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Tyndale University College & Seminary

Becoming More Like Him:
Spiritual Formation As the Key to Congregational
Disciple-Making

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

by

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ABSTRACT

This research portfolio tracks the discoveries I have made in the Doctor of Ministry program about my faith journey, understanding of spiritual formation, and desire for greater efficacy in disciple-making.

In writing my spiritual autobiography, I was blessed to realize the many ways I have been transformed in my life since saying ‘yes’ to Jesus at the age of eleven. More significantly, there was born in me a deep desire to discover how God formed and transformed me. Fueled by the courses in the DMin program, this growing interest in spiritual formation led me to believe that the teaching and understanding of spiritual formation must become the priority of my thinking and practice of ministry moving forward.

In the second section of this portfolio, my understanding of the spiritual formation process developed into a manual for teaching a basic spiritual formation course for believers.

For the third section, in order to see if a persuasive case could be made for teaching spiritual formation basics to everyone in the congregation, a research project was undertaken to teach spiritual formation to the elders of my church. Ultimately, the findings of the research did support that teaching spiritual formation will lead believers to a more comprehensive understanding. As a result, I am persuaded to prioritize a basic spiritual formation course for every believer and that this is key to achieving greater effectiveness in our church’s disciple-making.

DEDICATION

This research portfolio is dedicated to God who knew me before creation and who called me on this amazing transformational journey. May all honor, glory and praise be given to Him!

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I wish to express my heartfelt appreciation to my wife, Shirley, a travelling companion whom God has provided to me for the transformational journey. Thank you, Shirley. Your constant encouragement and love continues to fuel my desire to become a better husband, father and follower of Jesus.

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Not unexpectedly, the mentorship of the professors, the courses and assignments of the Tyndale Seminary Doctor of Ministry program have also played a significant part in my recent spiritual growth and in my appreciation for my faith journey in following after Jesus. I am also deeply grateful to my classmates from SF2 for our shared journey towards maturity in Christ.

Finally, my sincere gratitude goes out to all the brothers and sisters in Christ at Celebration Presbyterian Church Markham. Through your friendship and support, you have provided my family and me a wonderful and safe community to work out and fulfill what I believe to be God's good purpose for us all. I wish to specifically thank and acknowledge Winston Lee-Chan for his contributions in helping me design the diagrams depicting the spiritual formation model. May God use these new diagrams of the spiritual formation model to shepherd His people.

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All scripture is from the *New International Version* of the Bible (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan House, 1984).

INTRODUCTION:

FOLLOWING JESUS IS TRANSFORMING

When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus. (Acts 4:13)

Transformation

The rulers and the elders of the Sanhedrin were greatly disturbed and taken aback. The two lowly Galilean fishermen whom they had just arrested had spoken out with such boldness and conviction about Jesus that, momentarily, they were all taken aback and silenced. They noted that Peter and John had not been the least bit afraid even though they had been implicated with that renegade heretic, Jesus. Just being associated with Jesus would have gotten them arrested and punished. Yet here they were, preaching and proselytizing about their convicted master, the one they claimed to have been raised from the dead without any fear of the consequences.

One thing was for certain. The rulers, elders and teachers of the law in Jerusalem that day had witnessed the undeniable transformation that had come upon the two disciples of Jesus. These unschooled, ordinary disciples appeared to have themselves become spiritual leaders of such influence and force that they almost mimic their master. It was unmistakably obvious to everyone: Peter and

John had been transformed as a direct result of having followed and having been with Jesus. In God's eyes, Peter and John still had a long ways to go in their spiritual transformation, but the process for them had obviously begun.

The prefix *trans* in transformation has these related meanings: across, beyond, through, or changing thoroughly. Additionally, the word form in transformation means "the visible shape or configuration of something." Used in combination and in the context of spiritual formation, the verb *transform* refers to the dramatic change, inwardly and outwardly, that believers experience when they have been following Jesus. Like Peter and John, it may manifest as a disregard for the costly consequences when publicly identifying with Jesus. Or it may be expressed as an unmistakable clarity and resolve to do God's will at any cost. Following the Lord Jesus should make us more like Peter and John in their resolve to follow Jesus. And understanding the Lord's teaching should make us desire to become more like Him. It is this issue of transformation which forms the very heart of this portfolio. Through insights gleaned from writing my spiritual autobiography, to the piecing together of a spiritual formation model, and the findings which emerged from carrying out a research project, I want to share with you the wonderful discoveries about spiritual transformation that I have made on my journey.

