8). Serving in the Lord is not a duty in the kingdom of God but a privilege; it is an honour to be a team player in His wonderful plan, the Great Commission.

The third spiritual discipline associated with the journey inward is self-reflection (*Examen*). The *Examen* is an ancient practice found in the early churches. It is a prayerful exercise to detect God’s presence in our daily lives. When one does self-reflection depends on one’s individual schedule, maybe evening or after work so that the review of the day is more meaningful.

Instruction of the Spiritual Discipline

The Ignatian *Examen* is made of the following five steps (IgnatianSpirituality.com):

- Become aware of God’s presence.
- Review the day with gratitude.
- Pay attention to your emotions.

- Choose one feature of the day and pray from it.
- Look toward tomorrow.

In summary, the theme of the inward spiritual practice is contemplating. Solitude and silence, meditation, and self-reflection are the primary practices of the journey inward. They are not mutually exclusive but work together in harmony to bring the disciple closer to God.

The Upward Journey

Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. (Mt 11:28)

Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, “If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed.” (Jn 8:31, KJV)

Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth. (Jn 4:23-24)

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin. Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need. (Heb 4:15-16)

The purpose of the journey upward is to deny oneself and to follow the will of God. The Christian relieves his or her weariness and burden by experiencing Jesus’s rest (Mt 11:28). “Self-denial is simply a way of coming to understand that [one does] not have to have [his or her] own way” (Foster 1998, 113). Suffering is not welcome, but it does happen all the time. Jesus served to the death on the cross. “To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps” (1 Pt 2:21). Many

martyrs throughout church history have followed His steps. A real follower of Christ will experience suffering sooner or later. Jesus said to His followers, “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me” (Lk 9:23). What kind of sufferings does a Christian have? Persecution, pains, sickness, deteriorated health, and approaching death are common types of suffering. The Christian has to be aware that all sufferings are permitted by God. He always has a purpose for us in our suffering. Suffering for His sake with joy and courage is for our good (Lawrence 2011, 44). Occasionally, God uses suffering to clean and mould us into better instruments for Him. “If a man cleanses himself from the [ignoble purposes], he will be an instrument for noble purposes, made holy, useful to the Master and prepared to do any good work” (2 Tim 2:21). The only way we can ever cleanse ourselves is by bringing ourselves to Jesus and surrender to Him!

How does a Christian claim the victory over suffering? “God has many ways of drawing us to Himself. He sometimes hides Himself from us: but faith alone, which will not fail us in a time of need, ought to be our support, and the foundation of our confidence, which must be all in God” (Lawrence 2011, 42). Faith in Christ is the only way leading to eternal life. Faith is His confirmation leading to the love of God. Faith is the ultimate assurance that something will indeed happen eventually. “Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see” (Heb 11:1). We win because Christ has won the spiritual war. The faithful ancients in the Bible have shown us how to win spiritual warfare by faith. Brother Lawrence also reminded Christians that we

have to seek God always by faith. There are many times when we cannot find the faith we need to trust God, so we cry out for Jesus to be faithful on our behalf and bury our lack of trust in His faithfulness! Our faith in Christ is always built on the faithfulness of Christ. The pure faith like that of children—who just believe in the Father—will always please our God.

Disciples follow the will of God; in other words, disciples are supposed to abide by the Word of God (Jn 8:31). “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path” (Ps 119:105). The truth of God never expires. It exposes the will of God both two thousand years ago and today. The tricky point is how the Christian discerns the will of God. “Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will” (Rom 12:2). The hardest part is whether the Christian is willing to give up self-ownership and surrender. “If you desire to fulfill God’s will for your life irrespective the price, the sum total of all that makes up you must belong to Jesus Christ. He must be free to do with you and take from you as He pleases” (Henrichsen 1988, 12). Again, disciples need to be filled with the Holy Spirit so that Christ can reign in them.

The work of the Holy Spirit is indispensable when disciples want to live an obedient life. The purpose of the obedient life is to abide by the will of God. At conversion, the Holy Spirit descends to indwell disciples. “Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit” (Gal 5:25). Living by the flesh always leads to rebellion while living by the Spirit leads to deliverance. “For it is we who

are the circumcision, we who worship by the Spirit of God, who glory in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh” (Phil 3:3). Do not put confidence in the flesh because an obedient life is not done by human effort only. Again, the Christian life is a mutual effort of both God’s works implicitly and the disciples’ work explicitly.

Month Four: The Life of Surrender

Even though there are four aspects of Jesus’ life, the fourth month of the Life Impact Life model focuses on Jesus’ Life of Surrender and the practice of prayer.

Military discipline is based on obedience to orders. The soldier is taught to obey orders from his or her superiors immediately and without question. The kingdom of God recruits good soldiers of Christ. “Endure hardship with us like a good soldier of Christ Jesus” (2 Tim 2:3). Jesus’ disciples are fighting against the powers of this dark world. “Obedience means to bring our inner person into such a transformed condition that the deeds of Christ naturally arise out of it” (Graybeal and Roller 2006, 323). With the practice of spiritual discipline, the inner personality becomes the same as that of Christ Jesus (Phil 2:5). Disciples no longer live by themselves, but Christ lives in them (Gal 2:20). There are many great testimonies given by faithful Christians that reveal the importance of surrender. Let me introduce a few in the following paragraphs.

Piotr Andreyevich Streltsov, Father Arseny (1893-1973), was a Russian prisoner in a concentration camp during the period of communist rule under Stalin. He was a powerful influence on people he met. “Those who were with him

often and saw how he lived were amazed at the depth and strength of the insight that God had given him” (Alexander 2002, 68). He was a spiritual father, and many were touched through his prayer and faith during harsh times in the cold Siberian prisons.

Corrie ten Boom (1892-1983) was a Dutch Christian who helped many Jews escape the Nazi Holocaust during World War II. She was detained in Barrack 28 of Germany’s Ravensbrück concentration camp in 1944. She said, “Forgiveness is the key which unlocks the door of resentment and the handcuffs of hatred. It breaks the chains of bitterness and the shackles of selfishness. The forgiveness of Jesus not only takes away our sins, it makes them as if they had never been” (ten Boom 1998, 183). After the war, she returned to the Netherlands to set up a rehabilitation center in Bloemendaal. Her most famous book *The Hiding Place* is a biography that recounts her story of hiding Jews from the Nazis.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945) was a German Lutheran pastor, theologian, anti-Nazi dissident, and the key founding member of the Confessing Church. Bonhoeffer was known for his resistance to Nazi dictatorship, including the protest against Hitler’s euthanasia program and genocidal persecution of the Jews. He was arrested in April 1943 by the Gestapo and imprisoned at a Nazi concentration camp. He was executed by hanging on April 9, 1945, before the Nazi regime collapsed.

I personally feel inspired by these Christians’ faithful testimonies. They encourage me to be strong and courageous, to behave like them. These faithful Christians lived a Life of Surrender because they resonated with Jesus’ Life of

Surrender.

The first spiritual discipline associated with the journey upward is prayer. Prayer is the essential tool for communicating with God. Prayer is the essential tool that God uses to transform people. Many prayers are highly petitionary or intercessory. Fixed-hour prayers are always offered as a sacrifice of thanksgiving. Prayer should be offered as a sweet-smelling incense of the human soul before the throne of God (Jones 2005, 121). Busyness is wreaking havoc on many Christians. Some of the consequences of busyness are ignoring prayers during the day, missing God in one's pastoral ministry, neglecting important family relationships, focusing on tasks rather than people, drinking energy drinks without taking a break, etc. We have to start breaking from busyness before busyness breaks us. Personal prayers are holy checkpoints in the day when we can give thanks and praise to God. Personal prayers are a good discipline of the day to put the Christian back on the right track. Personal prayers are healthy boundaries of the day to have sacred times with God.

Prayer has four major components: Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication. "The simple acrostic ACTS is useful in helping a person get started in prayer" (Henrichsen 1988, 92). Adoration is adoring God, worshiping Him and praising Him with all of our heart, mind, and soul. Confession is admitting personal sin before God. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness" (1 Jn 1:9). Confession allows us to clear away the obstacles in our relationship with God which are displeasing to Him. Thanksgiving is expressing gratitude to God for

being blessed. “Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus” (1 Thes 5:18). Thanksgiving allows us to thank God for what he has done for us. Supplication, or intercession, is asking God for self-needs and the needs of others. These four components of prayer help us pray to God with the right attitude.

Instruction of the Spiritual Discipline

Here are a few suggestions for prayer application:

- Set the alarm on your mobile phone for prayer times.
- Start the day with Adoration and Supplication—take some time to praise the Lord and place what you are going to do in God’s hand.
- End the day with Confession and Thanksgiving—take some time to confess those sins and give thanks for God’s provision during the day.

Prayer is not a one-way communication, just speaking to God; it is also listening to God. Allow a moment of quiet time to listen for God’s voice. It is important to recognize God’s voice as we learn to surrender to God’s will and purposes.

Month Five: Submitting to Parents and Earthly Leaders

The practice of submission seems outdated in contemporary culture. Everybody listens to his or her own desires and behaves according to his or her own needs. Submission to many people means to subordinate others. Christians believe that the Kingdom culture is still the best. “Children obey your parents in

the Lord, for this is right. Slaves obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ” (Eph 6:1, 5). Children must learn to submit to their parents if they are to learn to submit to God. With the same assumption, employees must learn to submit to their employers if they are to learn to submit to God. The church members must learn to submit to the church leaders and the governing board. Earthly leaders include government officials and national leaders. Christians need to pray for “all people—for kings and all those in authority” (1 Tm 2:1-2). Of course, there are exceptions. In case of living with parents who are hostile towards the Christian faith, children need to pray earnestly for their parents. In the case of working with a leader who is hostile towards Christianity, the Christian needs to use cautious spiritual discernment. “But Peter and John replied, ‘Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God’s sight to obey you rather than God’” (Acts 4:19). It is preferable that Christians should listen to God rather than humans.

The second spiritual discipline associated with the journey upward is fasting. Fasting is a kind of surrender of personal desires and needs. The purpose of fasting is to put the focus back on God and submit to God. Fasting reminds us that food and other idols cannot sustain the Christian life. Fasting helps us to keep a balanced life. Fasting is a period of inward awareness to break the interference from the body. One should fast for a period of time so that there is a sacred moment in which to recognize external bondage, to confess wrongdoing, to renounce idols’ control, to acknowledge self-deception, and to be guided by the Spirit. One reason for fasting is to develop self-control (Jones 2005, 163). There

are at least two types of fasting: physical and mental. The physical fast is to abstain from all food and drink except water. The mental fast is to abstain from secular temptation like televisions, computers, smartphones, electronic games, etc.

Instruction of the Spiritual Discipline

Here are some suggestions of how one can fast:

- Skip one lunch meal during the week in order to spend more time in praying.
- Many church prayer meetings happen on weekday evenings. Try to skip the evening meal in order to attend the church prayer meeting.
- Do not use any electronic device during the evening meal. Chat with your family members.
- Do not watch television or use the computer on Sunday.

When people are first learning to fast, it is helpful to fast in the community. Even if you are not together, if everyone fasts at the same time, it is easier to be accountable. This provides an opportunity to discuss what was hard, what was helpful, and what can be done to prepare for another fast the following week.

Month Six: Observing the Church Ordinances

Jesus instituted and established two ordinances for the early church: Baptism and Holy Communion. Jesus received baptism from John the Baptist. “But John tried to deter him, saying, ‘I need to be baptized by you, and do you

come to me?’ Jesus replied, ‘Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness’” (Mt 3:14-15). Jesus endorsed water baptism, which was a Jewish practice for spiritual cleansing. Jesus shared the bread and the cup with His disciples during the Passover dinner (Lk 22:15-20) and asked them to remember Him after His ascension. If Jesus observed both baptism and the Lord’s Supper, the disciples should observe these ordinances too.

Baptism is an outward expression of Christians’ internal faith in Christ. “The terms ‘baptize’ and ‘baptism’ are transliterations from the Greek words, *baptizo* (verb) and *baptisma* (noun), referring to the action of washing with, or plunging into (literally, surrounding with) water” (Grenz 2000, 520). Baptism symbolizes our spiritual union with Christ in His death and resurrection; it confirms the covenant with God (Grenz 2000, 522). The apostle Paul explained the symbolic meaning behind baptism in Book of Romans (Rom 6:4-5). Other than the union with Christ, the believers are also one in the body of Christ. “For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink” (1 Cor 12:13). Even though we only go through baptism once—it is helpful to reflect on our baptism regularly and to use the baptism of others as an opportunity to reflect on our baptismal vows to follow Christ in submission.

Holy Communion is a liturgy to help us regularly remember the redemptive grace of Jesus Christ. Baptism occurs once, but Christians observe Holy Communion repeatedly. It reaffirms what we initially declared in baptism—namely, our new identity in Christ (Grenz 2000, 531). Two passages are often

quoted during the ceremony of Holy Communion, “When the hour came, Jesus and his apostles reclined at the table...” (Lk 22:14-20), and, “For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread...” (1 Cor 11:23-29). It is only a symbolic memorial of the Last Supper according to C&MA tradition. Both the bread and the wine symbolize the body of Jesus Christ and the cup of the new covenant in Jesus’ blood. “The Lord’s Supper is not only a symbol of present community with Christ but also with one another within Christ’s fellowship. For this reason, the act is intended to express the unity of all believers in the one body” (Grenz 2000, 539). Christians also remind one another that the second coming of Jesus Christ is imminent during the Holy Communion. Some churches observe the liturgy once a month and some observe it every week. The frequency depends on the respective spiritual tradition.

The third spiritual discipline associated with the journey upward is worship.

Whether it is private and personal, or public and communal, it is worship that keeps us most directly engaged with God in life through meditation on his Word (Ps 1:2), prayer (Ps 3), penitence (Ps 32, 51), praise (Ps 146-150; Heb 13:15a), thanksgiving (Ps 100, Heb 13:15b), lament (Ps 137), self-sacrifice (Rom 12:1; 1 Pt 2:5), ministry (Rom 15:16; Phil 2:17), doing good works (Heb 13:16), and more. (Pettit 2008, 52)

Forms and rituals do lead into worship but do not generate worship. Disciples should learn how to worship the Lord from the heart. “God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth” (Jn 4:24). The root meaning of the Hebrew word we translate worship is “to prostrate” (Foster 1998, 169). It is a body position (lying flat with the face down) showing a sign of respect to God

during the time of worship. One reason worship should be “considered a spiritual discipline is because it is an ordered way of acting and living that sets us before God so He can transform us” (Foster 1998, 166). Therefore, worship does not narrowly mean the Sunday service but our daily sacred time spent with God.

Instruction of the Spiritual Discipline

Here are some suggested steps into worship (Foster 1998, 170-173):

- Learn to practice the presence of God daily.
- Try many different experiences of worship.
- Find ways to prepare for the gathered experience of worship.
- Have a willingness to be gathered in the power of the Lord.
- Cultivate holy dependency, which means that you are utterly and completely dependent upon God for anything significant to happen.
- Absorb distractions with gratitude.
- Learn to offer a sacrifice of worship.

In summary, the theme of the upward spiritual practice is abiding. Prayer, fasting, and worship are the primary practices of the journey upward. They are not mutually exclusive but work together in harmony to help the Christian deny him or herself and follow God in a life of obedience.

The Downward Journey

You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven. (Mt 5:14-16)

For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what he has done. (Mt 16:27)

As for everyone who comes to me and hears my words and puts them into practice, I will show you what they are like. He is like a man building a house, who dug down deep and laid the foundation on rock. When a flood came, the torrent struck that house but could not shake it, because it was well built. (Lk 6:47-48)

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. (Acts 1:8)

The purpose of the journey downward is to bear witness to who Christ is and what God has done so that others will be encouraged to seek God or to respond to Christ's invitation to follow Him. Bearing witness to Christ's life and the verbal testimony speaks of the in-breaking of God's kingdom in the world today. It is not just a verbal testimony but a life testimony. Disciples put faith into practice so that others might also be able to look at our lives and ask questions. Disciples are the light of the world (Mt 5:14-16), working like a lighthouse to lead the world to their heavenly Father. After the heavenly Father is being praised, the Son of Man will reward His disciples (Mt 16:27) for their life testimonies.

Disciples also serve as mentors like Timothy or the apostle Paul who said, "Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ" (1 Cor 11:1). The mentor who kindles others' fire to live out Christ must have a vital relationship with Christ. The inherited fragrance (2 Cor 2:14) of Jesus Christ is contagious. The mentees will gradually inherit the fragrance. The closer the mentor and the mentees relate to one another, the stronger the mentor will impact or influence the mentees. "The more relationally-oriented the approach, the greater the potential

for fruitful results” (Krallmann 2002, 151). The mentor does not just teach the mentees skills and techniques, but life impacts life through the close relationship. Disciples are not just learning the Word of God which is revealed through Jesus Christ but are also teaching others who will then be qualified to teach others (2 Tim 2:2b).

Jesus invites His disciples to practise His teaching in their daily lives (Lk 6:47-48). Christ as the Coming King will reward those according to what they have done (Mt 16:27). Putting Jesus’ teaching into practice is not an easy task. Jesus Christ is the living Word from whom His disciples can always seek help. Sometimes He speaks through Scripture. He can also speak through people or even a special vision. In order to maintain a healthy faith, disciples must not make the biblical application substitute for the living Word of God. Ministry or service is valuable, but it cannot replace the eternal relationship with God incarnate.

The work of the Holy Spirit is indispensable when the disciples want to live a testimonial life.

As Jesus had been endowed with divine power at his baptism and then bequeathed the Holy Spirit’s anointing on his followers (Acts 2:33), so members of the Way movement acted likewise (Acts 8:14-17, 9:17). Doing so they passed on, as it were, not merely a baton but a torch, kindling reproduction and multiplication of Christlike witness wherever they went. (Krallmann 2002, 96)

Such divine empowerment enables and qualifies the disciples to become Jesus’ reliable witnesses (Acts 1:8). On the day of Pentecost, the disciples witnessed the birth of the apostolic church in the coming of the Holy Spirit to indwell all believers. The disciples spoke in tongues. Peter preached boldly to the crowd about Jesus Christ’s salvation. Acts 2 records that about three thousand people

were baptized and added to the church on that day of Pentecost.

With the help of the Holy Spirit, I started making an impact on the family that has invited me to have a meal with them on Wednesday evenings. One member of the family jogs with me regularly, and we train together for the marathon. One member participated my field research project and joined my small group of “reading the Bible in a year.” I can testify that life impacts life after the relational bond has been formed.

Month Seven: The Life of Testimony

Even though there are four aspects of Jesus’ life, the seventh month of the Life Impact Life model focuses on Jesus’ Life of Testimony and the practice of sharing one’s testimony.

Jesus, as a teacher to His disciples, was no doubt also their friend. “Spiritual companionship is a necessity on the journey. Spiritual mentors are not gurus or advice dispensers, nor do they have the answer to every situation or question. Rather, they are ordinary people who offer a wise presence that shows interest in us by asking questions and listening, by discerning and praying with us” (Clinton and Stanley 1992, 2125). The disciples entered into a life-sharing companionship with their rabbi. Jesus referred His disciples as His friends in John 15:14-15. Jesus clearly built friendships with His followers. Jesus encouraged believers to build fellowship among believers. Soteriologically, believers enter into friendship with God through salvation in Christ. Jesus’ purpose was making spiritual friends so that His friends would continue His mission. Jesus was also called “a friend of tax collectors and sinners” in Matthew 11:19. Jesus clearly

built friendships with unbelievers regardless of His holiness. Jesus encouraged believers to make friends with unbelievers so that the gospel could reach the world of unbelievers.

Although friendship reflects a level of equality with one another, there is always something to be learned from each other. “Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me--put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you” (Phil 4:9). Fellowship in the early church was not just about sharing their possessions or physical belongings. It was also about sharing their lives in Christ. “Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people” (Acts 2:46-47). People in Christ imitate other people in Christ. Living together definitely helps believers in achieving the practice of the imitation of Christ.

The first spiritual discipline associated with the journey downward is sharing one’s testimony. In the Chinese context, I have found Evangelism Explosion III (hereafter called EE III) helpful in sharing the gospel and my personal testimony. The structural message of EE III is solid, concise, and is easy to be memorized. Sometimes people may think that the ice breaking questions are offensive. Therefore, friendship is always the prerequisite for a fruitful conversation.

Instruction of the Spiritual Discipline

Here is the outline of EE III (Evangelism Explosion International 2017):

1. Do you know for sure that if you were to die today, you would go to heaven?
2. Let me ask you another question. If God were to ask you, “Why should I let you go into My heaven?” What would you say?
3. After hearing your answer, I know that I have some really good news for you. May I share with you how I came to know for certain that I have eternal life?
4. Heaven is a free gift. It is not earned or deserved.
5. Why is it that no one can earn his way to heaven? It is because people are sinners.
6. If we could go to heaven by good deeds, we would have to be as perfect as God. However, everyone is a sinner, and we cannot save ourselves.
Explain what sin is and provide metaphor why we cannot save ourselves.
7. So does it mean that humanity has no hope? No! For the Bible says that God is merciful and just.
8. God is merciful, and therefore does not want to punish us.
9. However, the same Bible says that God is just, and therefore must punish sin.
10. How do we handle this? God solved this problem for us in the person of Jesus Christ.
11. Who is Jesus Christ? Jesus Christ is the infinite God, who came to earth from heaven; He also is the infinite man, who lived a perfect life. He died on the cross to pay the penalty for our sins; He was buried, rose from the

dead on the third day, and then ascended to heaven, offering us the free gift of eternal life.

12. This gift is received by faith.
13. Faith is not mere intellectual knowledge about Jesus Christ and is not mere temporal faith. Saving faith is trusting in Jesus Christ alone.
14. Does this make sense to you?
15. Would you like to commit yourself to God, requesting that He forgive your sins and receiving the gift of eternal life?
16. Please write down the names of your neighbours and start to pray that God will provide opportunities for you to share Christ with those neighbours at the appropriate time and in the appropriate way.

Christians need to pray, fast, and seek God for ways that are most applicable for appropriately bearing testimony before their neighbours, family members, and friends. Praying for the unbelievers always has higher priority than knowing the scriptures to have well developed discussion with unbelievers. The mentees will be given a chance to practice the EE III while visiting unbelievers with the mentor.

Month Eight: Engaging with Scripture

In order to engage with Scripture formationally or contemplatively, one has to do formational reading rather than informational reading. “Instead of the being an object we control and manipulate according to our own insight and purposes, the text becomes the subject of the reading relationship; we are the object that is shaped by the text” (Mulholland 2001, 57). Christians need a balance

between informational and formational reading. Informational reading focuses on getting the meaning out of the text while formational reading focuses on applying the principles from the text. “Informational reading is more digging for answers to questions and less dwelling on life meanings that may light up for us in the text. Spiritual reading is more dwelling on such meanings and less digging for full transparency” (Muto 1994, 20). Informational reading results in the process of hermeneutics while formational reading results in the process of contemplation.

There must be this constant interplay between the informational and formation modes of reading. But the informational mode is only the front porch of the role of scripture in spiritual formation. It is the point of entry into the text. But once we have crossed the porch, we must enter into that deeper encounter with the Word that is the formational approach. (Mulholland 2001, 62)

A few questions need to be discussed among students. What is the difference between Bible study and time of devotionals? Bible study is informational which is building the cerebral knowledge. Time of devotionals is formational through which the Christian life is being transformed. We come to the scriptures longing for life, for truth, and for life transformation. What is a formational reading of Scripture? How do you think this might differ from a merely informational reading? Formational reading of Scripture is the process of being conformed to the image of Christ for the sake of others. Bible study is an informational reading of Scripture using hermeneutics. Christians need to do both Bible study and formational reading of Scripture.

Biblical meditation is simply doing meditation on the scriptures. In and through quiet time, the Word of God descends from the mind into the heart, where we can ruminate on it, masticate it, digest it, and let it become part of us. Biblical

meditation allows the text to soak into us; we permit the influence or power of Scripture to act within. It puts down the deep roots inside our hearts that can draw spiritual nourishment like chewing the cud or gnawing a bone. There are three phases of meditation: slow down, take it in, and take it with you. “Christians have practiced many forms of intentional meditation through the ages; many of them are directly connected to the text of Scripture” (Wilhoit and Howard 2012, 72). The Spirit forms us, remaking our feelings, moulding our habits, guiding our relationships, and confronting us when we are too comfortable. We come with our thoughts and feelings to our reading, and the Spirit causes God’s thoughts and feelings to arise as we read. In time, the Spirit reorders the thoughts and feelings of our heart. Divine reading is a powerful tool for reprogramming our hearts.