In an age where so much of the Church mirrors the look, thinking and behavior of the prevailing secular culture the above depiction of the transformed disciples serve as a wake-up call for today's Christians. Our following of Jesus

should also have similarly transformed us and set us apart from the world. But more often than not, we haven't been similarly transformed. Why is that?

Haven't we also said 'yes' to Jesus? Haven't we also joined the Church and taken on his name? Haven't we heard His teachings, experienced His forgiveness and His grace? Haven't we ministered and done good deeds in His name? The answer to all of these rhetorical questions is a resounding 'yes.' Yet, it still seems like we have such a long way to go in becoming like our Lord Jesus. What seems to be the roadblock to our transformation?

Scripture has been unmistakable on this point. God wants us to "all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to *the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.*" (Ephesians 4:13, emphasis mine) God's will is to work in us until Jesus returns and until we all reach perfect unity in our relationship with Him; until we all reach perfect maturity in our character like Him; and until we all reach perfect humanity in order to more perfectly reflect Jesus to the world.

There is also no question about the end goal of ministry in the Scriptures. The apostle Paul, addressing the Galatian believers, described his ministry end goal in this way, "My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth *until Christ is formed in you.*" (Galatians 4:19, emphasis mine) Here, Paul promised the church that he was willing even to endure suffering, like a mother is willing to endure child-bearing pain, in order for the believers there to become like Christ or until Christ has been formed in them.

Moreover, spiritual transformation is ultimately the end goal of the Gospel.

The end goal of the Gospel as revealed in Genesis through to Revelation is that

God wants to make all things new:

Then I saw “a new heaven and a new earth,” for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. ‘He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death’ or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.” He who was seated on the throne said, “I am making everything new!” (Revelation 21:1-5, emphasis mine)

The end goal of the Gospel is to see a new creation, featuring a new heaven and a new earth. There is to be a new Jerusalem, a new kind of worship, one that is entirely authentic and whole-hearted. The Gospel envisioned a new church populated by renewed believers whose relationship with husband Christ is based solely on love and faithfulness. There is to be a new dwelling arrangement where God and His people will always be together. And there will be a new order, where death, mourning, crying, pain, and sin shall no longer rule nor taint how we relate with God. It is no wonder then that God wants us to submit to Him so that He can transform our ‘old self’ into the ‘new self’ and in so doing, make us more and more like Him in righteousness and holiness (Eph 4:22-24).

A Change in the Way I Think about the Spiritual Journey

If the overall message and trajectory of the Scriptures, of ministry, and the end goal of the Gospel itself are leading and pointing me towards spiritual

transformation and becoming like Christ, why haven't I made spiritual formation and transformation my primary reason for being and my top ministry priority and goal? Drawing largely from my particular identity and context, I believe a significant part of the answer to this question lies with who I am, how I have been formed as a Christian, and what has been my denominational distinctives.

I was born of Chinese immigrant parents from Southeast Asia but grew up primarily in North America. My parents, who were in full-time ministry, raised me up in the Chinese congregations in which they served which are all within the Presbyterian Church in Canada. These ethnic churches were considered the more conservative and evangelical branches within the traditional mainline denomination. Another facet of my identity which shaped my faith later in life was seeing myself as a second-generation Christian. From my Chinese heritage, I came by my work ethic and pragmatism. The immigrant experience fostered in me a need to make something of myself and to be a success. My Presbyterian heritage and denominational training nurtured in me the importance of sound doctrine and orthodoxy. And being second-generation Christian generally meant that on the one hand, there was a tendency to push back against tradition, but on the other hand, that chafing sometimes resulted only in cynicism and uncertainty.

As a Christian, I believed in serving the church as a way to show my devotion to God and to help grow the church. As a pastor, I did everything I could to be the best churchman in order to make the church a success. As a Presbyterian, I tried hard to study and to theologically position myself in all the right ways. Yet

as a second-generation leader, I struggled mostly with growing both faith and church. Although second generation Christians put down the religious fervour of the first-generation, we generally don't have the deeper spiritual understanding and motivation required to excel spiritually or corporately for God.

Therefore in addressing the reason why spiritual formation and transformation haven't been my top ministry priority, it was because the goal was almost always to become a productive disciple and successful churchman. To be the most faithful disciple was to be able to win others and disciple them to Jesus. To be a successful church was to become one that increased in number. And in order to become both faithful and successful, I needed to work tirelessly and theologize rightly. Hence, to be a follower of Jesus meant being an activist and a Bible expert. As a pastor, what brought huge disappointment and disillusionment was the realization that those churches that tended to increase also happen to have great charismatic personalities and who were super innovative and creative. That was until I discovered spiritual formation, the importance of understanding how one is formed and transformed to become more like Jesus. Understanding spiritual formation has given my pastor's heart much encouragement: I believe now that New Testament churches grew because the believers there were transformed and not primarily because the apostles were such dynamic preachers and gifted programmers. What attracted unbelievers to Jesus were transformed lives.