Lectio Divina facilitates the scriptures soaking into us and reprogramming our hearts, changing the very concerns and ideas that control our beliefs and feelings. “*Lectio Divina* means reading the Bible with reverence and openness to what the Spirit is saying to us in the present moment” (Nouwen 2013, 11). The purpose of *Lectio Divina* is not to study the scripture systematically and theologically. “*Lectio Divina*, which literally means divine reading, is a process of formational reading that emphasizes a slow dwelling with the text” (Wilhoit and Howard 2012, 12). It is a process of formational reading. It is not a new way of reading Scripture but a traditional Benedictine practice from the monastery. It helps to remove our own agenda and open ourselves to what God wants to say to us. It helps us to discover both the primary intended meaning of the text and any number of accompanying implications in ways that other, more rational

approaches cannot uncover. There are five steps of *Lectio Divina*:

- *Lectio*—This is a slow and careful repeated reading of the text.
- *Meditatio*—This is the meditation on the scripture being read. It may involve savouring, repeating, thinking about, or digesting the words so that they become personally meaningful and nourish us spiritually.
- *Oratio*—Here we pray with the Scripture. We pray to God for understanding. We pray back to God the promises found in the reading. We use this reading to cry out to God, or we listen for His voice in what we read.
- *Contemplatio*—Here we rest in God’s presence through the Scripture. “Contemplation is variously described as a resting in God, or a loving gaze upon him, or a knowing beyond knowing, or a rapt attention to God” (Hall 1988, 9).
- Acting—If reading, meditating, praying, and contemplating have no fruit in acting, we have fallen short of Jesus’ standard. We have to travel in both directions, reflection to action and action to reflection. We start at the Word and bring that to our lives, but also start with our lives and ask what Scripture says to our circumstances.

The second spiritual discipline associated with the journey downward is devotional reading or *Lectio Divina*.

Instruction of the Spiritual Discipline

Here are the steps one would follow if doing *Lectio Divina* with Psalm 46:

- I start with a prayer, and we have a quiet moment for a few minutes.
- I read Psalm 46 the first time. “Please meditate on the Word of God.”
- We have another quiet moment for a few minutes.
- I read Psalm 46 the second time. “Please listen for the words or phrases that touch you or speak to you.”
- We have another quiet moment for a few minutes.
- “Please share the words or phrases that stood out to you.”
- After brief sharing, I say, “Please listen to the passage again, and this time listen now for how God is speaking through this passage to your life at this time.” I read Psalm 46 the third time.
- We have another quiet moment for a few minutes.
- “Please listen to God through God’s Word; now after this final reading you will respond to God in prayer.” I read Psalm 46 the fourth time.
- After a moment of silence, I close the time together with a prayer of thanksgiving.

Although *Lectio Divina* or devotional reading is placed in the category of the journey downward, it works well in other journey orientations. The component of *Oratio* or prayer helps the journey upward while both components of *Meditatio* or meditation and *Contemplatio* or contemplation help the journey inward.

Month Nine: Teaching the Word of God

Jesus’ teaching forms a major part of the New Testament. The Word of God is the special revelation of God Himself. “For prophecy never had its origin

in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” (2 Pt 1:21). Since the Word of God is inspired by the Holy Spirit, the same One can help disciples understand it. The Spirit knows everything, and God has revealed the Word of God to us by His Spirit (1 Cor 2:10). “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Tim 3:16-17). This verse describes four main functions of Scripture: (i) Teaching—what is right? (ii) Rebuking—what is not right? (iii) Correcting—how to get right? and (iv) Training in righteousness—how to stay right? Scripture is the vehicle through which we can be “thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Tim 3:17). Therefore, use every opportunity to speak Scripture into your life and the life of others. Transformation comes through the truth of God.

Teaching the Word of God requires spiritual empowerment. “My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit’s power, so that your faith might not rest on men’s wisdom, but on God’s power” (1 Cor 2:4-5). Anointed teaching makes both the teacher and students see the works of the Holy Spirit. The biblical message is expressed in a powerful way, addressing the learners’ hearts so that the Holy Spirit will guide us into the truth (Jn 16:13).

The third spiritual discipline associated with the journey downward is inductive Bible study. The inductive Bible study method includes three steps: Observation, Induction, and Application (hereafter called OIA). OIA is a popular approach among evangelical Christians. A crucial part of inductive Bible study is

asking God to implement the principles into daily lives. A sound understanding of the Scripture is the prerequisite for teaching the Word of God.

Instruction of the Spiritual Discipline

A template is provided to show how to do OIA in ten steps (see Appendix 15: Template for Inductive Bible Study). Inductive Bible study will be used in the following way:

- Everyone will be assigned a Biblical passage;
- They should spend at least two hours a week using OIA with their assigned Bible passage;
- They may do it alone or with someone else for mutual learning;
- They will have a chance to present their findings to the group.

In summary, the theme of the downward spiritual practice is impacting. Sharing testimony, devotional reading, and inductive Bible study are the primary practices of the journey downward. They are not mutually exclusive but working together in harmony to bear witness to Christ's life.

The Outward Journey

Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people. (Mt 4:23)

Then Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty." (Jn 6:35)

On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" After he said this, he showed

them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord. Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven." (Jn 20:19-23)

The ultimate purpose of the journey outward is to bring the good news of the kingdom of God to the community. The top priority is to repair people's personal relationships with the Father and bring peace to individuals. The church or the body of Christ is the community of faith formed by Jesus Christ. "The community focus indicative of the New Testament images is sharpened by the reciprocal relationship between the individual believer and the corporate fellowship indicative of the church as a covenant people" (Grenz 2000, 480). The covenant is a promise through Jesus Christ so that God will forgive sin and restore fellowship for those who believe in Jesus Christ. Since Jesus is the Saviour, He invites unbelievers to believe in Him and join the community. The ministry of reconciliation (1 Cor 5:18) has been given to the disciples. The mission to the community is commanded by Jesus (Jn 20:19-23). Believers are baptized into the body of Christ with Christ Himself as the head of the Church (Eph 1:22-23). Jesus Christ himself is the chief cornerstone (Eph 2:20). The church is called and sent to represent the kingdom of God. This journey outward differs from the journey downward since the action is more proactive by meeting the needs of the community.

Hastings (2012, 12) quotes John 20:19-23 as the Greatest Commission rather than the one from Matthew 28:19-20 for the concept of the missional church:

The essence of the triune God they profess to worship is missional, and indeed, that his mission is the essence and primary hermeneutic of the biblical story. They could then re-envision their churches as communities of deep communion with that missional triune God of the gospel, and communities who therefore can participate in his mission to the world.

In John 20, we find Jesus granting peace to His disciples by breathing His Spirit on them. He formed them into His community of *shalom* (peace). Leaving their upper room, His disciples went out to participate in God's ongoing mission to the world.

Disciples are invited by Jesus Christ to serve the community. The Father sent Jesus Christ; Jesus Christ sends the disciples. Jesus breathes on us and gives us the Spirit so that we are empowered to go out in love for one another and for the world. "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (Jn 13:34-35). It is through our love for one another that the world will know that we are the disciples of Jesus.

The work of the Holy Spirit is indispensable when disciples want to live a communal life. The purpose of the communal life is to reach out to the world. Christians have no power in changing others' faith except by the Holy Spirit. Extending the kingdom of God is a joint project with the Divine Being. Disciples need to be empowered by the Holy Spirit in order to accomplish His works: "Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit" (Zec 4:6). Only the Spirit can change people's hearts and motivate them to bring the good news back to the community and serve the community.

Month Ten: The Life of Community

Even though there are four aspects of Jesus' life, the tenth month of the Life Impact Life model focuses on Jesus' Life of Community, and simplicity is the characteristic of the community of faith because Jesus lived a simple life in the community.

Jesus asks His disciples to serve in the community. For Christians, the triune God is the primary symbol of a community with the characteristics of diversity within a unity. The language within the triune community is relational language, and because humans are created in God's image, relationship and community are primary for us too. "God is acting toward the fulfillment of his purpose for creation, namely, the establishment of the new community of reconciliation" (Grenz 2000, 503). The new community of reconciliation is a collection of people who have confessed their sins and would like to be reconciled with the Father. The new community of reconciliation is a group of Jesus' disciples or followers who have listened to the gospel and accepted Christ as their personal Saviour and their Lord. The new community of reconciliation is a group of blessed believers who received the Holy Spirit at the time of being born again. "The gospel is the announcement of the presence of God's reign which establishes community. The community of God is creating is a reconciled people who are concerned about, compassion, justice, righteousness, and above all, love, Hence, it is a community interested in social fellowship" (Grenz 2000, 508). The community of God has a mandate to focus on meeting needs and preaching the gospel. The community of God is called to serve the larger community, which includes the rich, the powerful, those on the margins, and the world.

The contemporary ministry of evangelism is very different from in the time of Jesus. Many evangelistic meetings are conducted inside the church building, happen at a fixed time, and follow a predefined methodology. In contrast, the evangelistic approach that Jesus utilized was to reach out to people outside the building. Disciples are encouraged to go into the community rather than waiting for unbelievers to come into the church. The church is the spiritual and holy community, but it is not separated from people physically. By the grace of God, He adds people to the church. Eventually, the secular community becomes the community of faith.

The first spiritual discipline associated with the journey outward is simplicity. “The Christian discipline of simplicity is an inward reality that results in an outward lifestyle” (Foster 1998, 79). Simplicity should be prompted by love. We live simply because we love God, one another, others, and the created world. Wealth belongs to God. Jesus condemns money and materialism (Lk 16:13) because wealth may hinder people entering the kingdom of God. “Jesus exhorted the rich young ruler not just to have an inner attitude of detachment from his possessions, but literally to get rid of his possessions if he wanted the kingdom of God (Mt 19:16-22)” (Foster 1998, 83). Since the young ruler was very rich, it was hard for him to give the wealth away in order to show his love for God and others. “The central point for the discipline of simplicity is to seek the kingdom of God and the righteousness of his kingdom first and then everything necessary will come in its proper order” (Foster 1998, 86). Foster (1998, 90-95) gives ten controlling principles for the outward expression of simplicity: (i) Buy things for

their usefulness rather than their status; (ii) Reject anything that is producing an addiction in you; (iii) Develop a habit of giving things away; (iv) Refuse to be propagandized by the custodians of modern gadgetry; (v) Learn to enjoy things without owning them; (vi) Develop a deeper appreciation for creation; (vii) Look with a healthy skepticism at all “buy now, pay later” schemes; (viii) Obey Jesus’ instructions about plain, honest speech; (ix) Reject anything that breeds the oppression of others; and (x) Shun anything that distracts you from seeking first the kingdom of God.

The danger of personal wealth is putting too much trust in our personal possessions and ignore God’s provision. After the passing of Grace, I gave the wedding jewellery back to Grace’s mother upon her request. It is more meaningful for Grace’s mother to own the fine jewellery than me. It was also a good opportunity for me to live a life of simplicity.

Instruction of the Spiritual Discipline

There are many ways that people can practise a life of simplicity and I have several suggestions to help participants. I suggest that participants go through their closets or a room in their house and give away three items to charity. I suggest they refuse to buy something inessential this week. I suggest they take a nature walk and express thankfulness to the Creator. These exercises may help them to think about the difference between personal possessions and God’s provision.

Month Eleven: Building the Church

The church (Greek: *ekklesia*) is actually a group of Christians walking the life journey together. “The choice of *ekklesia* as the designation of the Christian community suggests that the New Testament believers viewed the church as neither an edifice nor an organization. They are people—a people brought together by the Holy Spirit—a people bound to each other through Christ—hence, a people standing in covenant with God” (Grenz 2000, 465). What are they doing together? They worship together regularly. The indispensable elements of the Church are teaching, preaching, fellowship, worshiping, praying together, and evangelism (Acts 2:42-44). The purpose of the church is to help one another to grow in spiritual maturity and to extend the kingdom of God. The gathering is not for entertainment but building up one another in Christ.

A powerful way for the Church to journey together is to pray together. The Christian’s prayer life is full of personal and corporate prayer. Corporate prayer is the act of Christians praying together. A group of Christians can see one another and feel the presence of one another regularly. The most valuable part is feeling the presence of God together so that they can build an intimate relationship with God and each other.

Since God is missional, the church will also be missional. “The church is a community not for the healthy but for the sick, not for the ‘all together’ people but for the rebellious yet needy who came as the prodigal came, bidden by a prodigal Father” (Hastings 2012, 307). The purpose of the church is not only to go deep spiritually, but also to go wide evangelically. The missional church needs to continue Jesus’ mission of extending the kingdom of God.

The second spiritual discipline associated with the journey outward is fellowship. Fellowship (Greek: *koinōnia*) is the spiritual union of the believer with Christ as well as communion with the Father and fellow believers (1 Jn 1:3). The love is bestowed on us and overflows to affirm our relationship with others. “We love because he first loved us” (1 Jn 4:19). Love is not abstract when seen through lens of the life of Jesus whose actions and responses make love concrete. Christian loves the unseen God by loving his or her brothers and sisters in sight. “No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us” (1 Jn 4:12). Therefore, fellowship consists of two dimensions, relation to one another and relation to God. The word *koinōnia* supports the relation to one another as follows: “Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness?” (2 Cor 6:14) The word *koinōnia* supports the relation to God as follows: “God is faithful, who has called you into fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord” (1 Cor 1:9). The verse of benediction also blesses the fellowship with the Holy Spirit. “May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all” (2 Cor 13:14). The word *koinonia* itself already affirms the two relations.

Therefore, let us meet regularly and encourage one another as a habit (Heb 10:25). The motivation behind this is love. “This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another” (1 Jn 4:10-11).

Love binds one to another as the body of Christ or the church. “And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity” (Col 3:14).

There is diversity within the unity. Each part of the body has its own function (1 Cor 12:20). The body of Christ will grow healthy if all parts of the body function properly. Love works by sharing with one another.

Instruction of the Spiritual Discipline

Here are a few suggestions for fostering fellowship: (i) Allocate time of sharing—facts, feelings, convictions, and devotionals; (ii) Show hospitality by hosting a meal for others (1 Pt 4:9); (iii) Invite other families for doing fun activities together; and (iv) Attend church small groups.

Month Twelve: Caring for the Needy

Jesus is merciful and compassionate. “Jesus’ compassion expressed itself in ministry. As he observed the needs of people around him, needs which sparked his emotion, he engaged in action in order to alleviate the misery of others and minister to their needs” (Grenz 2000, 267). Jesus raised the dead for their loved ones who were so upset (Jn 11:44; Lk 7:14). Jesus taught the large crowd when He had compassion on them (Mk 6:34). Jesus healed the sick when He had compassion on them (Mt 14:4). “When pains come from God, He only can cure them. He often sends diseases of the body, to cure those of the soul. Comfort yourself with the sovereign Physician both of soul and body” (Lawrence 2011, 39). Jesus invites His weary disciples to lay down their burdens before Him since He is the divine Healer. In order to experience Christ as Healer, one has to have

faith in Christ and keep in mind that Christ is available to help and heal all the time (Heb 4:15-16). Even in Jesus' final hours on earth, He showed His compassion to those who rejected Him. He prayed for the soldiers who were crucifying Him: "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Lk 23:34). Jesus showed His love for enemies (Mt 5:43-47). Jesus displayed His passion for preaching to the lost: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near" (Mt 4:17). The kingdom of God had been instituted because of the appearance of Jesus Christ. Jesus' disciples need to care for the needy and bring them into the kingdom of God. The apostle Paul also asks the church of Philippi not to look to their own interests but the interests of the others (Phil 2:4). As Jesus was merciful and compassionate, so his Church should be too.

The third spiritual discipline associated with the journey outward is visitation. The discipline of visitation is to show love to both the believers and unbelievers in the community. Jesus is merciful and compassionate, and His disciples learn to be merciful and compassionate during visitation. Jesus said, "When you enter a house, first say, 'Peace to this house'" (Lk 10:5-10). Jesus had a heart for sinners: "When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, 'Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today'" (Lk 19:1-10). Jesus showed a love of caring for the needy. When Jesus visited Peter, he healed the fever of Peter's mother-in-law (Mt 8:14-15). Jesus healed the sick people if needed. Jesus also shared the Word of God with the family being visited. Mary, the sister of Martha, sat at the Lord's feet listening to what Jesus preached (Lk 10:39). Jesus preached and healed a paralytic at one house in Capernaum (Mk

2:1-12, Lk 5:18-25). Therefore, visitation is indispensable to the ministry of outreaching the community.

Instruction of the Spiritual Discipline

There are a few general protocols of visitation that should be followed:

- Establish a date of visitation in advance.
- Pray well before the visitation.
- The visitation team cannot be too big, only two or three people.
- Dress properly.
- Show genuine love to the needy.
- As a matter of common courtesy, do not create any inconvenience to the one being visited. For example, the time of the general visitation should not be longer than an hour. For visiting the sick, fifteen to twenty minutes of visitation is good enough.
- Listen to those being visited, pay attention to their facial expressions.
- To the unbeliever who shares his or her religion, the Christian must show respect to their sharing and thoughts.
- Build up the friendship before sharing the Gospel with unbelievers.
- If it is appropriate, encourage each other with Scripture; pray at the end of the visitation.

Here are a few reminders for visiting the sick:

- Stand in a position so that the patient can see you easily.
- Talk with a gentle voice.

- Let the patient share his or her feelings; listen to the patient patiently.
- Sometimes facial expression, eye contact, and body language may work even better than many words.
- If the patient feels tired, leave the patient alone.
- Share the gospel if the timing is right.
- Do not give the patient an unrealistic promise.
- If it is appropriate, hold the patient's hand and pray.

Here are a few questions frequently asked during the visitation of the sick:

- Are you feeling better today? Has there been any progress?
- Do you have any pain? How is your spirit?
- Could you eat today? Could you sleep last night?
- What did your doctor say?
- (If the person is a Christian) Have you prayed?
- Could I pray for you?

In summary, the theme of the outward spiritual practice is reaching out. Simplicity, fellowship, and visitation are the primary practices of the journey outward. They are not mutually exclusive but working together in harmony to bring the good news of the kingdom of God to the community.

A Day Retreat

The Life Impact Life journey is designed to be ended with a celebration event. The celebration event is a day retreat. The purpose of a day retreat is to observe the Sabbath and recap the FSJ model. It is to wrap up the training program and celebrate the completion of the program. It gives the attendants an

opportunity to share their difficulties in practising the spiritual disciplines, to share their stories of the life journey, and to enjoy Christian fellowship.

It is better to take advantage of the summer months (longer daylight hours) to have the day retreat. I would prefer a campsite located in the countryside so that the participants can enjoy nature during the day. The retreat day at the campsite involves four distinct sharing periods. Sharing the spiritual practices of the inward journey happens in the morning. Sharing the spiritual practices of the upward and downward journey happens in the afternoon. Sharing the spiritual practices of the outward journey happens in the evening. A prayer walk is introduced to pray for one another after dinner. The day retreat is ended with an evening service in order to worship God together. I believe it is important for all participants to focus on God again after sharing their personal needs and issues. The proposed schedule of the day retreat is as follows:

Table 2: The Day Retreat Schedule

Time	Program
9:00 a.m.	Arrive at the campsite
10:00 a.m.	Sharing the Spiritual Practices of the Inward Journey
Noon	Lunch
1:00 p.m.	Sharing the Spiritual Practices of the Upward Journey
2:45 p.m.	Break
3:00 p.m.	Sharing the Spiritual Practices of the Downward Journey
4:45 p.m.	Break
5:00 p.m.	Dinner
6:00 p.m.	The Prayer Walk
7:00 p.m.	Sharing the Spiritual Practices of the Outward Journey
8:45 p.m.	Evening Service
9:30 p.m.	Leave the campsite

The associate spiritual discipline is Sabbath. Sabbath does not have to be

on Sunday. Sabbath means something more than taking a day off. It is more about sharing the joy and celebrating the presence of the Lord. The fourth commandment of Decalogue is the longest commandment: “Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God” (Exodus 20:8-10a). Moses clearly declared that the holy festival is a serious discipline, not an option, for everybody on earth. “If we enter the Sabbath with joy, then it will spill its abundance into the other six days. The Sabbath is the kind of delight that leads to life” (Allender 2009, 12). As a Christian, observing the Sabbath is not just taking a break from busyness, but recognizing His glory through the creation, dancing with the Holy Spirit in a regular fashion, remembering the grace of redemption with others of the body of Christ, and tasting future play on earth as in the new heavens and earth with family, friends, and strangers. Sabbath is a holy day. Sabbath simply reminds us of our dependence upon God. It is good for us to stop in the midst of our work and realize how temporal life is and how small our worries and dreams are.

Celebration is an important act of Sabbath. “The Sabbath is our play day—not as a break from the routine of work, but as a feast that celebrates the superabundance of God’s creative love to give glory for no other reason” (Allender 2009, 82). Playing is not a failure but the sign or symbol of victory and the celebration of Christ’s salvation. The Sabbath is also a celebration of eternal life. Death is no longer in control, but Jesus Christ reigns and brings the freedom of the children of God (Rom 8:21). “Sabbath is God’s recreation of division as

Shalom, destitution as abundance, and death as joy” (Allender 2009, 97).

Christians celebrate the release of our hearts from the slavery of sin. Christians are united in the body of Christ. Christians are rich in spirit because we have entered the kingdom of God.

Sometimes eating and drinking seem to be wasting time when considered alongside church ministry, but the author of Ecclesiastes shared a meaningful view of celebration (Eccl 2:22-24). Eating, drinking, singing, and dancing can be Sabbath rituals and symbols. God gives peace, happiness, and enjoyment to those who please Him. If one enjoys eating and drinking as a Sabbath celebration in the name of the Father, one becomes a wise person. “Sabbath rituals and symbols are the way we act out the drama of a holy, redeemed day. Symbols might include candles or setting the table with our finest china. A ritual may be Sabbath sex or a long, meandering walk in the woods” (Allender 2009, 156). Celebration is not restricted to a fixed day of the week, a particular location like the church building, or a particular format of activities. God is the reason for the Sabbath celebration. The most important thing is the involvement of God in the Sabbath rituals and symbols.

The Life Impact Life journey is different from other discipleship-training programs because it consists of spiritual practices. The purpose of the program is to turn our lives into a testimony for Jesus Christ so that we should reflect the image of Christ. The spiritual practices are essential in the journey of Christlikeness. Many Christians find it difficult to implement spiritual practices by themselves. A research project implementing a few spiritual practices in a

small group context had been done in order to examine its feasibility. The details of the research project are elaborated in Chapter V.

Revision of the Life Impact Life Journey

After my research portfolio hearing in October 2018, I received quite a few suggestions for my proposed program, and they made sense to me. Therefore, I would like to make the Life Impact Life journey more realistic and feasible within the context of WAC. Two revisions are recommended as follows:

First, choose one spiritual discipline from each journey orientation for practice rather than doing all three from each category. It is not feasible if one must practice twelve in a year. “The Christian journey has its own sets of disciplines which enable the pilgrim to progress through the stages of the spiritual path toward wholeness in Christ” (Mulholland 1993, 609). I respect their personal choice of the spiritual disciplines. I recognize their situations or difficulties in different stages of life. Believers from all walks of life are encouraged to try the spiritual discipline which meets their needs and schedule. If one spiritual discipline does not work, they may try another one. Participants will learn the theory of all spiritual disciplines, but they can make the choice of at least one from each category. They need to have the exercise or the discipline that provides a balanced and holistic growth in Christian journey.

Second, run the program in a small group format rather than in a classroom format. Both the theoretical part and the practical part of the program would be better run in a friendly and cozy setting with a lot of sharing and discussion. It is better to meet at home rather than at church. All participants are

encouraged to practise the spiritual discipline together with the guidance of the mentor. The mentor does the spiritual discipline together with them. They meet regularly to encourage one another in order to train for persistence. For example, the mentor may show the participants how to do the Inductive Bible Study with the Book of Jonah. The mentor uses the OIA approach to acquire the theological information for chapter one in the first meeting. The mentor leads the same passage for the formational reading in the second meeting. The mentor uses the OIA approach to acquire the theological information for chapter two in the third meeting. The mentor helps one group member do the formational reading for chapter two in the fourth meeting. The mentor helps one group member to use the OIA to acquire the theological information for chapter three in the fifth meeting. One group member leads chapter three for the formational reading in the sixth meeting. The mentor watches the group members use the OIA approach and formational reading for the last chapter of Jonah. This is an example of shoulder-to-shoulder mentoring.

The Life Impact Life journey is an intentional discipleship model implemented in a small group. The purpose of the model is to turn the participants' lives into a testimony for Jesus Christ through their choices of spiritual practices. The mentor develops an affinity group to address special needs and interests of the mentees. Therefore, the mentor walks a life journey with the mentees in a natural way.

CHAPTER V:
LIFE OF COMMUNITY -
RESEARCH PROJECT

As a pastor, I enjoy the life of community by helping people to see, hear, and think about what the faith of Christian is about and by supporting people to find strength and courage to continue their journeys of life. I have experienced the benefit of living out the Life of Discipline. The Life of Discipline brought the awareness of Jesus Christ to me. The purpose of my journey outward is to bring the awareness of Jesus Christ to the community, both the community of faith (my church) and the community of unbelievers living around us. I love serving the community so that I can show Christ's love to them. For example, I have visited the needy at their homes or at the hospitals in the community; I have officiated weddings and funerals for the people living in community; I have connected with other organizations to serve with them in the community; and I have served as a volunteer at a private hospice in the community. I also love practising the spiritual disciplines with the community so that I can bring the awareness of Jesus Christ to the community. I have implemented a research project based on the needs of Westwood Alliance Church (WAC). Actually, this research project combines spiritual practices from all four parts of the FSJ model. It includes prayer (Upward), devotional reading (Downward), meditation and self-reflection

(Inward), and fellowship (Outward). The project demonstrates how I have lived out the Life of Community. As mentioned above, the fourth part of the FSJ model is the outward Life of Community. I am going to elaborate my outward Life of Community in the following sections.