This was the revelation that has struck me and which has now led me to change the way that I think about my spiritual journey, the way that I view my

faith development, the priorities that govern my pastoral ministry, and the future goals which I intend to practice to fulfil what God has called me to be and to do.

I was struck by this revelation when recalling the events and experiences of my life by means of writing my spiritual autobiography. When I said ‘yes’ to Jesus, God had already begun to do this transforming work in my life. And over the years of living as a Christian, God had continually been working in and on me to transform all of me, my work, character, attitudes, behavior, beliefs, and relationships into Christ’s likeness. While this was happening, I wasn’t aware then that that was what God was doing in my life. I only saw this development in my life in retrospect. I didn’t yet have a clear picture or a comprehensive understanding of how or why God worked the way He did. However, as I began to share the stories of my faith journey with others, it was remarkable how other believers also echoed that they too had encountered similar spiritual experiences like my own. Our common spiritual experiences gave me an inkling that there might be a pattern or common way by which God transformed His people. However until then, in all my years of following Jesus, I had not been presented or provided with an overview of how God changes and transforms us.

From Personal Experience to Curriculum Design

When I became a Christian in my early years, Christianity to me was largely just going to church, reading the Bible, obeying the Ten Commandments, praying and serving in the church. I didn’t know about God wanting to change me to become more like Jesus. Certainly, I wasn’t told about how to change to

become more like Jesus. And I wasn't taught how exactly God was going to change me to become more like Jesus. There wasn't a course on spiritual formation. Thus, my transformation has been a journey of discovering by trial and error how these changes were supposed to have taken place in my life throughout my life. In sharing my trial and error journey with others, I learned that other people have also had these similar spiritual trial and error experiences. This gave me the desire to somehow map out the spiritual life journey and explain to others how spiritual formation takes place by means of a model. Truth is, there is a spiritual formation process that is revealed in Scriptures and it is the 'road map and trip itinerary' by which all of God's people are formed and transformed. This is the second section of my portfolio.

Since many believers like myself have never had a course on spiritual formation, I believe having a clear, biblical, basic overview of the Christian spiritual formation process would be a benefit. A recent visit to the Holy Land gave me the idea that a spiritual formation course is very much like a road map and trip itinerary. Just as I experienced, most first time visitors to Israel sign-up for a seven-day tour of the Holy Land. And most typical seven-day tours of the Holy Land, regardless of tour operator, follow a similar tourist circuit. The tour begins with arrival in Tel Aviv. From the city on the Mediterranean Sea, visitors are shuttled northward following the coastline to Caesarea. Then their tour takes them northeast to the Nazareth region and the Sea of Galilee. After two days around Galilee, their tour route ventures southward, following the Jordan River, to

the Dead Sea. From the Dead Sea, and completing the clock-wise circuit, the tour winds back up in Jerusalem and in Tel Aviv for the remainder of the week. Thus, a road map of the tour would show travelers an overview of the day to day journey segments to be taken. A trip itinerary on the other hand provides more details of the various attractions and destinations on the tour.

A spiritual formation course provides a similar kind of overview road map of the spiritual formation process as well as reveals the details of each step in that journey. This was the rationale behind the writing of the spiritual formation process and model and using it as an introductory spiritual formation course for believers.

Having an overall view of the spiritual formation process can assure us as we make our way to the final destination; it can provide road signs that we're on the right track; and it can help us persevere on the journey despite encountering detours and setbacks. Through this spiritual formation model, God has helped me understand my own journey: I can see where I am, where I've been, where I am going, and what next steps I need to take to continue growing in becoming more like Jesus. In my studies, I have come to define spiritual formation as "the God and human partnership and process by which we become more like Jesus." This definition is developed and explained in detail in the model section of this portfolio.

In addition, I have found that this model of spiritual formation is also helpful for counseling believers who might have stalled or stagnated on their

spiritual journey. Some disciples are unclear about what they said ‘yes’ to when they became Christians. Some disciples are frustrated because they have not been taught the difference between their role in formation and God’s role in transformation. As my church does not presently provide spiritual formation teaching in any cohesive way, this has led me to re-think and re-evaluate the effectiveness of my own disciple-making philosophy and strategy. In the end, I believe God has led me to teach this model of spiritual formation in a course with everyone in my own congregation.