This research project examined how regular early morning prayer contributed to the prayer life for a small group of Cantonese-speaking members of WAC. In my ministry, I have found that WAC attendees were not satisfied with the prayer life. Quite a few Chinese Christians have shared with me that their prayer lives are disappointing and boring. A small group of Chinese Christians from WAC was invited to join an early morning prayer meeting at the church for forty days. The regular practice happened five days a week from six to seven in the morning so that the participants could get a taste of the spiritual discipline. The primary goal was to be more connected to God and more sensitive to the moving of the Holy Spirit after the prayer practice. All participants were guided to pray with the Adoration-Confession-Thanksgiving-Supplication (hereafter called ACTS) pattern and *Lectio Divina*.

All participants were asked to complete a pre- and post-practice questionnaire to assess their spiritual temperature. A group-sharing meeting for mutual support was held at the end of the practice. This qualitative approach to research revealed a positive influence on the participants' prayer life. After praying with the ACTS pattern for a while, they were more aware of confessing to God, giving thanks to God, praising God, and addressing other people's needs. Repeated reading of the Psalms helped individuals to pray with the scriptures. The

corporate prayer also achieved the purpose of fellowship within the small group.

Research Background

Deeper life is an Alliance term, which is basically another term for spiritual formation. The process of spiritual formation is to conform us to the image of Christ (Mulholland 1993, 234). Deeper life is moving towards a deeper experience with Christ our Lord. In my experience, reaching out to unbelievers is prominent in the WAC, but the component of reaching in or growing deep is shallow. WAC has an annual mission conference but not a deeper life conference. Spending time with family builds a deeper relationship with family. With the same principle, spending time with God through prayer builds a deeper relationship with God. The practice of prayer is an essential tool for living a deeper life. Even though most of us head-knowledge know that prayer is indispensable, we don't heart know it and that's why we don't place proper emphasis on it.

Many North Americans have been overwhelmed by their workloads in the workplace. They may go to bed late in the night. It is a struggle to have a morning prayer practice in North America because it requires a strong commitment. In the morning, people usually rush to work so that they can barely have time for grooming, dressing, and taking their children to school. Some may not even have enough time for breakfast before leaving for work. The busyness of North America is a main contributing factor to the poor prayer life of North Americans.

The spiritual discipline of morning prayer works well in the churches of mainland China and South Korea. The Chinese underground house churches

practise morning prayer, and the house church has grown tremendously in the past seventy years. The Chinese hymn “Five o’clock Morning Time in Mainland China” (Chinese: 中國早晨五點鐘) reflects the beauty of morning prayer. It has the following lyrics: “The morning prayer could unite the Chinese Christians and change the destiny of China.” Watchman Nee (1972, 101), a well-respected Chinese church leader, explains that “rising early has much to do with spiritual life.” Nee was a good example of rising early to pray. For those rising early receive much spiritual benefit. “Early rising is a great blessing” (Nee 1972, 106). In my experience, many Chinese Christians think that the one praying in the early morning loves the Lord more. It does not mean religious superiority and self-righteousness but expressing faithfulness to God.

Churches in South Korea gather for early morning prayer every day, and it has been practised for years. The practice of early morning prayer has become a distinguishing hallmark of Korean evangelical spirituality (Dyrness and Karkkainen 2008, 461). “God loves to move in our hearts early. Our day must begin in prayer, for then God responds” (Cho 1998, 106). God loves to strengthen Christians’ spirituality when there is morning prayer. God never sleeps and seems to be working actively in the early morning (Ps 46:4-5). “When we begin our day in prayer, we have the spiritual and physical strength to carry out our responsibilities” (Cho 1998, 107). Isaiah realized the works of God as he prayed to the Lord early in the morning (Is 26:9). The practice of early morning prayer may be a main contributing factor to the rapid growth of South Korean churches (Cho 1998, ix).

Praying at any time can rekindle our prayer life. However, choosing the early morning may help to provide consistency because there are likely to be fewer other distractions and commitments. I can imagine that many Chinese Christians have fallen into a dry and dying period of spiritual life after serving in an exhausted state. The spiritual practice of early morning prayer may enrich the spiritual life. It can create a space for people to interact with God through morning prayer. They can encourage one another through sharing prayer items and the devotionals. The pastor needs to be sensitive to people joining the morning prayer, encouraging but not pushing them. The purpose of morning prayer is not to exhaust the participants but to recuperate them.

I believe that spending time with God in morning prayer is biblical and is a God-pleasing activity. “Listen to my cry for help, my King, and my God, for to you I pray. In the morning, O LORD, you hear my voice; in the morning I lay my requests before you and wait in expectation” (Ps 5:2-3). Morning prayer is the missing jewel in our spiritual discipline. “I rise before dawn and cry for help; I have put my hope in your word” (Ps 119:47). I have learned from Jesus’ deeper life by following Jesus’ spiritual discipline of prayer. The apostle Paul stated his expectation in his epistles that the earthly church should be Christlike (2 Cor 3:18). He prayed continually (1 Thes 3:10, 5:17). Not only did the apostles demonstrate the benefit of prayer, but our fellow participants from the study have also shared the same benefit. Since the outcome of this research project was positive, the members of WAC have glimpsed the benefits of the spiritual practice of prayer. Morning prayer is practical and feasible in the contemporary church.

The anticipated benefit to the Chinese Christian churches is that they will move towards a Christlike community and will reflect the Lord's glory.

Early to bed and early to rise is considered a healthy habit in the Chinese culture. "Many of God's servants in the Bible had the habits of early rising" (Nee 1972, 101). Early morning prayer meetings should be before breakfast because the spiritual appetite should be fulfilled first. I suggested that the prayer meeting be an hour long. Many Chinese Christians believe that godly Christians are doing early morning prayer. However, the early prayer meeting is not a popular practice of Chinese churches in Canada. There are many reasons for this. Many Christians complain that the busy schedule makes it hard for them to spare another hour of prayer. Many complain about not getting enough sleep. They do not see the benefit of early morning prayer. They lack the motivation for doing early morning prayer individually. They need a peer support group to encourage each other.

The proposed morning prayer group created a peer support group environment to facilitate the development of a morning prayer habit. The project was forty days long, making it easier for members to commit to a short-term activity. By using a guided prayer practice, members were provided a way to pray and get close to God that they may not have been aware of before. Although the group was short-term, the idea was to help them to turn prayer into a long-term practice until it became a natural behaviour for them. Self-discipline is required for all spiritual disciplines. People's mindsets need to be trained until the habitual sense of God's presence is found. I believe that this morning prayer practice can train their persistence and perseverance because God helps those are willing to

pray. If they make effort to adjust their daily habits, the practice of early morning prayer may work eventually.

During this research project, I implemented an early morning prayer meeting and collected data about the spiritual practice. The spiritual practice should make an impact on the participants' daily lives at their workplaces, at home, and at church. "You'll get in better spiritual shape as you practice, and you'll be able to run the race to completion" (Jones 2005, 34). The spiritual practice should improve their spiritual appetites during the day. The participants were encouraged to continue the practice in the future.

Research Context

When I was pastoring in Halifax, I realized that the prayer life of many church members was scarce and miserable. Many young Christians did not know how to pray to God. After I shared the needs of prayer to one of the HCAC leaders, we initiated a morning prayer meeting to pray together with other church members. Some young Christians and some church leaders joined us regularly. We gradually formed a small group of prayer warriors. We prayed every weekday morning from seven till eight at church. I could see their commitment to praying together after a while of practice. However, I did not have a chance to interview the participants on how they had been transformed through the spiritual practice. For this research project, I had an opportunity to carry out this prayer practice systematically and formally.

In March 2017, we moved back to BC and began serving at WAC in Coquitlam. This research project was done in the context of WAC. I had chances

to listen to my church members sharing about their spiritual lives in different instances. In general, they had lost the desire to pray to God in the midst of busy days. They missed the daily appointment or the quiet time with the Lord. Few Christians in my church congregation prayed persistently. The prayer life was ignored during their spiritual journey. My church members may have felt that God was not present with them. Individuals had lost the desire to meet God every day. Although they were still serving hard and faithfully in the churches, their spiritual journeys were dry and boring. They gradually lost the energy or enthusiasm to follow Jesus closely. In general, they complained that their relationships with God were distant. The church prayer meeting continuously had low attendance. Because of low attendance, my church changed the weekly prayer meeting into a bi-monthly prayer meeting. Although they may have prayed at their own times, we were running out of corporate prayer warriors in the church.

I discovered that prayers for personal needs had been the beginning of spiritual life for my church members. However, such prayers are not sufficient to sustain one's spiritual life. Many of us fall into a pattern where the only times we pray are the times when we are prompted by personal needs or crisis. The rest of the time we rely on our own wisdom and strength. This pattern reflects what we really believe about the purpose of the prayer. This project investigated how a morning prayer practice could transform the church members' prayer life. I invited a small group of Cantonese-speaking members to join the morning prayer meeting and studied the results. I believe that praying in the early morning could rekindle the prayer life within WAC.

I was accountable to the senior pastor, Rev. Paul Chiu, of WAC. Pastor Paul studied the research proposal. We discussed the purpose and the implementation of the research in detail after he read the proposal. Pastor Chiu approved the research project in the summer of 2017.

Model of Spiritual Formation

Christ-centred is the motto of the Christian and Missionary Alliance. The FSJ model of spiritual formation is a response to the need for the balanced spiritual journey demonstrated by Jesus Christ. The balanced spiritual journey consists of four dimensions: inward, outward, upward, and downward (see Figure 6: The Fourfold Spiritual Journey Model). The journey inward, which is a Life of Discipline, is meant to help people acknowledge the indwelling of Christ within themselves. The journey outward, which is a Life of Community, is designed to help people reach out so that others are aware of the presence of Christ. The journey upward, which is a Life of Surrender, is intended to teach people to abide in Christ all the time. The journey downward, which is a Life of Testimony, is meant to help people impact others, learning the Word of God through Bible study. Since the four dimensions are intermingled, they influence and complement one another all the way. When I am too busy with community service, I need to practice contemplation from time to time. As I learn how to obey and live a Life of Surrender, I teach others to obey everything Jesus has commanded me. I am equipped to entrust what I have learned to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others (2 Tim 2:2). As I contemplate Christ and acknowledge His presence, I am empowered to abide in Christ, to impact others, and to reach

out to the community. As I abide in Christ, I will bear fruit, which means I will grow in character and reflect the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22-23). One of the fruits of the Spirit is self-control, which is an essential element for living a Life of Discipline.

Since the whole FSJ model was too big to be included in my research project, this research project examined a combination of spiritual practices from all four journey orientations to see whether the spiritual disciplines can help the Life of Discipline of the believers. I chose prayer (Upward), devotional reading (Downward), meditation and self-reflection (Inward), and fellowship (Outward) to be practised in my research project.

This research project attempted to reaffirm the holy practice of morning prayer in the Christian life. As I defined above, abiding in Christ is an important component of the Life of Surrender, which means to submit to God at all time. Kneeling to pray is one of the many tools used to submit to God. Jesus knelt to pray in the Garden of Gethsemane (Lk 22:41). Kneeling is a sign of submission (Upward Journey) to our heavenly Father. As Jesus' followers, we should also imitate His prayer posture in order to align ourselves with Jesus in term of body language.

This research project attempted to promote the formational reading of Scripture in the Christian life. As I described in Chapter IV, month 8, *Lectio Divina* is a useful tool for the Life of Testimony. As I defined in Chapter I, global theme of the research portfolio, contemplation is the spiritual action of the Life of Discipline, which is meant to bring my attention to God's presence. Meditation

and self-reflection are useful tools used in contemplation. Therefore, *Lectio Divina* is a process of formational reading that helps both the Life of Testimony and the Life of Discipline.

This research project attempted to promote the small group interaction in the Christian life to see whether the small group practice could help individual spiritual growth. “The church engages in its community function as it fosters sharing, caring people, as well as opportunities for believers to enjoy fellowship with one another” (Grenz 2000, 499). It may not be surprising that the outcome shows relational growth in the Life of Community. The anticipated outcome of the Life of Community was the acceleration of individual spiritual growth.

In summary, the practice of early morning prayer helps to live out all four parts of FSJ model, the Life of Discipline, the Life of Surrender, the Life of Testimony, and the Life of Community. The following sections will elaborate on the details of implementing the research.

Project Boundaries: Field and Scope

Christians living in a busy world have sometimes missed prayer in their daily lives, but Scripture describes prayer as being like breathing without ceasing (Rom 12:12, 1 Cor 7:5, Eph 6:18, Col 1:9, 1 Thes 5:17, 2 Tm 1:3). Through this project, I hoped to bring back the awareness of this lack through the spiritual discipline of prayer, peer support, divine guidance, and a short-term commitment. It is obvious that attending an early morning prayer meeting requires extra effort for many Christians. The mindset takes time to be transformed while the habitual sense of praying is being built. Once the habit is built, however, prayer becomes a

natural way of talking to God. I have experienced that the persistent practice has transformed my prayer life.

This project was implemented at WAC from October 11 to December 5, 2017, on weekdays for eight weeks. The number forty seems to have significance in the Bible. It often relates a particular timeframe of training (i.e., Moses on the mountain in Exodus 24:18) or trial (i.e., Jesus' temptation in Matthew 4:2). Morning prayer was practised for forty days as a spiritual discipline. Since it was a pilot project conducted in a small-group format, the eight-week duration matched well with the existing small group cycle of the church. The participants were invited from the Cantonese-speaking members of the church. The Cantonese congregation encompasses a wide age range, from young adults to seniors. A stable number of attendees was essential to the success of the research project. They had to have a strong commitment in order to pray persistently. Those members with a heart for seeking God and serving God were potential participants. The pilot group consisted of committed Christians who were recruited from the fellowship groups, small groups, and the regular prayer meeting participants. The recruitment stopped once the group of twelve was full. The small group of people including me met regularly in the early morning to pray.

Many aspects of the research project would have been considered normal in the life of the church. As a pastor of the congregation, I encouraged them to pray in all kinds of contexts (e.g., corporate prayer, prayer walks, healing prayer, etc.) Since one of the Alliance pastors' major responsibilities is to cultivate deeper

life in the church context, the congregation completely understood that the morning prayer practice proposed by the pastor was one way to help them to build a deeper life. My experience told me that it would be hard to keep the anonymity of participants for the research project. Anonymity might cause suspicion or even disturbance in the congregation. There was no harm for other people in the congregation to know of their participation. Filling in questionnaires is normal in the church ministries; it is done during Sunday school courses, summer camps, and ministry group retreats. The focus group meeting is also a common practice, giving participants a chance to share their spiritual journeys with others.

The prayer meeting was held during the week from Monday to Friday, five times a week. Since many adults in the congregation left for work after seven in the morning, the prayer meeting was scheduled from six o'clock to seven o'clock. People of our congregation lived close to the church, so they did not take long to get to the church in the early morning. The prayer meeting started and ended on time so that participants could plan their day accordingly. The content of the prayer meeting was simple, and it consisted of two segments. The first segment of thirty minutes was either sharing prayer items or doing *Lectio Divina*. The second segment of thirty minutes was for the corporate prayer.

The ACTS method of Christian prayer had been taught and practised at WAC. The Cantonese congregation was familiar with this method. It consists of Adoration (A), Confession (C), Thanksgiving (T), and Supplication (S). Adoration gives God praise and honour. Confession deals with the sin in our daily lives. Thanksgiving appreciates what God has provided for us in our daily lives.

Supplication is praying for the needs of others and ourselves. One of four components of ACTS was assigned as the theme of the prayer each day. The same theme repeated every four days. Forty days of prayer can have ten cycles of ACTS.

The practice of *Lectio Divina* was intended to help people focus more on the components of Adoration, Confession, and Thanksgiving. Sharing the prayer items in the first segment helped people focus more on the component of Supplication. Reading and meditating on the Psalms has helped people learn from the psalmists how to pray or connect with God. Jones (2005, 52) suggests using biblical Psalms as the text since they are a more obvious source of devotion. Therefore, I chose the Psalms for the *Lectio Divina*. There were Psalms of Praise (e.g., 100, 103, 104, 111, 113, 114, 117, 145, 146, 147, 148, 149, 150), Psalms of Thanksgiving (e.g., 18, 21, 30, 34, 75, 107, 116, 118, 124, 138), and Psalms of Confession (e.g., 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, 143). The prayer items could be personal items, church-related items, worldwide-related issues, etc.

For the second part of the prayer meeting, we would kneel, form a circle, and pray. I usually did the first prayer and reminded the participants of the theme of the day according to the schedule. Everyone took a turn to pray. Individual prayer length was flexible, and I advised them not to go too long. This gave an opportunity for everyone to pray during the session. At the end of the second segment, we would finish together by saying the Lord's Prayer or the Jesus Prayer. The unison prayer concluded the morning prayer of the day.

Qualitative Approach

This was a qualitative research project which examined the progress of people's prayer lives through early morning prayer meetings for a small group of Cantonese-speaking Christians at WAC. It was a form of participatory qualitative research (Sensing 2011, 58), which introduced the intervention of a spiritual discipline at a particular location and time. It was participatory because it required WAC to be the primary actor in defining the project's problem, data collection, method of analysis, and how to use the findings (Sensing 2011, 78). Intervention is a plan of action that emerges to address a problem (Sensing 2011, 64). This intervention was a pilot project with a group of committed Christians practising early morning prayer before deciding if it would become an official church ministry. I facilitated the prayer meetings five times per week for eight weeks. I shared with the participants the benefits of prayer by practising it with them. It was also essential to get the people experiencing the presence of God through the prayer so that they would practise it naturally in the long run.

I am the researcher who was the primary agent of the qualitative research. "Qualitative researchers need to position themselves in their writings. This is the concept of reflexivity in which the writer engages in self-understanding about the biases, values, and experiences that he or she brings to a qualitative research study" (Creswell and Poth 2018, 229). I need to report any personal and professional information that may have affected data collection, analysis, and interpretation (Sensing 2011, 224). I had experienced the benefit of the early morning prayer in the past. This past experience shaped my interpretation of the findings in the next section. It is obvious that my comments always revealed the

position of favouring early morning prayer. The reflexivity consists of two parts: (i) the researcher first talks about his or her experiences with the phenomenon being explored; (ii) the researcher discusses how these past experiences shape his or her interpretation of the phenomenon (Creswell and Poth 2018, 229). With the concept of reflexivity in mind, I share my past experiences first and then how these past experiences shape my interpretation in the following sections. I had a blessed and fruitful experience of doing early morning prayer while I was pastoring HCAC. It was a blessed experience because I encountered God in those five years. It was a fruitful experience because believers grew up and an unbeliever was converted by the Lord. I expected a similar outcome from this research project.

I love to hear stories and personal experiences with God from the participants. Christians' stories and spiritual experiences are precious assets by which the status of their spiritual lives can be examined. "Through narrative, a researcher can explore the ways practical theologians come to know and practice their craft in tacit and unmeasurable [sic] ways" (Sensing 2011, 158). I have shared my stories and spiritual experiences through Sunday sermons, Biblical teaching, devotional sharing, etc. Because of this, it was not abnormal for me to ask the participants to share their testimonies and spiritual experiences. It was very likely that studying their testimonies and spiritual experiences would reveal their desire for the spiritual discipline of prayer. "Narrative stories often contain turning points or specific tensions or transitions or interruptions" (Creswell and Poth 2018, 69). Their stories could give a glimpse of their desires for the practice

of prayer.

Narrative stories were collected from different sources to provide corroborating evidence. When a theme in different source of data was revealed, it was triangulating information and provided validity to my findings (Creswell and Poth 2018, 259). There were four different data sources: pre-intervention data, post-intervention data, focus group data, and field observation data noted during the intervention.

Table 3: Four Different Data Sources

Data Sources	When collected	How collected	Data was collected from
Pre-Intervention Data	Oct. 11-15, 2017	Open-ended Questionnaire	Pseudonyms: Timothy, Mark, Peter, Daniel, John, Jonah, Luke, Hosea, Joshua, and Matthew
Field Observation Data during Intervention	Oct. 11-Dec. 5, 2017	Jotted Notes through field observation	Ditto
Post-Intervention Data	Dec. 5-19, 2017	Open-ended Questionnaire	Ditto
Focus Group Data	Dec. 6-7, 2017	Transcribed Notes	Eight of above because two were sick

Those from the Chinese Christian tradition would appreciate rising early for prayer. An ethnographic approach focuses on the culture-sharing group (Creswell and Poth 2018, 90) and investigates their customs and behaviours. During the intervention, I collected ethnographic data for further analysis. “Ethnography involves extended observations of the group, most often through participant observation, in which the researcher is immersed in the day-to-day

lives of the people and observes and interviews the group participants” (Creswell and Poth 2018, 68). I studied the meaning of the behaviour, the language, and the interaction among the prayer group members. I looked for signs and patterns in the prayer group’s interactive activities, hopefully, to discover how the practice could shape individuals.

Method

Three data-gathering tools were used to collect the stories: open-ended questionnaires, a focus group interview, and field observation. This methodological triangulation (Sensing 2011, 73) provided a way to cross-check the data, provided breadth and depth to the analysis, and increased the trustworthiness of the research (Sensing 2011, 72). The themes revealed from different sources should not contradict one another. They should complement one another to provide a good picture of how the participants benefited from the early morning prayer.

An open-ended questionnaire was done by all participants at the beginning and at the end of the spiritual practice period (see Appendix 1: Open-Ended Questionnaire). The open-ended questions were designed so participants could share their spiritual journey stories. The open-ended questionnaire asked their stages of life. Participants from different stages of life provided useful information to see how the spiritual practice affects these different groups of believers. Comparing the two questionnaires helped determine if the persistent practice of prayer had helped them in growing the deeper life with God.

One focus group meeting was conducted after the intervention so that the

participants could share their spiritual experiences across the group. It was for the benefit of the participants, not only for the sake of data collection. “Through group interaction, data and insights are generated that are related to a particular theme imposed by a researcher and enriched by the group’s interactive discussion. The synergy of the group will often provide richer data than if each person in the group had been interviewed separately” (Sensing 2011, 120). This church congregation liked sharing. The focus group provided a way for members to review their experience in the group and share their perspectives on the logistics of running the group and their experience of morning prayer in a group format through the use of ACTS and *Lectio Divina*. This could increase their sense of belonging as they might have felt that their opinions were valued, and their spiritual experiences could encourage each other’s spiritual growth. A few questions were designed to promote sharing and discussion (see Appendix 2: Focus Group Interview Questions). Participants could share their spiritual journeys with the help of predefined questions. They could learn from each other through the cross-group interaction. At the same time, I verified the results from other collected data.

Field observation was done throughout the prayer meetings. I jotted notes as part of qualitative data collection. The ethnographic data provided some insights into how the social interactions and behaviours occurred within the small group of participants. If attendance was good, it might reflect their commitment, perseverance, and even spiritual growth. If attendance was bad, the participants might be telling us that they lacked the desire for God.

There were ten participants (six women and four men) recruited, not including me, who attended the early morning prayers. It was important to mask participants' names so that no identifiable information was included with the data sources. The recruitment leader—who was not a participant—assigned ten pseudonyms (Timothy, Mark, Peter, Daniel, John, Jonah, Luke, Hosea, Joshua, and Matthew) for the participants. The recruitment leader gave them male names only for his convenience. They were at varying stages of life: five of them were working full time, three were retired, and the last two did not specify their status. According to the knowledge of the pastor, seven of them were aged thirty to fifty and the last three were over the age of fifty. They were all married with children, and the group contained one husband and his wife. They were mainly from two fellowship groups (Love Fellowship and Joy Fellowship) of WAC. Love Fellowship was basically a fellowship group for young couples with young kids while Joy Fellowship was a fellowship group for adults aged fifty plus of all kinds of walks of life.

Since this was a qualitative research project, the textual data described the participants' spiritual health at a certain time and in a particular circumstance. The narratives of perceptions of their spiritual health were collected before and after the intervention by the open-ended questionnaires. The differences between the two tests were evaluated to see any change. The data collected from the focus group interview was a good check of the participants' spiritual health after the intervention. It elicited more detailed information, which was not obtained from the written questionnaire. It was used to confirm the data collected from the post-

intervention questionnaire. Finally, the data of field observation was used to examine the interactions and behaviours of participants.

After the data was collected, the process moved into the phase of data analysis. “Data analysis in qualitative research consists of preparing and organizing the data (i.e., text data as in transcripts, or image data as in photographs) for analysis; then reducing the data into themes through a process of coding and condensing the codes; and finally representing the data in figures, tables, or a discussion” (Creswell and Poth 2018, 183). The stages of data collection, data analysis, and report writing were not separate steps in the process. They were intermingled, and I often went back and forth between them throughout the research project. The data analysis process was used “to place the raw data into logical, meaningful categories, to examine data in a holistic fashion, and to find a way to communicate the interpretation to others” (Sensing 2011, 194).

The data was grouped in order to address the project’s problem and purpose. I provided the rich details from the findings with a thick description. With thick description, I took the data collected and gave a detailed interpretation of that data through my three angles of evaluation (Sensing 2011, 195). “Data analysis involves thick description of themes, slippages, and silences” (Sensing 2011, 211). The three angles of evaluation were used to look for the areas of significant overlap as themes or patterns, the areas of disconfirming evidence as slippages, and the realities not represented in my findings as silences (Sensing 2011, 197-198). Coding data made findings manageable. Grouping the coded data

into categories made findings summarized and systematic. Modelling the data groups into themes, slippages, and silences made sense of the data for interpretation. Here was the cycle of data analysis:

1. Raw text data was extracted from each data set. “Coding (sometimes called indexing, tagging, or labeling) is a way to get a handle on the raw data so that it is more accessible for interpretation” (Sensing 2011, 202). Coding was used to put the raw text data into meaningful groups. Each meaningful group was assigned a unique code.
2. Categories were generated by grouping a few related codes together. Categories were mutually exclusive. A unique code fit into only one category.
3. A theme was developed from the categories. Modelling the data groups into themes, slippages, and silences made sense of the data for interpretation.
4. The analysis moved back to the raw data, which was evaluated again to see whether it made sense all the way to the final theme.

The same data analysis process was applied to the focus group data. The transcribed data became the raw text data of another data set. Themes were developed through the cycle of the data analysis. The same process was applied to the field observation data. The jotted notes became the raw text data of another data set. Themes were developed through the four-step process. After all models of interpretation had been developed, I looked to see if there were any overarching themes across the questionnaire data, focus group data, and field observation data.

Phases and Timetable

The WAC research project started in May 2017 and was finished in April 2018. The research phase name, the respective action, the duration of each phase, the action implementer, and the way by which the action being implemented can be found in Table 4 below.

Table 4: Research Phases and Action

Phase	Action	Time Frame	Who	How
Getting Permission from WAC Senior Pastor	Sent the draft proposal to Pastor Chiu	Aug. 1, 2017	WF Chow	Emailed draft proposal and discussed the proposal with Pastor Chiu
Developing the Proposal	Submitted the supporting documents and REB Application to reb@tyndale.ca for Ethics Review	Sept. 1, 2017	WF Chow	Written report
Approval of the Proposal	Amended the REB Application and Project Proposal	Sept. 1-Oct. 4, 2017	WF Chow	Ethics review clearance on Sept. 25. The proposal approved on Oct. 4.
Recruiting the Participants	Obtained signed informed consent letters	Oct. 4-10, 2017	WF Chow & Participants	Third party invitation
Gathering Pre-Intervention Data	Assigned pseudonyms to the participants	Oct. 10, 2017	The Recruitment Leader	Clement Yeung (Love Fellowship President)
Gathering Pre-Intervention Data	Handed out the open-ended questionnaire	Oct. 10, 2017	WF Chow	WF Chow passed out questionnaire at church
Gathering Pre-Intervention Data	Filled out and returned the open-ended questionnaire	Within 5 days of distribution	Participants	Participants filled out and returned to WF Chow's mailbox
Intervention Stage (Eight weeks)	Held prayer meeting five times per week for eight weeks	Oct. 11-Dec. 5, 2017	Participants and WF Chow	WF Chow facilitated the prayer meetings
Gathering Post-Intervention	Handed out the open-ended	Dec. 5, 2017	WF Chow	WF Chow passed out questionnaire

Phase	Action	Time Frame	Who	How
Data	questionnaire			at church
Gathering Post-Intervention Data	Conducted the focus group interview	Dec. 6-7, 2017	Participants and WF Chow	WF Chow facilitated and jotted notes
Gathering Post-Intervention Data	Filled out and returned the questionnaire	Within 15 days of distribution	Participants	Participants filled out and returned to WF Chow's mailbox
Analysis	Coded data for questionnaires, focus group interview and observation	Late December 2017	WF Chow	
Interpretation	Reviewed and interpreted the coded data	Jan. 1-31, 2018	WF Chow	
Reporting	Draft written report	Feb. 1, 2018	WF Chow	via the Course Website "Items for Peer Review" Forum
	Final written report	Apr. 1, 2018	WF Chow	via the appropriate Assignment Submission Folder on the Cohort website

Ethics in Ministry-Based Research

The confidentiality of data was essential to the collection of genuine feedback. The participants were assigned pseudonyms at the very beginning. Only the recruitment leader kept the names' mapping information. The participants dropped off the questionnaires with their pseudonyms only. I could not identify individuals after receiving the questionnaires. I maintained the confidentiality of all information shared, and all data was stored in a locked filing cabinet and on my password-protected laptop. All the participants in the research project were expected to keep confidential all sharing that took place in the prayer meetings. The collected data was coded and then interpreted. While elements of our

personal stories might be included in the final written report, no names or other identifying information would be included in the report. This report is going to be placed in the Tyndale library as part of my project portfolio. Copies can also be given to all research participants who would like one, and a copy will also be given to the congregation and likely placed in the church library. I assured the participants that there would be no secondary use of the data.

It was important that the research participants knew that total anonymity was not possible. The Cantonese congregation of WAC is an intimate congregation. The church members might know who was participating in the research with me. Additionally, church members might be able to identify the participants in the final written report based on familiarity with their stories. No aspect of the story was included in the final report with which participants were not comfortable.

At the time of seeking the consent of the participants (see Appendix 4: Research Study Consent Form), I communicated the purpose of the qualitative research. Participants understood the purpose of the research and its potential benefits. Participants were asked to show commitment. They should not make up results in order to please me. In order to reduce any power differential that might occur, I pledged not to pressure potential or actual participants in any way and always to seek the best interests and the interests of the congregation (see Appendix 3: Information Letter for Research into Deeper Life). The participants were encouraged to provide genuine feedback, and they would also have the opportunity to review and interpret the data.

Protecting the privacy of participants was important. All prayer items, intimate sharing, and sensitive information were prohibited from being shared outside the prayer group. The recruitment leader did not know the details of the completed questionnaires since they would not collect the data for the researcher. The participants dropped off their questionnaires with the pseudonyms into a mailbox in the church office. I collected the questionnaires from the mailbox, and I could see the collected data with the pseudonyms only. The participants were reminded that the intervention might induce embarrassment, humiliation, lowered self-esteem, guilt, conflict, anger, stress, discouragement, or other emotional reactions. The participants were told to feel free to drop out of the practice at any time. The participants were free to answer or to not answer the questionnaires. The participants were free to share their feelings during the focus group meeting.

There were a few amendments to the Research Ethics Board (REB) application and the project proposal. The ethics review clearance at Tyndale Seminary was received on September 25, 2017. Professor Chapman finally approved the project proposal on October 4, 2017.

Findings

Before the intervention, the pre-intervention questionnaires (see Appendix 1: Open-Ended Questionnaire) were completed by the ten participants and collected within the first week of the intervention. The prayer practice, or intervention, was implemented from October 11 to December 5, 2017. The field observation data was recorded on the same day right after the prayer meeting. After the intervention, the post-intervention questionnaires (see Appendix 1:

Open-Ended Questionnaire) were filled in by the ten participants and collected before the Christmas holidays. The focus group was done on December 6 and 7 at church from six to seven in the morning. Basically, I jotted down interesting points from each participant with my laptop computer after I raised the focus group questions (see Appendix 2: Focus Group Interview Questions).

During the Christmas holidays, I converted all important points for each participant from the paper form of the questionnaires into the electronic form of Excel spreadsheets. Two spreadsheets were created, one for the pre-intervention questionnaires and one for the post-intervention questionnaires. For the spreadsheet of pre-intervention questionnaire, I put the first question's data onto the first sheet, the second question's data onto the second sheet, and so on. Each spreadsheet had three columns: the first column was the raw data, the second column was the name of participant, and the third column was the code I assigned for each row of raw data (see Figure 7: Example of a Raw Data Worksheet). On the last spreadsheet, I put all codes in the first column, grouped codes in the second column, put categories in the third column, and grouped categories in the fourth column (see Figure 8: Example of a Coded Data Worksheet). A theme was then drawn from the grouped categories for each question. After a long process of back and forth data re-organization, the flowchart of finalized codes, categories, and themes diagrams (see Appendix 5: Question 1—Codes, Categories, and Themes) was fixed for each question of the pre- and post-intervention questionnaires.

Figure 7: Example of a Raw Data Worksheet

Figure 8: Example of a Coded Data Worksheet

The focus group data and the field observation data were already in the form of Excel spreadsheets. Therefore, there were four Excel spreadsheets of data, and each spreadsheet represented a particular data source. Similar data organization and analysis were done to the focus group data (see Appendix 9: Question 1—Categories of Focus Group) and the field observation data (see

Appendix 14: Field Observation Categories).

Credibility

According to Sensing, there are methods to increase the credibility of my research project. “Credibility is related to the degree of confidence that others can have in the findings of a particular project” (Sensing 2011, 219). Basically, I have applied the following techniques: (i) triangulation (Sensing 2011, 220); (ii) reflective confirmation (Sensing 2011, 220); (iii) thick descriptions (Sensing 2011, 222); and (iv) accounting for researcher’s biases (Sensing 2011, 223).

Triangulation (see Chapter V: Method) had been applied to secure the validity of data and interpretation. In order to ensure truthful answers, survey questions were designed in such a way that there were no right or wrong answers. This helped participants to give responses that were perfectly acceptable without worrying about coming up with an acceptable Christian answer. In order to reduce my potential influence on the data, I pledged not to pressure any participants in any way and always to seek the best interests of the church congregation. The participants were encouraged to provide genuine feedback all the time. Anyway, I did not know who the authors of the open-ended questionnaires were since they did them with pseudonyms. The participants should have provided reliable data. With the focus group meeting, I could see their joyful faces, and my intuition told me that they were speaking the truth. The participants did not give feedback to please me but shared genuine answers. I also jotted down the field observation notes faithfully. Therefore, the raw data is clean and reliable. The next step was to reduce my biases when interpreting the data.

Reflective confirmation was applied to confirm the findings and the interpretation. Member checking was conducted in the focus group interview by verifying interpretations and data gathered in earlier questionnaires. The five questions designed for the focus group interview were geared to verify the data collected from the pre-intervention questionnaires. No discrepancy arose between my perceptions and the participants' data.

Thick descriptions give a detailed interpretation of data by using themes, slippages, and silences. I identified many themes (see Appendix 5-14), but one silence was also observed. "The question that silence asks is 'What is left unsaid that needs to be examined?'" (Sensing 2011, 200) One of the participants, Joshua, realized God was his judge (see Appendix 7 & 8) during the prayer practice. The divine Judge condemns our sins, and nobody would like to get close to Him. Joshua's voice was almost ignored because others strongly expressed that prayer would help to build an intimate relationship with God. That silence was deafening (Sensing 2011, 201). We feel that God as a friend is more comfortable than God as a judge in contemporary culture. We preach the love of God more than the righteousness of God. The Father is not only a loving God but also a righteous God. Bible says that God is just, and therefore must punish sin. People try to ignore and escape the negative or bad experiences, but this research result actually suggests that God's image as a judge may help spiritual formation too.

Researcher's biases (one example of reflexivity) were addressed in order to reduce the bias. Desirability bias is a bias toward a belief I want to be true. This bias prevents me from providing truthful interpretation to survey questions and

observation, thereby leading to inclined results of survey questions and observation, and thus diminishing the ultimate purpose of this research project. Here are a few approaches that I took in order to reduce the researcher's bias. First, the reader should have seen my intention in the narrative descriptions of the project design and implementation. I disclosed my personal background that might have affected data collection, analysis, and interpretation (Sensing 2011, 224). Second, since my assumption was that morning prayer would be beneficial, the interpretation must be made based on the raw data, not from my assumption, and no presumption should be made before the data analysis. Third, ambiguous themes would not be drawn from the interpretation.

With these four techniques being applied to the research project, I am confident that this research report is convincing and reliable. I am willing to share the research results with other Alliance churches in the future.

Data Analysis

In order to answer the research question, "How does regular early morning prayer contribute to the prayer life for a small group of Cantonese-speaking members of WAC?" I have gone through the process of data analysis. For pre-intervention and post-intervention data sources, I received the raw data from questionnaires. I read the raw data many times and then coded it in order to answer the respective questions of the questionnaires. This led to a list of codes (see Appendix 5-14: leftmost column of each flowchart). I grouped related coded data into meaningful categories (see Appendix 5-14: middle column of each flowchart). Finally, I drew the themes (see Appendix 5-14: rightmost column of

each flowchart) from the groups of categories. The same process was applied to the raw data collected from the focus group data and the observation data.

For each question from the respective data sources in the following sections, the respective raw data points will be quoted right after the questions, and then followed by the tables of the grouped categories which were developed from the coded data. A description of the developed themes, which were drawn from the categories, will also be given at the end of the discussion.

For the observation data, a table of categories, which was developed from the coded data (see Appendix 14: Field Observation Categories), was extracted and is presented in the section of “Observation Data.” A summary of themes, which were drawn from the categories, will also be given at the end of the discussion.

Intervention Data

There were four questions on the open-ended questionnaire. The data analysis of each question is listed respectively.

Question 1

What kind of spiritual practices do you practise in your daily life? Why do you practise them? (See Appendix 5: Question 1—Codes, Categories, and Themes)

The pre-intervention data showed that participants connected with God through prayer with supplication. Here are a few examples of the data. Matthew would “ask for help and guidance.” Hosea “prayed to God for assistance and

forgiveness.” The post-intervention data showed that they connected with God through prayer with praise, confession, thanksgiving. Here are a few examples of the data. Matthew practised prayer to communicate with God. Daniel “praised God with singing.” John liked “to give thanks to God.” Luke practised prayer because he “felt distant and lack of motivation to pray.”

The pre-intervention data showed that many participants did informational Scripture reading in their daily life. Timothy had “read Proverbs” recently. Matthew “attended Sunday school weekly and Bible study meeting in order to know God more.” The post-intervention data revealed that many participants did formational Scripture reading in their daily life. Daniel, Matthew, and Joshua wanted “to know God more.” Luke “listened to sermons in order to know God more.” After the intervention, the purpose of Scripture reading had changed from cerebral knowledge of God through Sunday school and Bible study to experiencing God through meditation and personal reflection (see next paragraph).

According to the pre-intervention data, many participants spent time with God as a spiritual practice in their daily life. Timothy “spent time alone with God.” Luke meditated on God. The post-intervention data showed that many participants spent time with God as a spiritual practice in their daily life. Daniel “meditated on God’s Word.” John did “personal reflection on Bible verses.” Hosea did “a meditation on God.” Luke “felt in need of time alone with God.”

From the pre-intervention data, the spiritual practice—the intervention—would help participants to build an intimate relationship with God. Hosea, Joshua,

and Matthew clearly indicated that “prayer would help to build an intimate relationship with God.” Daniel wanted “to be more like Jesus.” Joshua wanted to “listen to His voice.” From the post-intervention data, the spiritual practice helped participants to build an intimate relationship with God. Matthew wanted to “listen to God’s voice.” Peter wanted to “cultivate the presence of God.” Luke “put God as a priority to start the day and had more desire for God’s work.” Hosea wanted to “listen and wait for the Holy Spirit.”

Table 5: Grouped Categories of Q1 (Intervention Data)

Pre-Intervention Categories	Post-Intervention Categories
Connected with God through prayer with supplication	Connected with God through prayer with praise, confession, thanksgiving
Informational Scripture reading	Formational Scripture reading
Spent time with God	Spent time with God
Helped to build an intimate relationship with God	Helped to build an intimate relationship with God

The findings revealed that spending time with God helped participants to build an intimate relationship with God. Before the intervention, they connected with God through prayer with supplication and they did informational Scripture reading. After the intervention, they connected with God through prayer with praise, confession, and thanksgiving and they did formational Scripture reading. The Scripture reading tended to be formational because they started meditating on God and felt the need to spend time with God. It was hard to measure the move from informational to formational. One sign of movement was that the participants were willing to share their inspiration after reading the Scripture rather than interpreting the Scripture. They put God as a priority to start the day

and had more desire for God's work.

Question 2

How do the spiritual practices influence your desire for God during the day? (See Appendix 6: Question 2—Codes, Categories, and Themes)

The pre-intervention data showed that participants communicated with God through supplication. Matthew “asked God for help.” The post-intervention data showed that they communicated with God through praise, supplication, and blessings. Joshua “asked God to take away [his] negative thoughts and strengthened [him].” Matthew “asked God to lead [him] and solved the problems for [him].” Mark “knew better how to praise the Lord.”

The pre-intervention data showed that Scripture reading, according to many participants, was a spiritual practice that influenced their desire for God during the day. Jonah shared that it “reminded [him] what Bible verses told [him].” Jonah “felt connected with God during the day after meditation.” Matthew “knew more of our Lord including His plan for [him].” The post-intervention data also showed that Scripture reading, to many participants, was a spiritual practice that influenced their desire for God. Mark “knew about God's attributes.” Jonah “thought how to apply the scripture in [his] daily life.”

The pre-intervention data showed that many participants realized that God could help them. Daniel claimed that “God calmed [him] from the always overwhelming life.” Matthew felt that he “had more faith in God.” The post-intervention data showed that many participants realized that God could help.

Timothy “had faith that God would do what He said.” Daniel “realized how man is small and helpless in difficult times.” Joshua would “notice the wrongdoing immediately and repent to God.” Matthew “tended to think positively.”

The pre-intervention data showed that the spiritual practice (already practised in their daily lives) helped participants to build an intimate relationship with God. Timothy was “sensitive to God’s voice.” Mark had the “desire to have a deeper relationship with God.” Peter would “not forget God in [his] daily life.” Daniel “focused on God” more often. Joshua had “the pursuit of God” more often. Matthew “thought of God’s work” more often. The post-intervention data also showed that the spiritual practice helped participants to build an intimate relationship with God. Mark was “meeting God during the day.” Daniel would “try to put [his] trust in God.” Luke “focused [himself] on God and made Him as a priority throughout the day.” Luke wanted to deepen his spiritual life (“a deeper life”). Hosea had “a closer relationship with God and felt that Holy Spirit guided and led [him] into His way day by day.” Joshua had “a closer relationship with God and was sensitive to God’s desire.” Matthew was “sensitive to sin” after reading the Psalms of Confession.

Table 6: Grouped Categories of Q2 (Intervention Data)

Pre-Intervention Categories	Post-Intervention Categories
Communicated with God through supplication	Communicated with God through praise, supplication & blessings
Scripture reading	Scripture reading
God could help by knowing self	God could help by knowing self & others, and being sensitive to sin
Helped to build an intimate relationship with God	Helped to build a deeper life with God

The findings revealed that prayer and Scripture reading helped participants to build an intimate relationship with God. Before the intervention, the emphasis was on self-learning. After the intervention, the emphasis was on more than self-learning, it also included knowing others and being sensitive to sin. Some participants used the Alliance term *deeper life* to describe their personal relationships with God. After noticing wrongdoing, they would ask for forgiveness from God. They were willing to make God a priority throughout the day. Because they were willing to listen to the Holy Spirit during the day, they were sensitive to God's desires and their own sin. Some participants must have grown closer to God during those days of intervention.

Question 3

Please share, in a few sentences, about your prayer life experience in the last week. (See Appendix 7: Question 3—Codes, Categories and Themes)

Not many participants shared prayer issues both before and after the intervention. Luke felt that “[his] prayer was usually about [him] and [his] family.” Daniel “sometimes found it hard to connect with God but sometimes His presence was so stronger that makes [him] emotional.”

The pre-intervention data showed that participants had had a godly praying experience in the preceding week. Mark experienced that “God responded [his] prayer and helped [him] to change [his] perception of other people.” Peter “prayed while driving in the morning.” Jonah “learned how to pray for each

other.” Hosea “opened [his] mind and got close to God.” Matthew would “pray in the morning and at night.” The post-intervention data showed that there had also been a godly praying experience in the preceding week. Peter “knelt down to pray with my daughters as learned from the early prayer meeting.” Daniel believed that “God answered [his] prayer even though the problems might not be resolved.” Matthew “tried to make use of the scripture in [his] prayer.”

The pre-intervention data showed that prayer had helped the participants to encounter God in the preceding week. Timothy experienced that “God changed [him] through prayer.” Mark experienced that “God removed the doubt towards others.” Joshua experienced “the comfort of God as He forgave [him].” Matthew believed that “God had planned for everyone even though some prayers had not been answered.” The post-intervention also showed that prayer undoubtedly helped the participants to encounter God. Timothy experienced that “there was hope.” Mark “focused on the glory of God and all suffering seemed to be not existing anymore.” Hosea experienced that “God saved [him].” Joshua experienced that “God’s Word comforted [him].”

The pre-intervention data showed that the prayer helped to build Christian fellowship. Mark “enjoyed the fellowship with God and others.” John shared more openly with others. John was aware of “more about others’ situations.” Daniel “understood what it meant when people said, ‘Christians connected through the Christ.’” The post-intervention showed that the prayer helped to build an intimate relationship with God. Timothy felt that “[his] relationship with God grew.” Daniel experienced that “real connection with God is very refreshing and

reminded [him] of time at the very beginning of [his] Christian life.” Jonah “sat down and thought about what God did for [him] yesterday/today before praying.” Luke “had experienced a more focused, quiet and alternative experience with God.” Luke experienced that “God helped [him] to cast away other distractions and reminded [him] to give up [his] wants (like sleeping in) to search for His kingdom.”

Only one participant felt that the prayer helped to build Christian faith after the practice. Joshua experienced the “prayer strengthened [his] faith in God.”

Table 7: Grouped Categories of Q3 (Intervention Data)

Pre-Intervention Categories	Post-Intervention Categories
Prayer issues	Prayer issues
Godly praying experience	Godly praying experience with the ACTS model
Helped to encounter God	Helped to encounter God
<i>koinōnia</i>	Helped to build an intimate relationship with God
	Helped to build Christian faith

There were prayer issues with the participants’ prayer lives. The findings before and after the intervention for the third question of the questionnaire were quite different. Regular prayer definitely helped participants to encounter God. Before the intervention, the prayer focus was on supplication. People quickly realized the benefit of corporate prayer with a closer human relationship (quality time of fellowship with one another in the group). After the intervention, they were familiar with the ACTS model of prayer. People realized the benefit of corporate prayer on the Divine-human relationship (quality time of fellowship

with God). Some tried to make use of Scripture in praying. Some felt the growth of Christian faith after the practice.

Question 4

Please share your personal experience with God in the last week. (See Appendix 8: Question 4—Codes, Categories, and Themes)

The pre-intervention data showed that participants communicated with God through prayer with praise and thanksgiving. Mark “gave thanks to God.” Matthew “praised the Lord.” The post-intervention data showed that they communicated with God through prayer with a new approach. Timothy “connected [his] life events and changed [his] outlook on prayer.” Timothy “made an effort to pray throughout the day.” Joshua “asked God to be merciful to [them] and lighten up [their] hearts to seek Him and leave those idols misleading [them].” Matthew experienced that “God listened to and answered [his] prayers.” Matthew “praised the Lord.”

The pre-intervention data showed that many participants reported that Scripture reading had affected their experience with God in the preceding week. Peter “thanked God for helping [him] in Bible study and experienced the protection throughout the family trip.” The post-intervention data showed that many participants felt Scripture reading had affected their experience with God in the preceding week. Jonah was “very good connecting and learning a lot from God.” Matthew could “get insights from Psalms more easily than before.”

The pre-intervention data showed that prayer had helped participants to

encounter God in the preceding week. Timothy “learned to rely on God in the daily need” and “noted that to rely on God to start a day of life.” John “prayed more whenever [he] had any emotion swing (anxiety & anger).” Luke felt that “there were times that [he] felt God was not there for [him].” Joshua experienced that “God forgave [his] weakness.” Matthew experienced that “God provided [him] with what [he] needed.” The post-intervention data showed that prayer had helped participants to encounter God in the preceding week. Timothy “changed the way [he] talked to God, and [his] view on prayer.” Mark was “close to God even though many difficult times in the last week.” Mark experienced that “the purpose of [his] life was to fulfill His purpose.” Peter experienced “God’s healing of [his] wife’s finger.” John “noticed the words of encouragement [he] received, [he] knew that [he] had nothing to worry about.” Luke “asked God for the direction of what He would like [him] to do.” Joshua experienced that “God was [his] shelter and God told Joshua to wait for Him and be strong.” Joshua experienced that “[his] trouble completely released after His Words came.”

The pre-intervention data showed that the spiritual practice of prayer helped to build an intimate relationship with God. Mark “saw a miracle in a sister’s ministry.” Jonah “*felt closer to God.*” Luke “felt comfortable with his connection with God.” Luke “hoped that [he] could be less self-centered with interacting with Him.” Jonah wanted “to have private time with God” before the intervention. The post-intervention data showed that the spiritual practice of prayer helped to build an intimate relationship with God. John said that “God reminds [him] daily of His blessings.” Jonah claimed, “to have a better spiritual

life.” Luke said that “when we focused on the right thing in the morning, it felt like [he] set [himself] up in the right direction that [he] was ready to roll for the day.” Luke said that “God kept speaking to [him] throughout the day and continued to remind him of His words.” God has drawn Luke closer to Him.

John “had a sense of calm in [him]” before the intervention. Luke felt that “his faith was not strong enough and needed to be worked on” before the intervention. John “felt the encouragement to step out and shared God’s love with others” after the intervention.

Table 8: Grouped Categories of Q4 (Intervention Data)

Pre-Intervention Categories	Post-Intervention Categories
Communicated with God through prayer with praise and thanksgiving	Communicated with God through prayer with a new approach
Scripture reading	Scripture reading to know God
Helped to encounter God	Helped to encounter God
Helped to build an intimate relationship with God	Helped to build an intimate relationship with God
Helped to build Christian character	Helped to reach out others

The findings revealed that prayer was a practice essential to encountering God and building a relationship with God. The answers before and after the intervention for the fourth question of the questionnaire were quite different. Before the intervention, the participants encountered God through prayer with a reaching-in purpose. They liked to spend time with God and experienced the growth of Christian character. After the intervention, the participants encountered God through prayer with a reaching-out purpose. Scripture reading helped participants to know God. They were inspired by reading the Psalms. The practice

encouraged them to discern God's will so that they could fulfill His purpose. The practice encouraged one participant to reach out to others to share God's love.

Focus Group Data

There were five questions in the focus group interview. Eight participants attended the meeting. I gave the pseudonyms M1 to M8 for those participants when I quoted their words. The data analysis of each question is listed respectively.

Question 1

Please share your positive experiences, if any, from the prayer practice so that it could be shaping and helping one another spiritually. (See Appendix 9: Question 1—Categories of Focus Group)

The early morning prayer was a spiritual discipline. M6 shared that “[he] never prayed in that early morning and [he] did not want to stop the practice after it was done.” M6 needed “the family support” to make the commitment.

The ACTS prayer model was comprehensive. M1 shared that it was “powerful to pray for the needs of others in the group.” M6 shared that “reading Psalms helped to pray including the components of praise and thanksgiving.”

The spiritual reading was inspiring. M1 shared that “[he] read more Chinese Bible now.” M2 shared that he had “wider inspiration from knowing others' thought.” M3 shared that “reading Psalms was like reading a love letter.” M6 shared that “[he] used to see one perspective of the scripture, but it had helped [him] going deeper and wider this way, and [he] even prepared the reading the

night before.” M7 shared that “[he] looked at a different translation of Psalms at the beginning of the practice.” M8 shared “it was hard to interpret the scripture before, but this way was easier to read Scripture.”

The practice helped to build Christian fellowship. M4 shared that “praying together is a strength.” M6 shared that “praying together was to watch over one another.” M2 shared that “[he] knew more the needs of brothers and sisters compared with other church meetings.” M3 shared that “sharing included life application with a different personal perspective.” M4 shared that they “learned from one another.” M8 shared that “everyone’s expression was different.”

Kneeling to pray was a refreshing experience for many participants, and they were more focused on God.

Table 9: Group Categories of Q1 (Focus Group Data)

Categories
Spiritual discipline
ACTS prayer model
Spiritual reading
<i>koinōnia</i>
Refreshing experience of prayer

The refreshing prayer experience included building spiritual discipline, building Christian fellowship, and praying with the ACTS model. It was a positive experience, with some participants looking forward to the morning prayer meeting the night before. Since they knew the Scripture (psalms) they were going to read, some of them even read the passages beforehand. One participant mentioned that they learned from one another through the inspiring sharing.

Question 2

Please share your negative experiences, if any, after the prayer practice so that we can pray for your unique needs. (See Appendix 10: Question 2—Categories of Focus Group)

The negative experience was simple. M2 shared that “there was not enough time to share in the first half of the meeting.” M6 shared that “speeding resulted in order to get to church in the morning.” M7 shared that “[he] got less sleeping time” during the practice. M2 shared that he found it “hard to speak loud while kneeling to pray.” M8 shared that there might be “spiritual warfare” because two participants were sick, and they could not finish the full practice. M8 shared that “it was hard for [him] to share personal prayer items.” M8 shared that he got “many negative thoughts the night before one prayer meeting” because of anxiety.

Table 10: Group Categories of Q2 (Focus Group Data)

Categories
Spiritual discipline
Face resistance to prayer
Anxiety

There were resistances to practising the spiritual discipline of prayer. In order to attend the meeting punctually, one drove carelessly with excessive speed. There might have been spiritual warfare against the powers of the dark because Satan did not want us to draw closer to God. That may have been why two participants suffered serious illness during the forty days, and both could not

finish the full practice.

Question 3

How is this morning prayer practice different from your regular prayer practice? Please share the advantages and the disadvantages of the morning prayer. (See Appendix 11: Question 3—Categories of Focus Group)

There were differences between the morning prayer practice and the participants' regular prayer practice. Meditation, spiritual reading, and waiting before God were the major tools used in the morning prayer practice which were different from their regular prayer practice. M2 shared that "meditation was biblical, and it helps [us] to focus and not to wander around." M2 was "trained to wait before God patiently." M2 felt that "God spoke to [him] through the Word of God." M4 shared that "[he] needed more time of meditation in order to make a connection with God." M3 shared that he had "experienced a better connection with God because of better focus during the quiet time." M4 shared that "monasticism was actually good because we had too many distractions today." M7 shared that the practice "was not spontaneous, it needed efforts to go through the journey;" therefore, "this way of prayer was very restrictive, it was hard to implement with regular church meetings." M8 shared that "[he] received many things from God so that it helped the family communication." M6 shared that "many hymns were from the psalms." The Psalms are a way to praise God. One shared that the practice "helps [him] to pray harder for others."

Table 11: Group Categories of Q3 (Focus Group Data)

Categories
Give space to God / To know God
An intimate relationship with God
Spiritual discipline
ACTS prayer model
<i>koinōnia</i>

Basically, the participants just shared the advantages of this morning prayer. This spiritual discipline gave space to God and helped participants building an intimate relationship with God. Daily life has many distractions to draw the participants away from God. This prayer practice provided a quiet time—like what monks do in the monastery—so that they could intentionally focus on God. Although it was rightly observed that the prayer practice took effort, the benefits expressed make the effort worthwhile.

Question 4

How has this morning prayer practice affected your relationship with God? (See Appendix 12: Question 4—Categories of Focus Group)

Early morning prayer was a spiritual discipline which affected their relationship with God for many participants. M1 shared that he had “more quiet time now and the daily life pattern had been changed.” M6 shared that “[he] did not feel hard to get up early.” M7 shared that “[his] focus was to practice prayer.”

The morning prayer practice helped participants to build an intimate relationship with God. M3 shared that he “had a closer relationship with God and it affected the day because of thinking of others’ sharing.” M3 shared that he was

“more open to God’s Words in everyday devotionals so that [he] was closer to God.” M4 shared that “focusing on Scripture helped to get closer to God.” M5 shared that he was “still connected to God while others were praying.”

Praying with the ACTS model affected their relationship with God. M3 shared that “because the praise focus was done less in the past, doing it now helped [him] to get closer to God.” M5 shared that “praising God was not because of the grace received.” M6 shared that “[he] knew how to thank God but did not know how to praise God as a child.” M6 “learned to praise more in the prayer and knew why to praise more.”

It was interesting to learn that the practice helped to build a closer relationship among the brothers and sisters in the Lord. M4 shared that he was “willing and felt safe to share with this group.” M6 shared that our group “was rich with many professionals and they had contributed a lot of variety.”

Table 12: Group Categories of Q4 (Focus Group Data)

Categories
Spiritual discipline
Daily life changed
An intimate relationship with God
ACTS prayer model
<i>koinōnia</i>

The spiritual discipline of praying with the ACTS model helped participants to build an intimate relationship with God. Almost every participant shared similar feedback. The ACTS model helped them to praise and give thanks to God naturally.

Question 5

How would you feel if we were to have this morning prayer practice on a long-term basis? (See Appendix 13: Question 5—Categories of Focus Group)

The practice helped to build a daily spiritual discipline. M2 shared that we had “to stress on spiritual discipline in order to grow mature.” The forty days practice “helped [him] relying on God further.” M6 shared that “the benefit was to grow a deeper relationship with God and we had to grow spiritually.” M4 shared that we have to explicitly “ask for commitment during recruitment.” M7 shared that “the individual commitment was more important than the size of the group and [his] wife’s accommodations were crucial to the success of [his] prayer practice.”

The practice helped participants to pray with ACTS model. M3 “would like to see every believer in the church should attend within a year, it would benefit every Christian.” M5 shared that “this kind of prayer nurtured [him], retuned [him] to know how to pray with the church prayer items.” M7 shared that “our practice was very different from the traditional prayer meeting, but both would work.” M7 shared that we should “pray with the ACTS model even without this kind of prayer meeting.”

The practice helped to build a closer relationship among brothers and sisters in the Lord. M3 shared that “God should connect believers who were members of the family.” Some preferred the group members should know one another well at the beginning of the practice while some preferred not knowing one another. Many treasured the opportunity of praying together.

The morning prayer practice on a long-term basis needs individual commitment and also the church effort. M3 shared that “it is better to invite personally by sharing personal testimony.” M4 shared that the church needs to “make an announcement and ask for the commitment.” M6 shared that “who’s leading should not matter.” M7 shared that “this kind [of prayer practice] has size limitation because of quality is important.”

Table 13: Group Categories of Q5 (Focus Group Data)

Categories
Spiritual discipline
ACTS prayer model
<i>koinōnia</i>
Church effort

Based on the positive feedback, I was encouraged to implement the morning prayer practice on a long-term basis. Many participants treasured the opportunity of praying together.

Observation Data

The field observation data was collected to examine the customs and behaviours of a small group of Chinese Christians from WAC during the intervention (See Appendix 14: Field Observation Categories). In summary, the practice helped to build spiritual discipline of prayer in the participants.

Table 14: Group Categories of Observation Data

Categories
Good attitude
Physical setback
Encountered God
Flexibility of participants
<i>koinōnia</i>
Unexpected Visitor

The field observation provided some information about logistics. Most of the prayer meetings were held at church except when the power was cut and there were a few days of special arrangements. One participant suffered a heart attack, and she underwent a successful stenting operation. In order to support and pray for her, the practice was moved to her home for three days. Because I was away for a few days during the intervention, one of the participants stepped up to facilitate for three days. The participants were flexible and adapted to the changes of the meeting location and the facilitator. The changes did not seem to affect participants' prayers quality and relationship with others. I did not see anyone being distracted by the different environment. Nobody raised concerns about a change of facilitator. The feedback from the temporary facilitator was good.

In general, the participants showed a good attitude to the prayer practice. The average attendance rate was over seventy percent. Eight out of eleven participants attended the whole practice from the beginning to the end. Three of the group were never absent or late to the meetings. Two of the absences were due to sickness or serious injury. Another absentee went back to Hong Kong after twenty-eight days. Since she is the leader of the prayer ministry, I encouraged her

to join in order to taste the spiritual discipline, even though I knew her plan beforehand. Occasional lateness (a few minutes) was expected, and participants made an effort to do better the next day.

I had to consider physical weakness during the early morning prayer practice. I provided three cushions for participants in case they were needed. Kneeling for thirty minutes' praying was a bit too much for the ladies. All three cushions were used by the ladies all the time. Unexpected sickness prohibited two participants from finishing the practice with the rest of the team. An unexpected visitor who heard about the prayer meeting came to join us one morning. Although it was a closed group practice, some church members did not know about the details. It was hard for me to turn people down from joining the prayer meeting, and the brother joined the prayer meeting one time. This indicated that some other church members would like to pray in the early morning too.

Interpretation

In answer to the research question, “How does regular early morning prayer contribute to the prayer life for a small group of Cantonese-speaking members of WAC?” three overarching themes were identified during reporting across the data sources. These themes can explain how the regular early morning prayer helped the individual prayer lives of the participants.

Reporting Across Data Sources

Since data triangulation provided a way to cross-check the data and provided breadth and depth to the analysis, I identified a few themes across the different data sources—pre-intervention data, field observation data during the

intervention, post-intervention data, and focus group data—for further analysis. If these themes were repeated across different data sources, it must be reliable and meaningful findings from the research project. Some overarching themes are discussed in the following paragraphs.

The theme of “Building an intimate relationship with God” was identified from the intervention data (all four questions) and the focus group data (Q3 and Q4). It matched the purpose of the practice of early morning prayer, which was to create sacred space for the participants to build an intimate relationship with God. “Sacred space is a physical space set apart for God and God alone. It is also a place in time set apart to give God our undivided attention. This is a time for resting in God, enjoying his company and allowing intimacy to deepen without any utilitarian purpose” (Barton 2010, 37). Many participants were busy professionals, and they shared with me that it was hard for them to have daily devotionals with God. Therefore, their life of devotionals was sparse or even down to zero. Their expectation of this challenge of early-morning prayer was that it might revive their intimate relationship with God. The intimate relationship with God was built through personal prayer with praise, thanksgiving and confession (see Q3 Intervention Data & Q1 Focus Group Data). These three components of prayer are usually ignored but they help to appreciate, to acknowledge, to glorify, and to contemplate God. The findings provided strong evidence that the practice enriched and enhanced their prayer life. In summary, personal prayer with praise, thanksgiving, and confession has been shown to help building an intimate relationship with God.

The theme of “Scripture reading” was identified from intervention data (Q1, Q2, and Q4) and the focus group data (Q1). It matched the purpose of the practice of early morning prayer, which was to provide a refreshing experience of formational reading of Scripture. I choose *Lectio Divina* as the means of formational reading of Scripture. Many participants expressed that it helped them in encountering God (see Q3 & Q4 Intervention Data & Observation Data). The purpose of Scripture reading is not just for cerebral knowledge but also for experiencing God’s presence. Reading Psalms was a perfect choice since the psalmists also teach us how to pray to God. The findings provided strong evidence that the practice has enriched and enhanced their prayer life. In summary, small group practice of *Lectio Divina* has been shown to help people’s prayer life.

The theme of “Building Christian fellowship” was identified from the intervention data (Q3), the focus group data (Q1, Q3, Q4, and Q5), and the observation data. This was not an expected outcome of the practice of early morning prayer, which was supposed to focus on building an intimate relationship with God. It was a by-product of the practice because we were doing the prayer in a small group context. The small group practice helped participants get to know one another spiritually through in-depth sharing. The body of Christ is a spiritual community of faith. The small group practice helped in building unity and maturity in the body of Christ (see Q4 Focus Group Data). “Speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every

supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work” (Eph 4:15-16). One sign of “Building Christian fellowship” is that the participants’ fellowship has continued after the project. The findings provided strong evidence that the practice has enriched and enhanced their prayer life. In summary, corporate prayer has been shown to help building Christian fellowship.

Therefore, the major overall themes can be summarized as follows:

- (i) Personal Prayer with Praise, Thanksgiving, and Confession Helps the Prayer Life;
- (ii) Group *Lectio Divina* Helps the Prayer Life;
- (iii) Corporate Prayer Helps the Individual Prayer Life.

These themes were considered important results for the whole research project, and these themes were examined in order to acquire the following descriptive or pastoral statements.

Personal Prayer with ACTS Helps the Prayer Life

I used to pray with a list of prayer items. Supplication was the focus of my personal prayer. One of the reasons why I did not have a closer relationship with God was because I used to come before God only when I needed something. The motive of my prayer was not right. My past experience of personal prayer was not appealing (concept of reflexivity). I always ran out of words to pray. This research project was designed to have participants pray with the Psalms most of the time. The prayer cycle consisted of four days, the first day participants prayed with the prayer items or requests while the next three days they prayed with Psalms. The Psalms teach us how to praise, give thanks, and confess with our

prayers. Our prayers were more interesting and inspirational. The data collected showed an encouraging and affirming response.

Our group of participants enjoyed spending time with God daily. Although the intervention was not a daily office, it was indeed a discipline of daily morning prayer offering to God (Jones 2005, 21). While many prayers were a sort of petition or intercession, praying with the ACTS model extended the participants' concept of praying. While many prayers were about personal needs, praying with the ACTS model shifted the focus to God's glory. The Scripture reading of the Psalms trained participants to pray with Scripture. "The psalms are cries to God, thanksgivings to God, praises of God—they don't particularly lend themselves to theological reflection, but move the adherent to acknowledge that we are the creatures and God is the Creator" (Jones 2005, 21). Participants were intentionally and repeatedly asked to praise, to give thanks, and to confess to God. Jesus was very familiar with Psalms. Psalms is the book of the Bible which Jesus quotes most often in the four Gospels. Question 1 data of the focus group interview (see Focus Group Data - Question 1) indicates that reading Psalms helped participants' prayers. Personal prayer with Psalms can help an individual's prayer life.

The active participation reflected the participants' commitment, perseverance, and willingness to pray in the morning. According to the findings, regular morning prayer helped their prayer life at least during the intervention. My question was whether the prayer meeting had to be in the morning. I doubt that it does because only one participant (Luke) mentioned that prayer to start the day made him have a stronger desire for God. As long as, during the day, there is

a fixed setting without distraction, it will give space to God to work inside individuals. “The real purpose of prayer is the deepening of personal realization in the awareness of God” (Merton 1973, 178). M2 said that the morning prayer trained him to wait before God patiently. M3 said that the morning prayer was more focused, and a better connection was made during the quiet time. I do believe that if the prayer is consistent and regular, it will help the Christian’s prayer life. The regular practice of morning prayer helps to build a spiritual discipline which is essential to encountering God daily and to building an intimate relationship with God.

The ACTS prayer model was not new to participants, but they had not really practised it in the past. I had had a lot of opportunities to pray with them at church in the past. Whenever I asked for their prayer items, they shared their own needs or their families’ needs. Their prayer usually focused on supplication for themselves and their families. The prayer practice intensified the concept of the ACTS prayer model. The prayer practice made their prayers rich in praising and giving thanks to God. The prayer practice made their confession to God a more frequent practice. Many of them admitted that they learned a lot from praying with the ACTS prayer model. Many of them explicitly shared with me that they have felt more comfortable and at ease giving thanks and praises to God since the intervention. Balancing the practice by recapturing the components of adoration, confession, and thanksgiving helped the participants’ prayer life.

Group *Lectio Divina* Helps the Prayer Life

My past experience of doing *Lectio Divina* with HCAC was fruitful

(concept of reflexivity). I tried studying the same piece of Scripture for two consecutive weeks in a small group setting. The group members engaged the Scripture with *Lectio Divina* (formational approach) in the first week and then with Inductive Bible study (informational approach) in the second week. It seemed to work well for the small group members. The group members at least got familiar with or immersed in the Scripture in the first week even though they may not have fully understood the Scripture, but it did open the spiritual door to study the theological meaning of the Scripture in the following week. This interplay approach makes studying the scriptures more interesting in the small group setting. With the successful experience of the informational approach, I focused on the formational approach of Scripture reading with the current project. The outcome was again encouraging and affirming.

Lectio Divina is a devotional way of reading Scripture “that often results in this living Word giving us life” (Jones 2005, 54). Our group of participants enjoyed reading the scriptures repeatedly. The group *Lectio Divina* helped to give space to God daily. The practice encouraged people to meditate on God’s Word daily. “The real purpose of meditation is the exploration and discovery of new dimensions in freedom, illumination, and love, in deepening our awareness of our life in Christ” (Merton 1973, 178). Reading the Psalms particularly helped our participants to pray to God because the book of Psalms records how the psalmists prayed to God. The practice helped participants to build an intimate relationship with God. It helped to build a spiritual discipline. It helped to build a closer relationship with brothers and sisters in the Lord. “The reading of the scripture

was expected to instruct, to stimulate, and through the work of the Spirit, to effect, a Godward change of life” (Howard 2012, 75). One WAC research participant shared his evangelistic desire to share the love of God with others since he has experienced the love of God. His life will likely change when he chooses to respond to God’s voice. From these research findings, *Lectio Divina* enhanced the participants’ prayer life.

My question was whether the benefit of *Lectio Divina* was supported by other research. Eugene Peterson is one of the pastors promoting spiritual reading. “*Lectio Divina* is the strenuous effort that the Christian community gives to rehydrating the scriptures so that they are capable of holding their own original force and shape in the heat of the day” (Peterson 2006, 88). According to Peterson’s experience, he confirmed that praying with the scriptures made the day different. This explains why the participants were energized after the practice of *Lectio Divina* in the morning. The research findings affirmed that *Lectio Divina* has helped participants to build an intimate relationship with God.

Corporate Prayer Helps the Individual Prayer Life

During the focus group meeting, many participants shared that their individual prayer lives were improving. It makes sense because they learned from one another and encouraged one another to spend more time in prayer during the day. With corporate prayer, the Holy Spirit works effectively and dramatically in the prayer group. There are many magnificent examples from the early church. “After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly” (Acts

4:31). Individuals may be touched by the Holy Spirit to draw close to God. I believe that the Holy Spirit was working effectively and dramatically in our prayer group of research participants.

The practice helped to boost up their passion in praying, at least at the time around the intervention. The participants enjoyed the fellowship with God and their peer group of prayer warriors. They started sharing more prayer items through a social media group (using the WhatsApp platform) on those days. They also shared daily devotionals through the WhatsApp platform from time to time. I did not ask them to share these things since it was not required or mentioned in my expectations. The information letter (see Appendix 3: Information Letter for Research into Deeper Life) and the consent form (see Appendix 4: Research Study Consent Form) did not ask for it. Therefore, these were good signs that the participants were touched by the Holy Spirit to share.

My past experience of early morning prayer with HCAC was impressive (concept of reflexivity). A small group of churchgoers was willing to pray together every weekday. One unbeliever in our group at HCAC could pray well after a few months of the practice, and he had successfully connected to God. Eventually, he prayed to God directly to commit his life to Christ. Although this WAC research project group consisted of believers only, I personally believe that morning prayer as a spiritual discipline would benefit both the believer and the unbeliever because both believer and unbeliever can connect with God through the prayer.

Building Christian fellowship was another theme found across the data

sources. The primary focus of the project was to enhance the Divine-human relationship by regular connection and communication with God. However, the by-product of the intervention was the building of close human relationships among the small group. Fellowship describes the spiritual union of the believers with the triune God as well as with fellow believers. 1 John 1:3 mentions the first two persons of the triune God. True fellowship consists of both Divine-human (“fellowship with the Father and Son”) and human-human (“fellowship with us”) relationships (see Figure 9: Divine-Human & Human-Human Relationships). The triangle illustrates these relationships. The ascending lines of the triangle describe the Divine-human relationship while the horizontal line describes the human-human relationship. Each line has an arrow at both ends because the relationship between two parties can be varied from time to time. The length of the dotted horizontal line describes the distance or the closeness between the two people. If both people draw closer to God, the relational distance between the people gets shorter, and this means that the two people will have also drawn closer to one another.

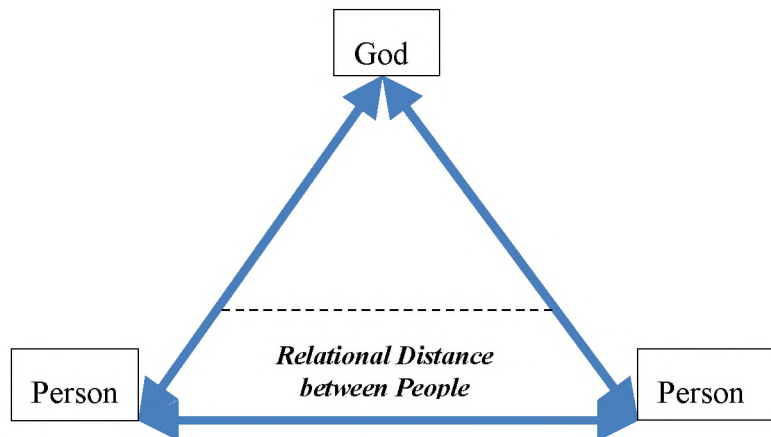


Figure 9: Divine-Human & Human-Human Relationships

From the findings of the project data, the morning prayer practice in a small group context achieved the purpose of fellowship. The personal practice of prayer enhanced the Divine-human relationship while the corporate prayer enhanced both the Divine-human and human-human relationships. The corporate prayer did have some benefits for the community of faith. Although there was not much personal interaction or conversation during the prayer meetings, many of the participants felt that they had experienced a time of fellowship. They enjoyed the time of praying together. They were more connected after the daily practice and even after the intervention. A group of “reading the Bible in a year” has been formed as another spiritual practice for 2018. Four early morning prayer group participants have joined the new group, and they will walk together another journey throughout the year. This is a good sign that close personal relationships were built within the group meeting for early morning prayer.

Corporate prayer can create unity (Jn 17:22-23), and it is a key aspect of

encouraging one another (1 Thes 5:11) and spurring “one another on to love and good deeds” (Heb 10:24). When the apostle Peter was kept in prison, the church was earnestly praying to God for him (Acts 12:5). The early church met regularly to do corporate prayer because it is an essential part of the life of the body of Christ. “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer” (Acts 2:42). During the intervention, there was a desperate need to pray together for one of our participants who suffered a heart attack on one Saturday. When she was discharged from the hospital after the heart stent surgery, our morning prayer group moved to her house for three days to accommodate her so that we could encourage and support her through prayer. On one Tuesday, we circled a sister and laid hands on her, praying for her because she was facing a spiritual battle. Some of the general benefits of praying together are watching over one another during times of difficulties, sharing joy with one another at times of celebration, encouraging one another to pray continually, training one another in how to pray publicly, and serving together eternally. I absolutely believe that corporate prayer helps the individual prayer life.

Outcomes

Given the above interpretation, I believed that the integrated tools of prayer (personal prayer, group *Lectio Divina*, and corporate prayer) help Christians to build an intimate relationship with God. The derived themes matched my expectation. The spiritual discipline of daily prayer—forged through the busy schedule of individuals—appeared beneficial for spiritual growth. The findings indicated a desire for change in the participants’ prayer life after the

prayer practice.

The expected outcome of the research was that it would provide enough evidence to encourage the congregation to adopt the spiritual discipline of prayer. Even though this pilot project was successful, other church members may question if the time of day was too early for a prayer meeting at church. They may prefer the traditional prayer meeting. Forty days was a bit too long for many people to commit. The possible adjustment of doing the morning prayer practice is to be on a project basis. Just like the forty-day project, we can introduce a short-term prayer commitment to the congregation in the future. This would make the practice reasonable and feasible. For example, people may sign up for a month-long commitment to practise early morning prayer, or we could try to fix a time other than the early morning to pray daily. We do not have to meet at church but could meet online through video conferencing apps. I used Skype to do an online prayer meeting in Halifax during times of severe weather. The technology works well with a small group of prayer warriors. In summary, some adjustments need to be made for doing the spiritual discipline of prayer in the future at WAC.

Conclusion and Implications

The goal of this research project was to study how a regular morning prayer practice could contribute to the prayer life for a small group of Cantonese-speaking members of WAC. The result is affirmative, and every aspect of the FSJ model has shown some benefits. The spiritual practices helped the participants to experience the Fourfold Spiritual Journey. The observed benefit to the participants from their involvement in the project was that the participants were

able to make the commitment to pray in the early morning during the period of intervention. They showed a greater desire for God and awareness of God during the day. The themes from the answers of the open-ended questionnaires indicated that participants would like to pray regularly. The themes coming out of the focus group interview also confirmed their desires to pray regularly. The themes noted during the observation reflected the good commitment of all participants. At the same time, the desire for God and the resistance to praying were fighting against each other all the time. With the influence of peer pressure, the desire for God did beat the resistance. With the encouragement of their pastor, the desire for God did beat the resistance. With the limited time commitment, the desire for God did beat the resistance. This could explain why the attendance was so good during the intervention. I wonder whether individuals will continue to pray early and regularly after the intervention. The spiritual gift of self-control was essential to the success of implementing the spiritual discipline. Individuals had to have a strong will and desire in order to keep praying early and regularly.

The prayer group members enjoyed the time of prayer and fellowship. The opportunity of spending time together for spiritual discipline is rare these days. The community of faith should recover the practice of spiritual disciplines. There are many benefits of praying together. The participants shaped one another through the corporate prayer. They became spiritual friends with one another. They celebrated the completion of the practice by having a celebratory breakfast the week after the final prayer meeting. The hunger for intimate human relationship is one of the most basic desires of the human heart. As I suggested

above, fellowship is a useful tool for living out the Life of Community.

WAC has not done any formal research projects to create and measure outcomes connected with the small groups of the congregation. This research project is a good start and may shed light on our small group ministry. The church small group is supposed to provide a context for developing these intimate relationships. The church small group is also supposed to offer soul care to the needy. As a church pastor, I expect that the church members are looking for spiritual friends within the congregation. I personally prefer building spiritual friendships in the small groups. My principle of shepherding is simple. The church pastor is supposed to shepherd the sheep; however, most of the time, the pastor becomes a program manager or the administrator of the church, with little time spent with the congregation. The prayer group can fill the needs of spiritual friendship. I would like to integrate the benefit of spiritual friendship with an existing small group ministry. Small groups typically serve a variety of purposes, but they have not satisfied the particular needs of spiritual friendship. I would like to share the needs of spiritual friendship with the congregation. I would like to train small group leaders who can facilitate this kind of prayer group. I hope that many church members will share the similar benefits of the research participants through prayer groups in the future.

I believed that corporate prayer is one of many efforts to keep the unity of the body of Christ (Eph 4:3). Corporate prayer is especially helpful in building mutual accountability. All these findings and conclusions imply that the practice of early morning prayer is better done in a small group or a community context.

The small group or community provides mutual accountability which binds all participants together, and they can encourage one another to pray persistently. It is quite certain that corporate prayer enhances mutual submission (Eph 5:21). As I suggested above, [corporate] prayer is a useful tool for living out the Life of Surrender.

Since *Lectio Divina* worked well in the practice, I could introduce it into other ministries like the Bible study ministry and the small group ministry. *Lectio Divina* is grounded in a balance of silence and praying with Scripture. The ultimate purpose of silence and praying with Scripture is listening to God. Listening always involves silence. Listening in silence and stillness allows us to encounter God as He speaks directly and personally to us. In order to listen to the voice of the Lord in prayer, we have to practise God's presence. "The practice of the presence, then, is simply the discipline of calling to mind the truth that God is with us. When we do this consistently, we are given the miracle of seeing by faith. We begin to see and hear with the eyes and ears of our hearts" (Payne 1999, 131). It can simply be a daily discipline of reminding myself that God is with us and listening to His voice with my heart. In North American culture, people tend to be talkative and expressive in meetings. The practice of *Lectio Divina* at the prayer meeting could be invaluable, and the research interpretation has confirmed this. As mentioned above in the FSJ model, silence, meditation, and self-reflection are the essential tools of the Life of Discipline. *Lectio Divina* is not only the tool of engaging with Scripture—which is the spiritual practice of the Life of Testimony—it also works with the Life of Discipline.

A small group named “Prayer Run” has been formed to practice both physical discipline and spiritual discipline early on Saturday mornings at WAC because of the success of this research project. The “Prayer Run” group is an official church ministry. We gather at church to pray before going out to run. The purpose of the group is to experience a holistic journey (FSJ model) for the church members. One participant of the research project group is helping me to lead this “Prayer Run” group. The rest of this group are all new to these disciplines. The goal of the small group was clearly communicated in the very beginning. Both praying and running are essential to the success of the practice. The group members were expected to meet for two months, the feedback was again very positive and encouraging. Therefore, the church will continue running this kind of “Prayer Run” group in the future.

This research project report has shown how the participants benefitted from the regular morning prayer. This research project was very meaningful to me. It provided a chance to pray with people from the WAC congregation. It provided an opportunity to grow with other people into spiritual maturity. This was the goal of my Life of Community. Although the practice did not result in a dramatic change, it aroused at least the attention of the participants to the spiritual discipline of prayer. If I have the opportunity to do similar research, I would like to form a group of Christian young adult, or a group of unbelievers, or a group of people from Western culture. I believe that it will be a bigger challenge for young adults, or unbelievers, or non-Chinese Christians to do early morning prayer, and the outcome might be more dramatic and interesting.

CHAPTER VI:

CONCLUSION

Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age. (Mt 28:19-20) – The Great Commission

Jesus Christ has painted a clear picture of what His disciples' life journey should like with His final words on earth. I would like to use the metaphor of “Running the Great Commission” in my spiritual journey to conclude my research portfolio. It is simple and concise, easily understood by others. The Great Commission given by Jesus Christ in Matthew 28:19-20 actually affirms my Fourfold Spiritual Journey (FSJ) model. There are four phrases for “Running the Great Commission.” Each phrase matches a specific journey of the FSJ model:

- (i) “Go and make disciples of all nations” (Life of Testimony);
- (ii) “Baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Life of Community);
- (iii) “Teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you” (Life of Surrender);
- (iv) “I am with you always to the very end of the age” (Life of Discipline).

The Life of Testimony is about teaching and impacting others to follow

Christ. Jesus asks me to participate, as God's Spirit is actively at work, to "go and make disciples of all nations" (Mt 28:19). Preaching the gospel is pointing unbelievers in the right direction. Making disciples is directing believers to run (individually and collectively) towards Christ. Jesus Christ is also the Word of God or *Logos* (Jn 1:1). Teaching the Word of God is equipping disciples for every good work. As a pastor, I build up the disciples while God builds up the church. Preaching the gospel, making disciples, teaching the Word of God, and developing Life Impact Life journey are visible signs of my Life of Testimony.

The Life of Community is about reaching out to the community and bringing the gospel and peace to them. The purpose of the Life of Community is to bring the community of unbelievers living around us into the community of faith. Jesus asks me to "[baptize] them in the name of Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Mt 28:19) so that they are baptized into the body of Christ or the community of faith. As a pastor, I baptize people with water, but Jesus Christ baptizes them with Holy Spirit and fire (Lk 3:16). My role is showing the community of unbelievers the love of Christ. My Life of Community invites others to join the spiritual activities in the community of faith. For my current community of faith, WAC, I run physically with some church members regularly. I also run with them symbolically as a teammate in all kind of church ministries. My early morning prayer project has demonstrated how I have interacted with the community, brought the awareness of God, and made God's presence more real and vibrant to them. Serving the needs and running with others are visible signs of my Life of Community.

The Life of Surrender is about trusting and obeying God. Jesus asks His disciples to “teach [others] to obey everything [He has] commanded [them]” (Mt 28:20). Obeying His commandments means abiding in Christ. When we obey His commandments, we are willing to surrender our lives to Him. As I obey His commandments, I must deny myself and take up my cross and follow Him (Mk 8:34). My wife, Grace, shaped me and taught me how to live a Life of Surrender. Trusting and obeying became real and concrete only after wrestling with God. Tears and wounds were unavoidable during the process. My chapter on my wife’s passing demonstrates how I went through that difficult part of my life journey. It also revealed how important it is that the community of faith walked the journey with me during the healing process. As a pastor, I have walked through the darkest valley, and I can help others walking through their crises. My wife, Grace, is a signpost leading me to live a Life of Surrender. The “Run with Grace” team is a visible sign of my Life of Surrender.

The Life of Discipline is about the awareness of God’s presence. Jesus has promised that “[He is] with [us] always to the very end of the age” (Mt 28:20). Secular distractions tend to create a unique barrier to the awareness of God’s presence. As a pastor, I help by removing the barrier and creating time and space for God. God trains me to be a runner. Running for God improves my awareness of God’s presence. I have a great desire to meet God during my time of running. I have enjoyed His presence during my time of running. Running for God is a visible sign of my Life of Discipline. I can see God was working at all times in my life, and my autobiography has demonstrated that. The autobiography reveals

that I am passionate to get closer to God.

My beloved wife Grace returned home to be with the Lord in the third year of my DMin program. This has intensified my running practice and led to doing longer runs because I would like to draw closer to God for help. I have a new purpose for running, to remember Grace and to honour God. Many times, God has healed me and saved me from deep sorrow through running. Many times, God has spoken to me and shown me how to implement the research project through running. This research portfolio kept me busy and occupied my thoughts during bereavement. I was greatly cheered up by the participants' joyful attendance of the early morning prayer meeting. Although God has not answered all my questions and has not clearly shown me the next step in my life, He seems to be pleased if I keep running and praying about what I am doing. It seems to me that God has asked me to take a serious break in my life to examine myself and my plan for the future. The FSJ model is the outcome of serious self-reflection and evaluation. I will keep praying and discerning God's will after finishing my research portfolio.

While I am running the Jesus' Great Commission, four great signs in my life journey have been identified. Running toward Christ is a great sign of my Life of Testimony. Running with others is a great sign of my Life of Community. Running with Grace is a great sign of my Life of Surrender. Running for God is a great sign of my Life of Discipline. As mentioned above, these four aspects of life are identified as the four components of the FSJ model. This FSJ model can be deepened through the Life Impact Life journey and I hope to experiment with an

implementation of the journey in the near future. The Life Impact Life journey can demonstrate my formational approach to making disciples.

In drawing to a close, I will highlight some future implications of my studies in spiritual formation, particularly in areas I hope to develop further. First, I would like to dig deeper into more about living a contemplative life in a secular context. There are many misunderstandings among the religious cultures that the contemplative life tends to be confined in the monastic institutions. According to Merton (1973, 172), the contemplative life can happen in the midst of secular life and does not have to be in the monastic setting. Both Thomas Merton and Henri Nouwen are great examples of men who lived the contemplative life. If the monastic setting is the perfect school for learning how to love God and one another, the contemplative life in the secular setting is also the perfect school for learning to practise the first and second greatest commandments (Mt 22:36-40). I can see that it would enhance my FSJ model if I could integrate the contemplative lifestyle into the model.

Second, the outcome of the contemplative life is not only the awareness of God, but it also brings awareness of the pain and suffering of the world. Therefore, the contemplative life is not just an inward journey towards the Divine Being; it is also an outward journey towards the world. The journey inward calls for disciples to love God. The Life of Discipline may be appealing to others who are looking for a deeper life and through the FSJ model they may be introduced to Jesus Christ. They may also discover a relationship with Jesus Christ is more fulfilling by reaching out to the community than by simply following a

regimented routine. The journey outward calls for disciples to care for and love others in the community and beyond. Our gaze on God is also reflected outward because God is missional. The missional church usually goes deep and wide together. The deeper life always leads to the Life of Community, which introduces formation in the community. The church is the salt and light of the world (Mt 5:13-14). The transformation may be slow in the contemporary community because it takes time to build close relationships first before making a life impact.

Third, I would like to examine the FSJ model to see whether it can be applied in another context. Will this model and the Life Impact Life journey help others to grow in spiritual maturity? I will try running the Life Impact Life journey with my own church and evaluate the outcome. One option is to replace the existing discipleship-training program (also a twelve-month program) of my church congregation in the future. The other option is to do a test run in a small group context. I can add a Life Impact Life group into the existing small group ministry and see how it goes. The characteristic of the Life Impact Life journey is doing spiritual disciplines together. The research project of the morning prayers has demonstrated that doing spiritual disciplines in a small context works. By all means, I would like to share my model with other Alliance churches like VCAC and HCAC. My model will be improved after it has gone through the stages of testing and fine-tuning. I pray that God would use the FSJ model greatly in the future.

My spiritual life is actually one holistic journey of spiritual formation with

Christ living inside me. The indwelling of Christ through the Holy Spirit is the source of spiritual nourishment and empowerment. The key to a healthy and unregretful spiritual journey is the ability to surrender myself and let Christ be the Lord of my life. Being spiritually smart is to be filled with the Holy Spirit. Running for God is the moment when the Holy Spirit is working in me with minimal resistance. Running toward Christ is no doubt the goal of my spiritual life. I will continue running for God and toward Christ for the rest of my life until I go home to be with Christ. “I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus” (Phil 3:14). If I can evaluate myself at the end of my life, I would love to claim that running for God and toward Christ has been the highlight of my life journey. Although I am a little bit away from Him on earth right now, I know one day I will be embraced by Him forever. According to Ephesians 2:6, “God [will raise me] up with Christ and seat [me] with Him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus” eventually.

I am currently in the third stage of walking from the Jordan River, running as I participate in the Great Commission. As I continue to paint the stories of my autobiography, the four actions of contemplating, abiding, impacting, and reaching out are still prominent in my spiritual journey. I believe that God continues to shape me to a Christlike pastor who seeks to help Jesus’ disciples as they participate in the Great Commission. As I continue my spiritual journey, my passion is to develop others in Westwood Alliance Church into Christlike disciples with the Fourfold Spiritual Journey model.

APPENDICES

For the horizontal hierarchal flowchart below (Appendices 5-14), codes are identified and populated into the textboxes on the left-hand column. Categories were developed and populated into the textboxes in the middle column while themes are concluded in the right-hand textbox. Direct quotations (keeping the original wording) from the participants will be used to illustrate the points.

Appendix 1: Open-Ended Questionnaire

Name of Participant: _____

Date: _____

Stage of Life: (i) Student; (ii) Working; (iii) Retired; (iv) Other

- What kind of spiritual practices do you practise in your daily life? Why do you practise them?
- How do the spiritual practices influence your desire for God during the day?
- Please share, in a few sentences, about your prayer life experience in the last week.
- Please share your personal experience with God in the last week.

Appendix 2: Focus Group Interview Questions

This will be a semi-structured interview, which provides the researcher or the facilitator with the opportunity to ask any spontaneous or follow-up questions. Since it is a focus group, there will also be an opportunity for cross-group interaction. Although the researcher expects some positive feedback on the prayer practice, the participants may have had negative experiences during the prayer practice. The facilitator will emphasize at the beginning of the meeting that the participants are free to leave the meeting and free to share. They do not have to share if they do not feel comfortable. Protecting the privacy of participants is important. All prayer items, intimate sharing, and sensitive information are prohibited from being shared outside the focus group. The facilitator values honest feedback. The meeting will close with a session of praying for one another.

- Please share your positive experiences, if any, from the prayer practice so that it can shape or help others spiritually.
- Please share your negative experiences, if any, from the prayer practice so that we can pray for your unique needs.
- How was this morning prayer practice different from your regular prayer practice? Please share the advantages and the disadvantages of the morning prayer.
- How has this morning prayer practice affected your relationship with God?
- How would you feel if we were to have this morning prayer practice on a long-term basis?

Appendix 3: Information Letter for Research into Deeper Life

By Rev. Wai Fung Chow

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

As the pastor of the Cantonese ministry of Westwood Alliance Church, I invite you to participate in a research project which I will be conducting at our church as part of my studies as a Doctor of Ministry student at Tyndale Seminary. This qualitative research project had been reviewed and approved by the Tyndale Review Ethics Board. I will be the facilitator of the project as well as a fellow participant in it. All those who choose to be involved will also be given the opportunity to help shape the project, as well as to interpret the results.

The research project, titled “Regular early morning prayer as a contribution to the prayer life for a small group of Cantonese speaking members of the Westwood Alliance Church,” will include all those who accept the invitation to join the early morning prayer during the fall of 2017. The expected duration of the research phase of the project is forty days, from September to December 2017.

The purpose of the research is to examine how a regular morning prayer practice could possibly contribute to the deeper life or the spiritual maturity of the Christian life for the Alliance church. The research is being carried out for the participants’ direct benefit.

In order to evaluate if the participants receive the benefit, two instruments will be used to collect their stories: questionnaires both at the beginning and end of the research and a focus group interview. Participation in the focus group after the practice is beneficial to the participants. The participants are encouraged to journal how they have experienced the presence of God during the practice. Furthermore, general observation will be done throughout prayer meetings and the focus group meeting. I will take notes of the things the participants share and the interactions among us. The data gathered throughout the study will be used to write the final qualitative research report. Please be reminded that the senior pastor may review the data for insight into how to further develop the ministries of the church.

The confidentiality of data is essential to the collection of genuine feedback. Participants’ names will be mapped to pseudonyms in the very beginning. Only the recruitment leader will keep the names’ mapping information. I will maintain the confidentiality of all information shared, and all data will be stored in a locked file cabinet in my office or stored on my password-protected laptop. All the participants in the research project will be expected to keep confidential all sharing which takes place in the prayer meetings and the focus group meeting. All kinds of collected data will be coded and then interpreted. While elements of our personal stories may be included in the final written report, no names or other

identifying information will be included in the report. This report will be placed in the Tyndale library as part of my project portfolio. Copies will also be given to all research participants who would like one, and a copy will also be given to the congregation and likely placed in the church library. I assure the participants that there will be no secondary use of the data.

It is important that you know that total anonymity is not possible. The Cantonese congregation of Westwood Alliance Church is an intimate congregation. The church members will know who is participating in the research with me. Additionally, church members may be able to identify the participants in the final written report based on familiarity with their stories. No aspects of the story will be included in the final report with which participants are not comfortable.

Protecting the privacy of participants is important. All prayer items, intimate sharing, and sensitive information will be prohibited from being shared outside the prayer group. The recruitment leader will not know the details of questionnaires since they will not collect the data for the researcher. The participants will be expected to drop off their questionnaires with pseudonyms which will be assigned by the recruitment leader into a mailbox in the church office. I will collect the questionnaires from the mailbox, and I will be able to see the collected data with the pseudonyms only. The participants are reminded that the intervention may induce embarrassment, humiliation, lowered self-esteem, guilt, conflict, anger, stress, discouragement, or other emotional reactions. The participants should feel free to drop out of the practice anytime. The participants should feel free to answer the questionnaires, and to share their feelings during the focus group meeting.

I acknowledge that I am in a dual role throughout this research project, both as your pastor and as research facilitator, which raises the potential for undue influence or conflict of interest. I pledge not to pressure potential or actual participants in any way and always to seek your best interests and the interests of the congregation. Ultimately, I believe that the interests of the church and of the research are the same: to promote deeper life at the Cantonese congregation of Westwood Alliance Church.

Participation in this research project is completely voluntary. If you choose not to participate, I will certainly continue to love and care for you as your pastor! You are also completely free to discontinue your involvement in the research at any time without consequence, as well as to withdraw any of your personal data from the study. Feel free to be absent if you are sick or cannot come to the prayer meeting for personal reasons.

If you have any questions, feel free to contact me, Pastor Wai Fung, either via my office phone _____, email (_____), or simply in person. You may direct any questions or concerns to Pastor Paul Chiu who is the Senior Pastor of Westwood Alliance Church. You may also direct any questions or concerns about the ethical nature of this study to the Chair of the General

Tyndale Research Ethics Board at Tyndale Seminary at [redacted]. You are also welcome to contact my research supervisor, Dr. Mark Chapman, Associate Professor of Research Methods, Tyndale Seminary, via email [redacted] or office phone [redacted]

Thank you for considering participation in this research project.

Blessings,

Rev. Wai Fung Chow
Pastor of Cantonese Ministry

Appendix 4: Research Study Consent Form

Regular early morning prayer as a contribution to the prayer life for a small group of Cantonese speaking members of the Westwood Alliance Church

Name (please print): _____

1. I have read and understood the attached “Information Letter for Research into Deeper Life.”
2. I understand that I will be engaging in a research exercise, participating in an early morning prayer meeting at Westwood Alliance Church. I will be asked to share my story of Deeper Life via questionnaire, focus group, and optional journaling.
3. I give permission for my data to be used in the written report, knowing that it will not be included if I am not comfortable with it.
4. I understand that every effort will be made to safeguard the confidentiality of data and personal information. I further understand that complete anonymity will not be possible due to the intimate nature of the congregation.
5. I understand the risks and benefits of the proposed study.
6. I understand that my participation in this research project is voluntary, that I am not waiving any legal rights, and that I may withdraw at any time without consequence.
7. I understand that the spiritual practice is meant to help to build up a holy discipline and not stress. If I feel sick and cannot come for personal reasons, I may be absent.
8. I am aware that I may direct any future questions to Pastor Wai Fung Chow, either via office phone _____, email (_____), or simply in person. I may direct my questions or concerns to Pastor Paul Chiu who is the Senior Pastor of Westwood Alliance Church. I may also direct any questions or concerns about the ethical nature of this study to the Chair of the Tyndale Research Ethics Board at Tyndale Seminary at _____ I am also welcome to contact Pastor Wai Fung’s research supervisor, Dr. Mark Chapman, Associate Professor of Research Methods, Tyndale Seminary, via email _____ or office phone _____

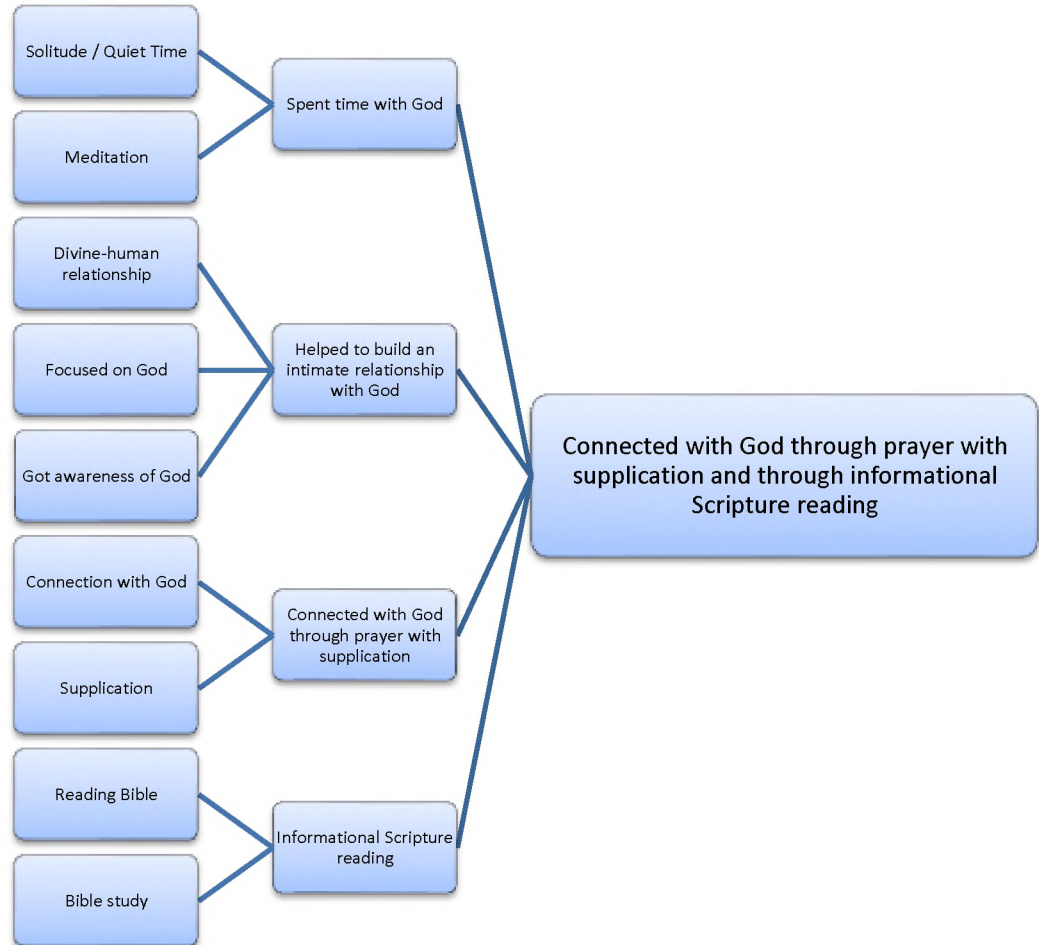
I have read the above statements and freely consent to participate in this study by joining the early morning (6 - 7 a.m.) prayer meeting at Westwood Alliance Church:

YES _____ NO _____

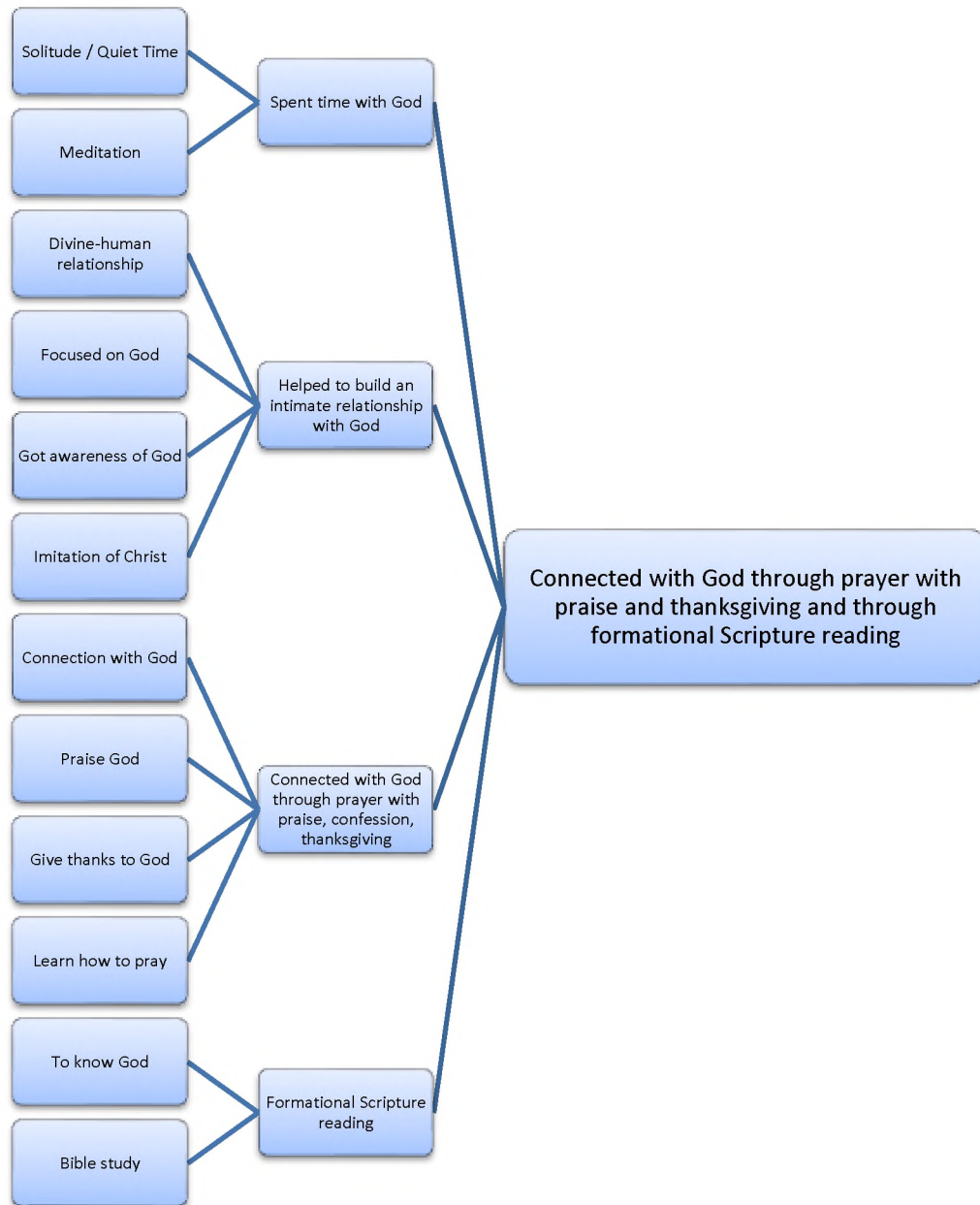
Signature: _____ Date: _____

Appendix 5: Question 1—Codes, Categories, and Themes

Pre-Intervention Questionnaire

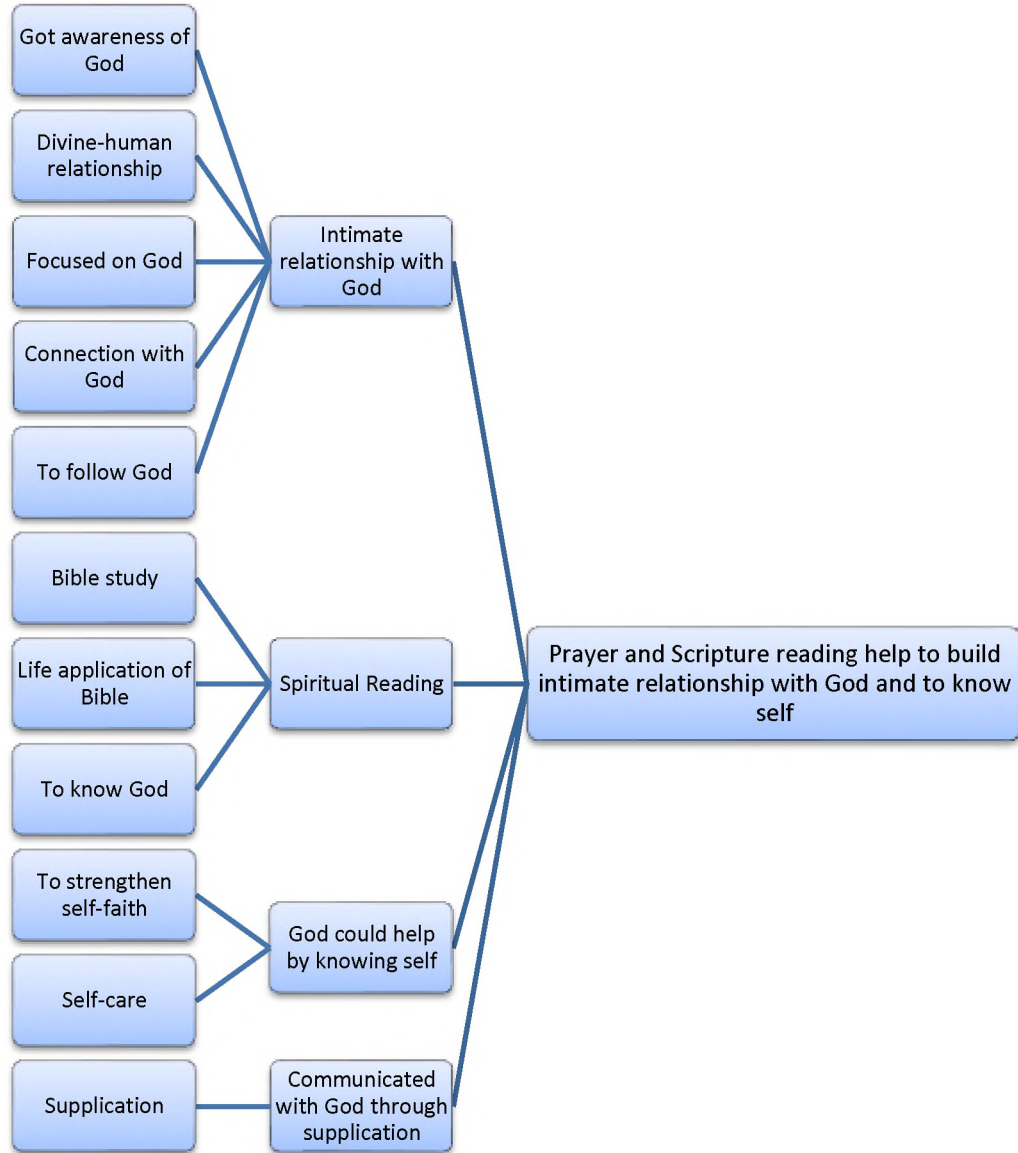


Post-Intervention Questionnaire

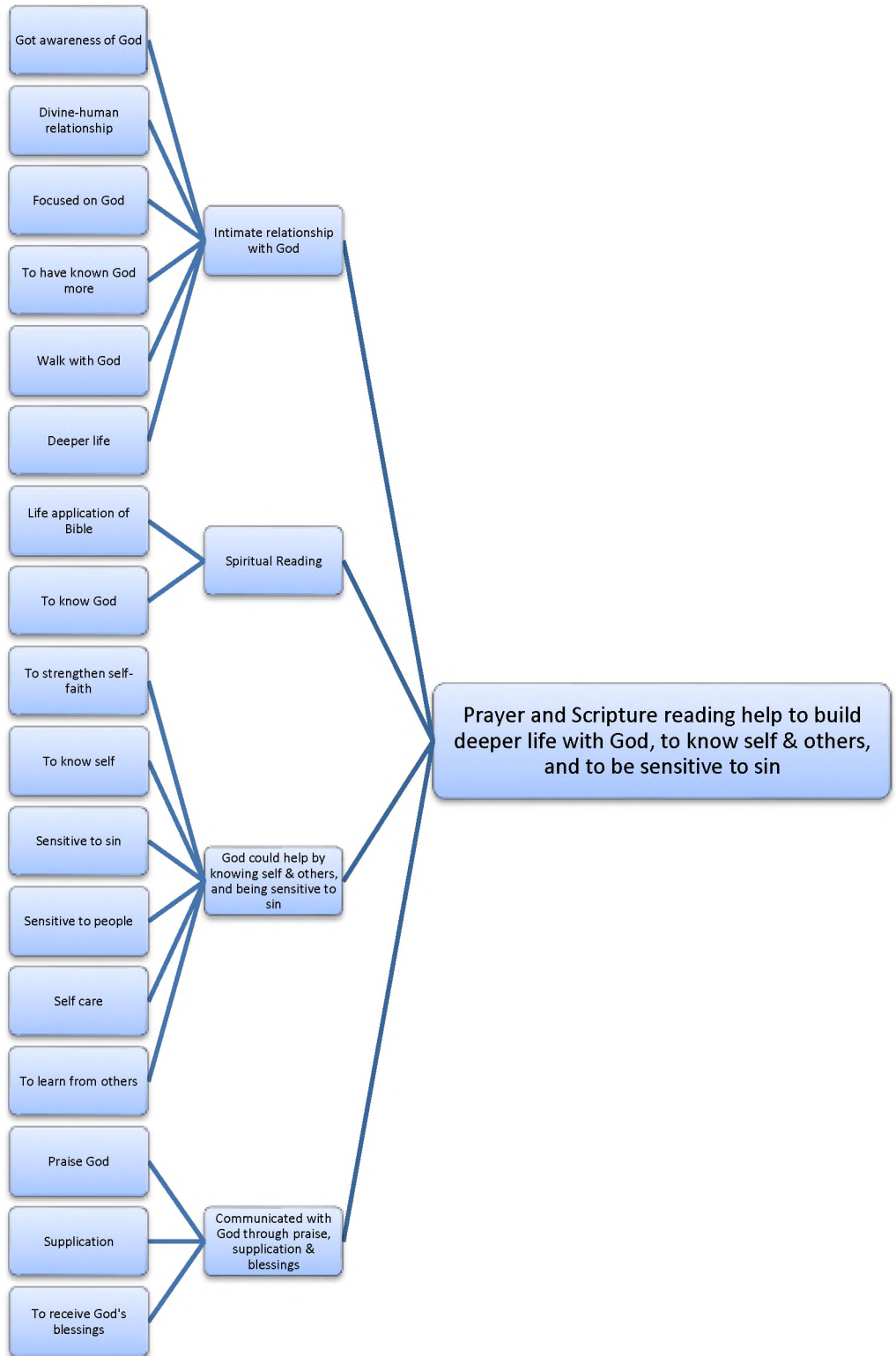


Appendix 6: Question 2—Codes, Categories, and Themes

Pre- Intervention Questionnaire

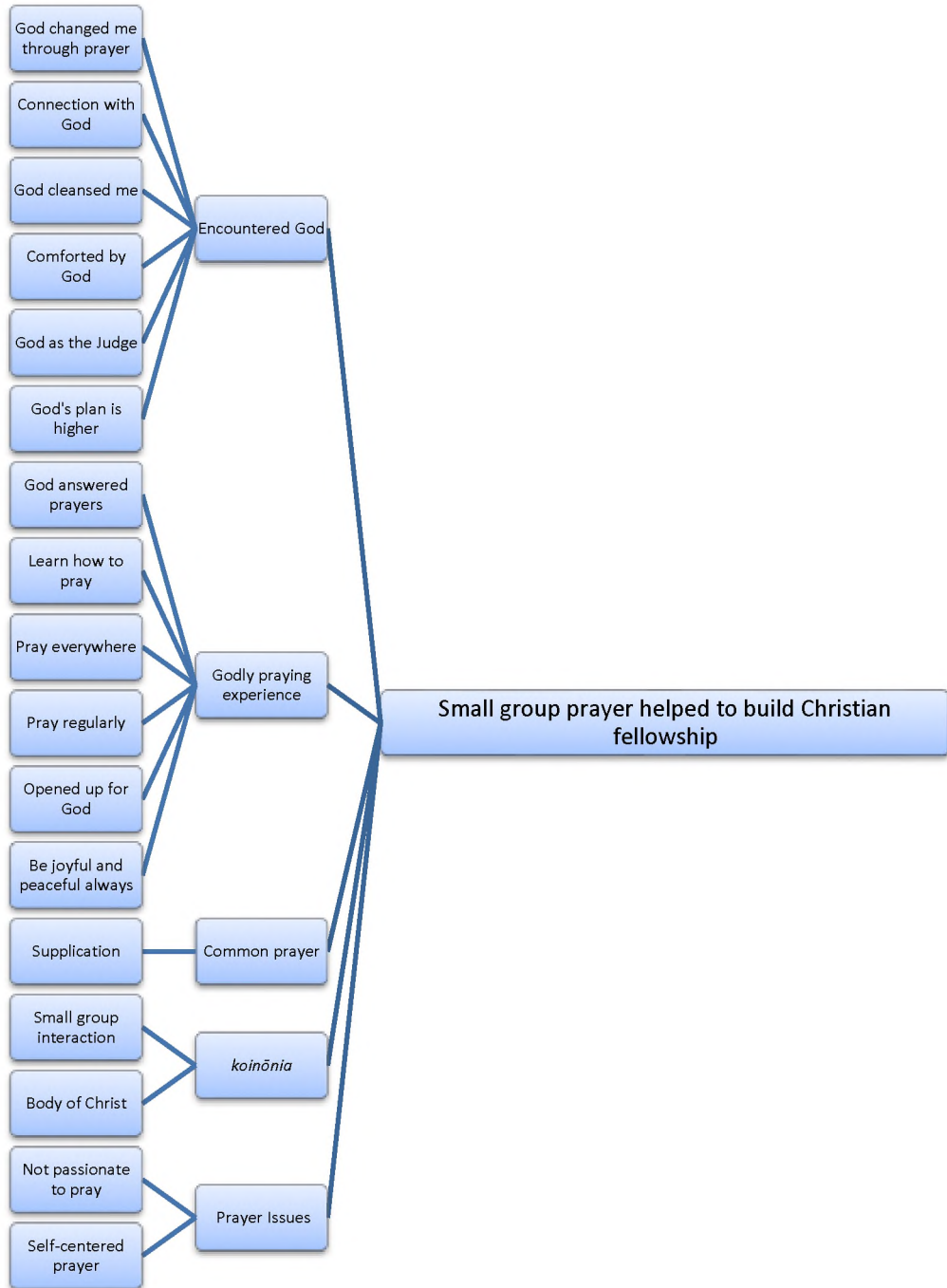


Post-Intervention Questionnaire

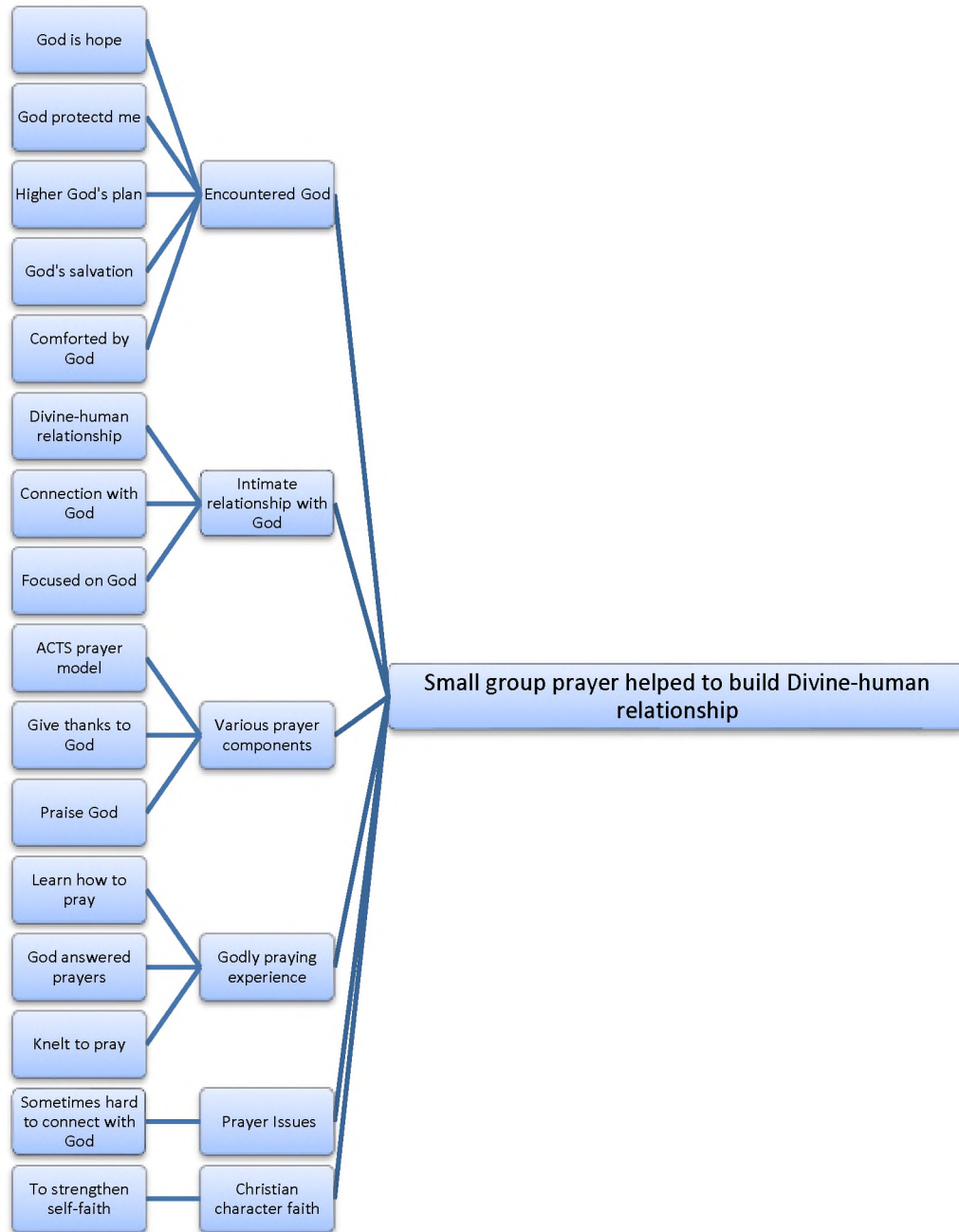


Appendix 7: Question 3—Codes, Categories and Themes

Pre-Intervention Questionnaire

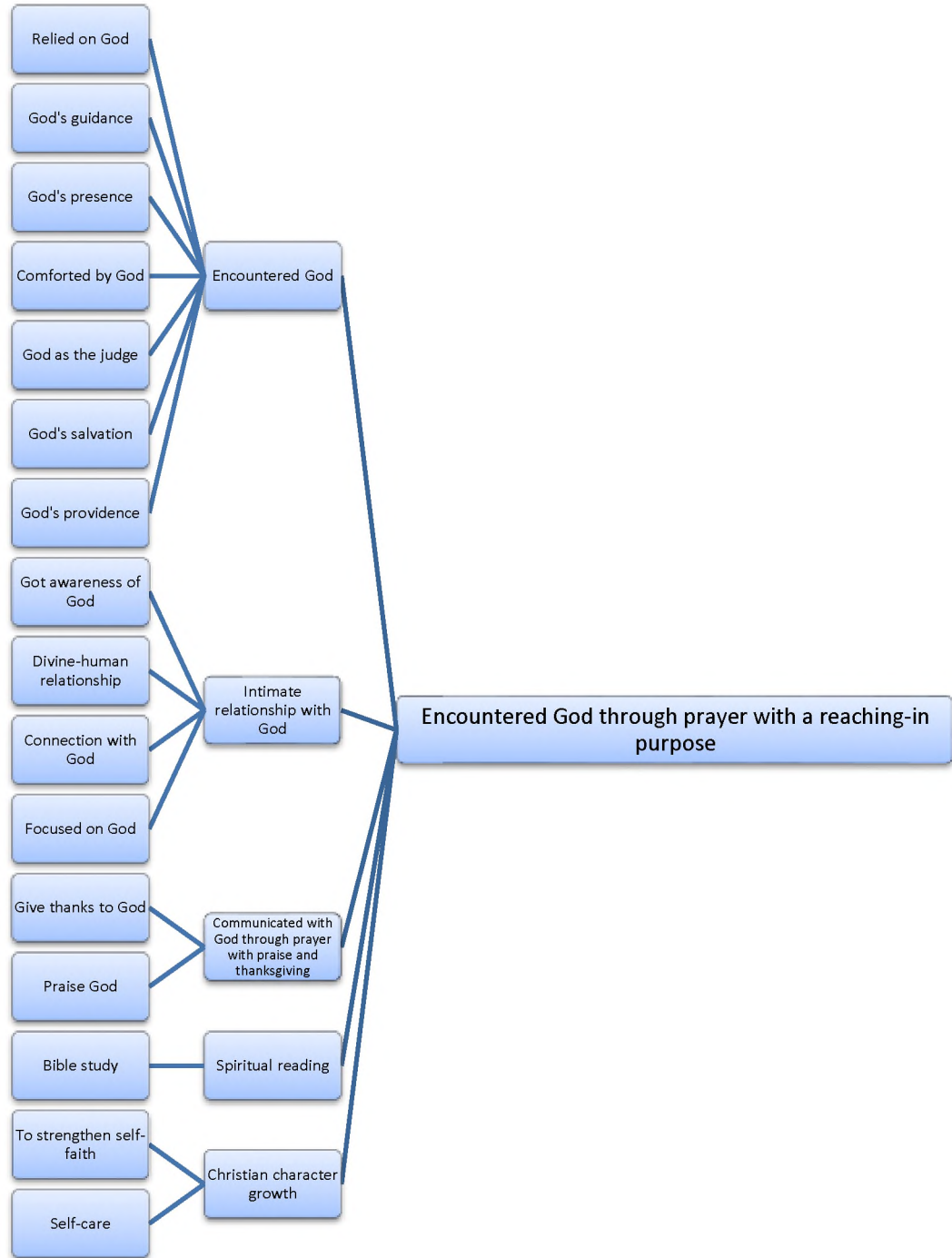


Post-Intervention Questionnaire

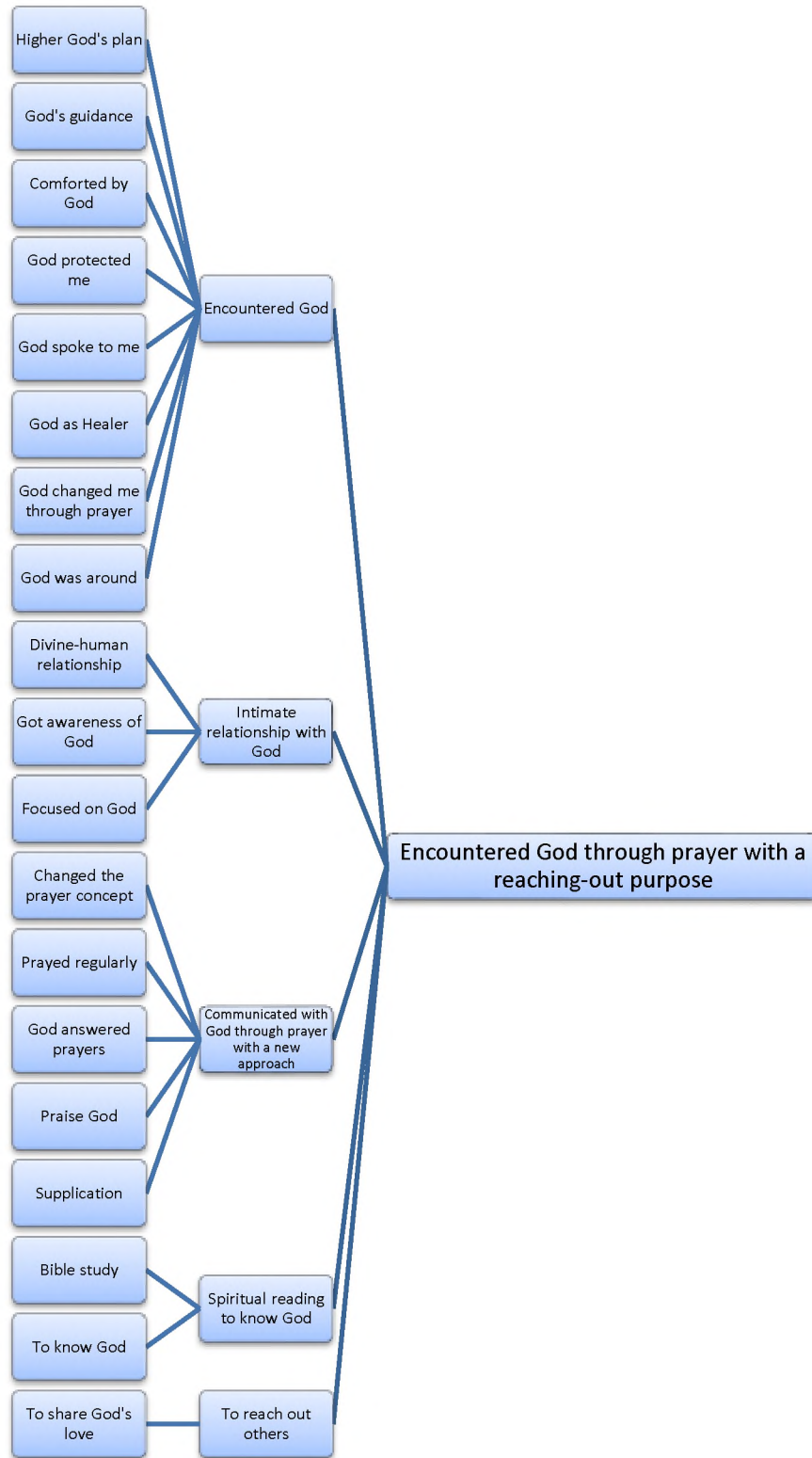


Appendix 8: Question 4—Codes, Categories, and Themes

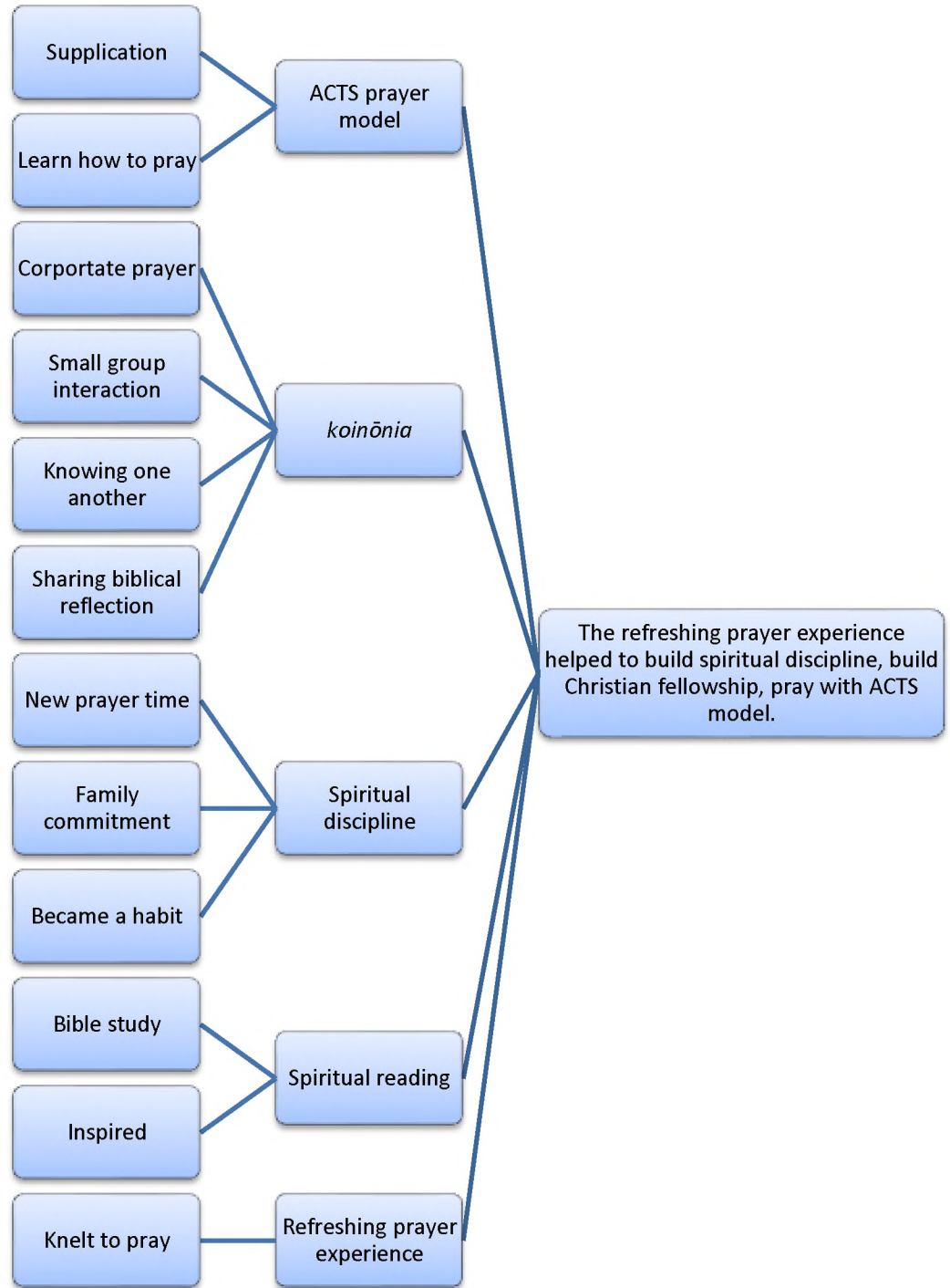
Pre-Intervention Questionnaire



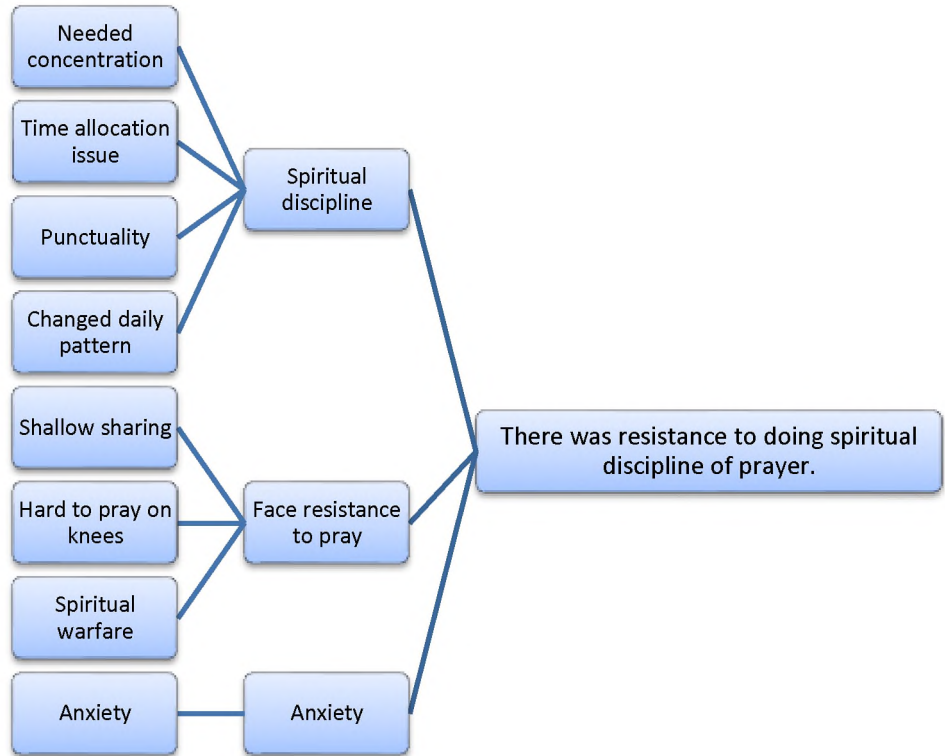
Post-Intervention Questionnaire



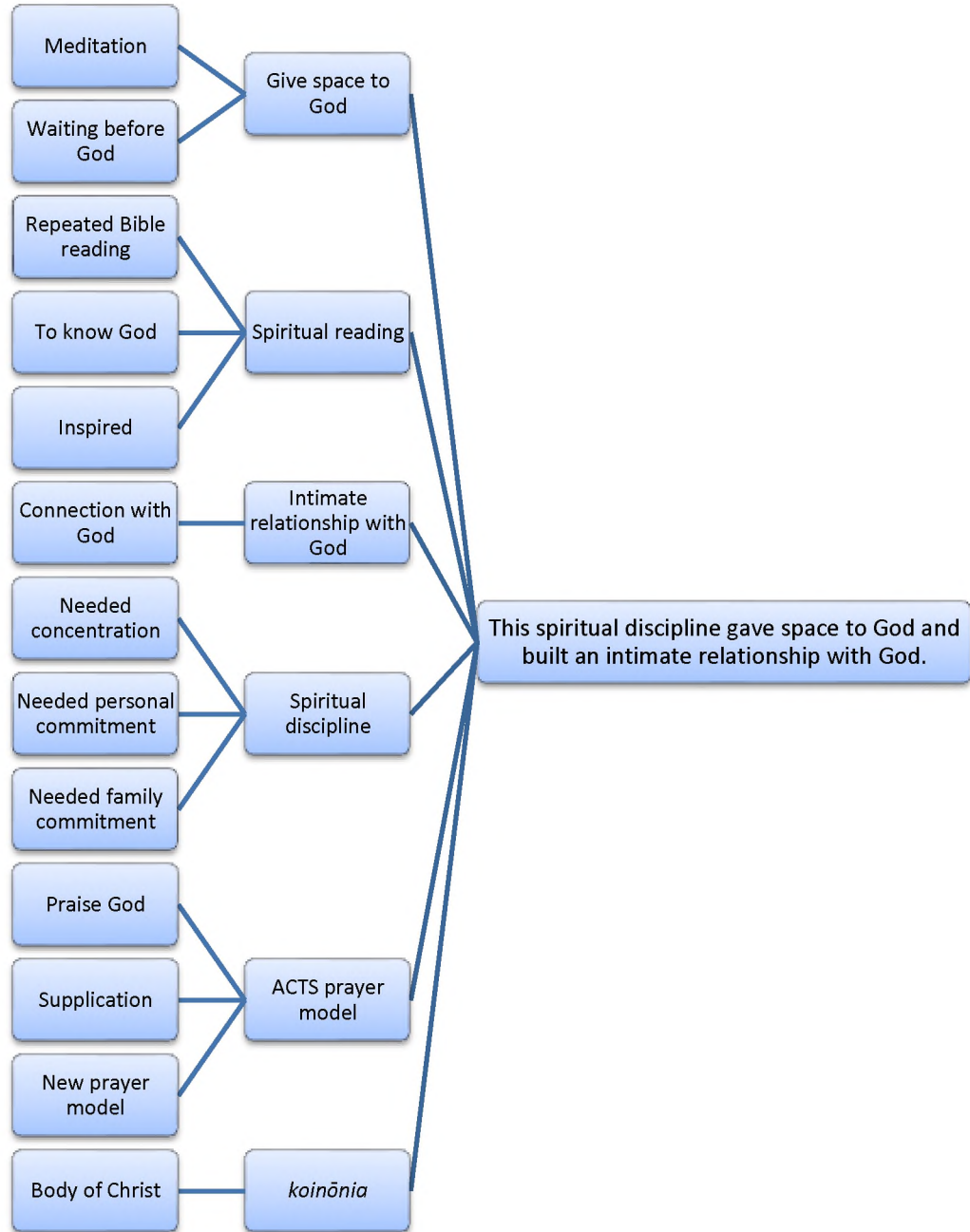
Appendix 9: Question 1—Categories of Focus Group



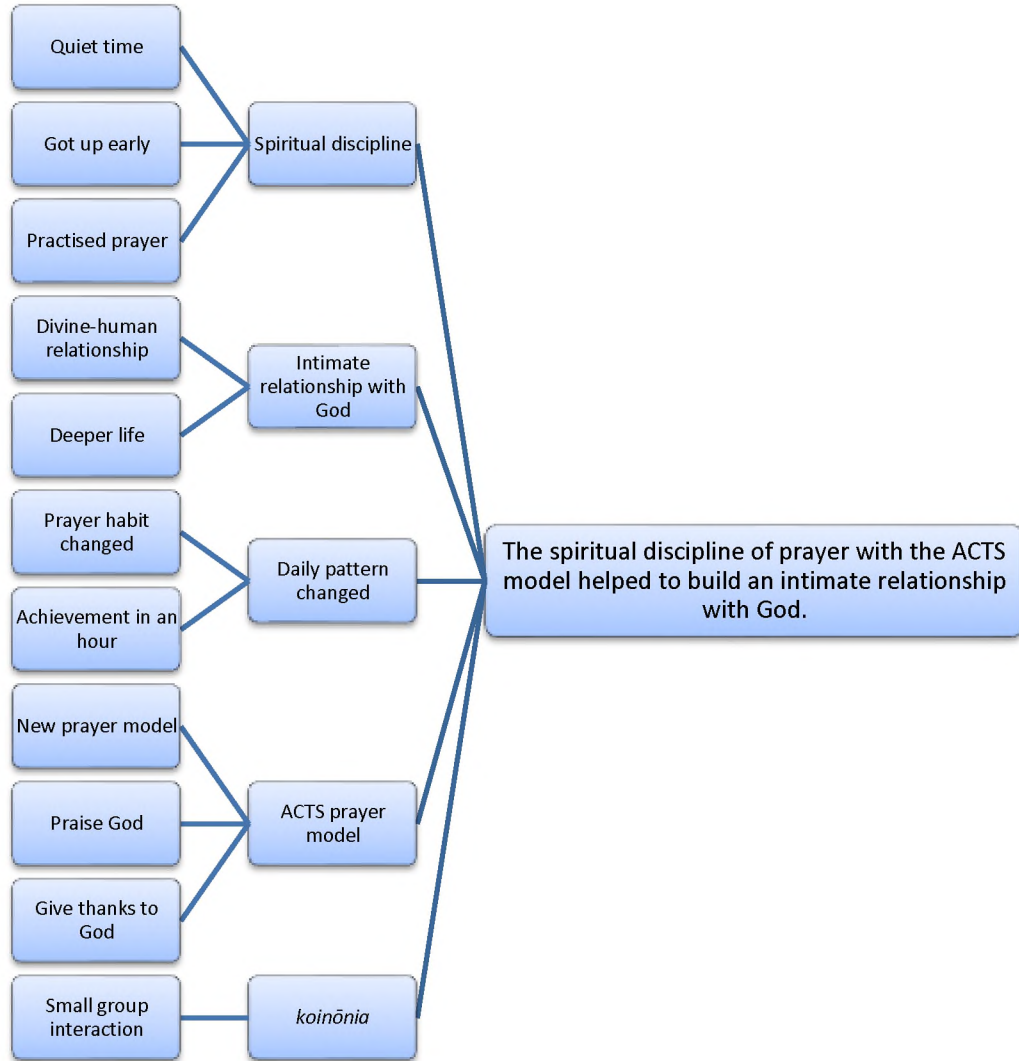
Appendix 10: Question 2—Categories of Focus Group



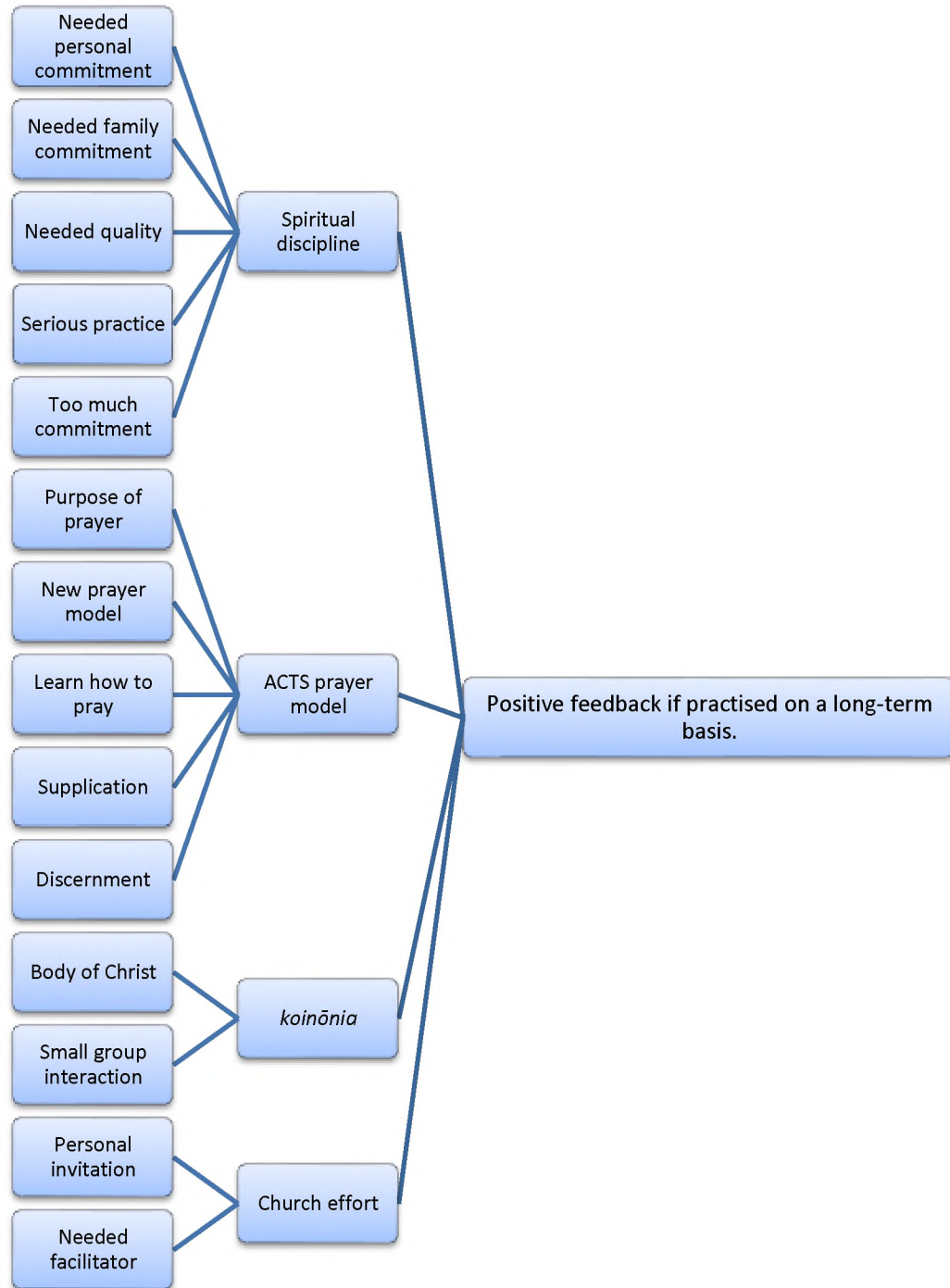
Appendix 11: Question 3—Categories of Focus Group



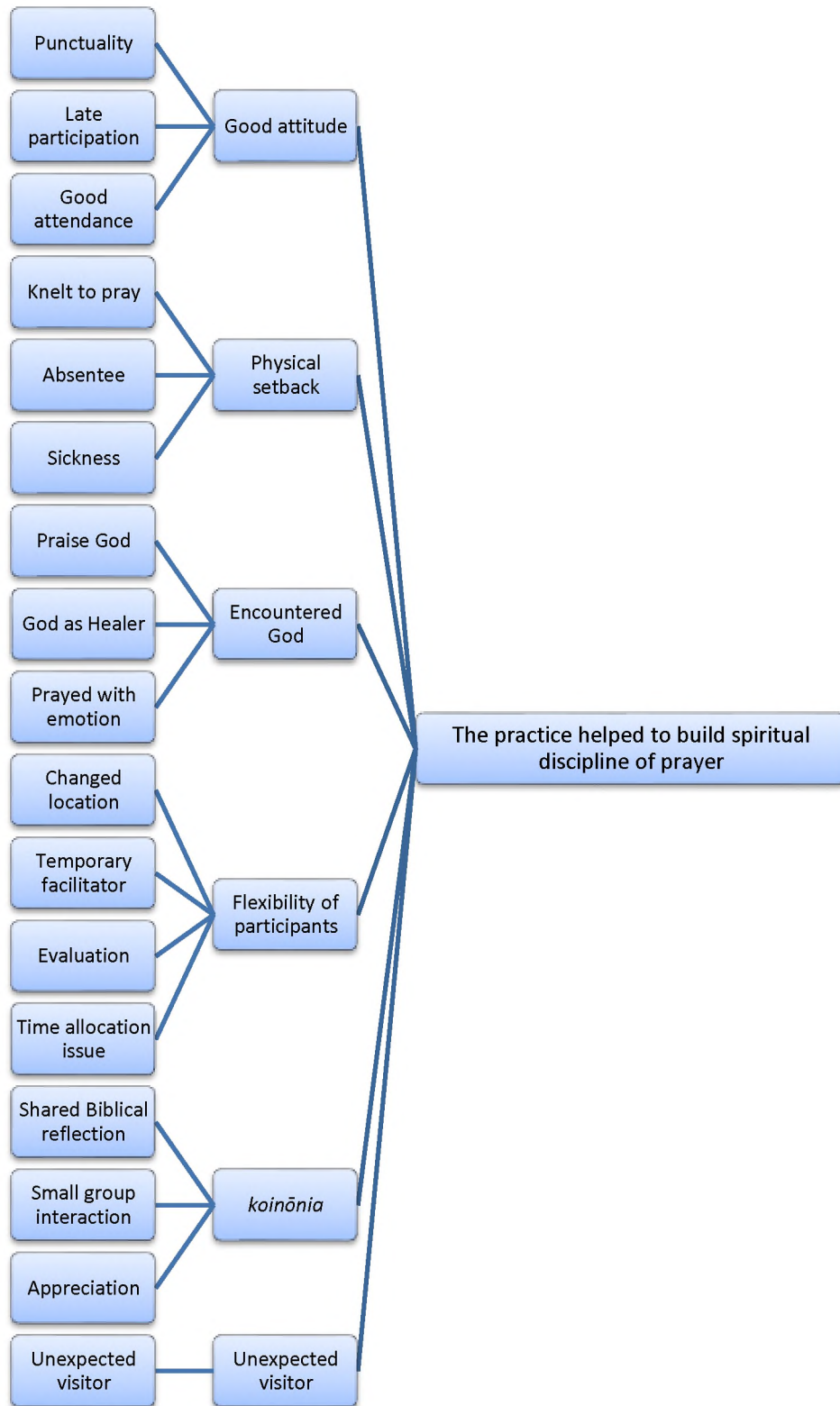
Appendix 12: Question 4—Categories of Focus Group



Appendix 13: Question 5—Categories of Focus Group



Appendix 14: Field Observation Categories



Appendix 15: Template for Inductive Bible Study

To read the passage in different biblical versions. i.e., Union Gospel Version, New International Version (NIV), New King James Version, ...

*** OBSERVATION ***

- First: Observe and Pick up Facts
 - Genre:
 - Author:
 - Date:
 - Venue:
 - Characters:
 - What happened:
 - Dialogue:
 - Metaphor:
 - Contrast:
 - Parallelism:
 - Key verse:
 - Theological Concept:
 - Difficult Phrases:

- Second: Identify Connections
 - Repeated Phrases:
 - Context:
 - Compare Different Biblical Versions:

- Third: Identify Structures like plots, Divide into blocks.
 - 1st Block (vv.)
 - 2nd Block (vv.)
 - 3rd Block (vv.)
 - ... (vv.)

*** INTERPRETATION ***

- Fourth and Fifth: Ask Questions and Answer them
 - 1st Question ? 1st Answer
 - 2nd Question ? 2nd Answer
 - 3rd Question ? 3rd Answer

-
 - Sixth: Induce Overall Meaning and Write the Outline
 - Outline 1
 - Outline 2
 - Outline 3
 - ...
 - Seventh: Find the Theme
- *** APPLICATION ***
- Eighth: Draw the Principle (Work in different cultures and different generations)
 - Ninth: List the SMART Details (Specific Measurable Achievable Relevant Timing-related)
 - Tenth: How to Put into Practice?

Appendix 16: Permission of Using C&MA Fourfold Gospel Logo

Abigail Brown <

Jun 21, 2018, 10:58 AM ☆ ↶ ☰

to Eric <

Thank you for checking with us Rev. Chow. We've made some minor adjustments to that logo. You likely won't be able to detect them immediately, but please use the ones attached.

Wishing you well with your academic paper.

Abigail Brown

Director of Communications

The Christian and Missionary Alliance in Canada

CHRIST-CENTRED | SPIRIT-EMPOWERED | MISSION-FOCUSED

From: Wai-Fung Chow |

Sent: June 20, 2018 8:42 PM

To: Communications <

Cc: Wai Fung Vivian Chow <

Subject: Request of using the C&MA logo diagram

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