Implementing and Assessing the Curriculum

The research project that formed the final part of this portfolio was designed to test whether a basic course in spiritual formation would indeed be effective in helping a group of believers increase their understanding of spiritual formation and help them take their spiritual next step towards growing in Christ. In this pilot project, I discovered that providing a basic course in spiritual formation was indeed helpful to believers. It gave them a clearer, basic overview of the Christian journey. It also taught them the basic biblical material on transformation. And finally, it pointed them towards discerning their next step in spiritual formation and growth.

While I do believe that the spiritual formation course was beneficial, those who attended the course were not transformed overnight. If they were, it was not discernible to me. Spiritual formation and transformation is a life long process and there are no short cuts. Even if the course was taught church-wide and had the

most enthusiastic reception from all its participants, I doubt if it would have changed Chinese Presbyterians into looking more like Jesus in the short term. However, over time, I do believe that the message of spiritual formation and transformation will begin to soak into our faith understanding, will begin to shape the goal of our discipleship, will begin to direct the priorities of our church and will even begin to invigorate us towards a more sustainable fulfillment of God's mission.

In tracking my own slow transformation, I only have to recall my DMin experience of these past three years. I had set out simply hoping for an upgrade to my knowledge of the faith and to shore up the practice of my faith. But in the course of the many months of my studies, I was eventually struck by this kernel of understanding that had been growing but was unclear to me until now: God wanted to change me to become more like Jesus, and most amazingly and gratifyingly, He has revealed in His Word some simple, clear, and practical ways for me to cooperate with Him to be changed.

SECTION I:
“COME, FOLLOW ME”:
FOLLOWING THE GRACIOUS INVITATIONS OF JESUS
A SPIRITUAL AUTOBIOGRAPHY

The dawn has not yet broken. It is still dark outside. My bedroom is still dim. I am warm, still sleeping under my blanket and covers. But my sub-conscious mind has begun to stir. This happens to me quite regularly actually. God slips into my sub-consciousness, quietly and gently in the stillness of the night and early morning. He begins to sort through my list of questions or concerns from the day before. One by one, He gives me His answer and His solution. Oftentimes, He gives me the insights to a particular passage of Scripture I have been mulling over. Sometimes, He gives me the coming Sunday’s three point sermon!

I begin to be aware of His communication with me. I think I am roused from my deep sleep in large part because God’s responses and replies are so undeniably ‘right on’; so appropriate and they make so much sense. With my eyes still closed, I examine these answers from multiple angles and I have to agree with Him that they are correct and good. By this time, I am going through my whole list with Him: What sermon illustration should I use? What should I say to

this person? How should I address that issue? What should I cook for dinner this evening?

Then, struck by His grace and generosity, I can't help but begin to thank Him. I worship Him. I confess to Him. I repent of my sins. I pledge my allegiance once again to Him. I tell Him how amazing it is to be His child, and how wonderful it is to be called by Him to serve Him. Sometimes this interaction with God lasts a long, long time. Sometimes, it is but a few brief moments before the alarm clock buzzes. But always, it is my absolute favorite and most enjoyable time of the day!

On this particular morning sometime last year, in my semi-comatose state, I was telling the Lord how much I am enjoying my present ministry. I had enjoyed preaching the sermon series on heaven. I had relished a recent interaction with our youth on the topic of prayer. I had been surprisingly effective in bringing comfort to a parishioner stricken with cancer in the hospital. My conversations with friends who were not yet believers and with whom I played badminton continued to be positive. I remained invigorated by wonderful times of prayer and discussion with my church elders and staff. I was beginning to see deep inroads of God's Holy Spirit at work in our people. God was bringing around more seekers into our midst. I remember reflecting and relishing, "Wow, everything is going so well!"

Then this realization slowly crept up on me. It didn't take a hold of me right away. It was not sudden. But the thought lingered around for a while until I

latched on to it gradually, savoring it in my mind. Eventually, the more I considered it, the more it became a weighty truth to me and in me: “God has called me to this!” I understood with all of my being that I had found my true calling and I was living it right then and there.

I believe I have found God’s purpose for my life, my place in the Lord’s ministry and my reason for being. I am at peace with who I am and what I am doing. I wake up each morning truly content with everything within my lot. The Psalmist described this feeling this way, “The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; surely I have a delightful inheritance.” (Psalm 16:6) Lord, is this just a fleeting trend or phase? No. Come to think of it, I have been experiencing this joy and peace for quite some time, but only now was I realizing and naming it. This was when I began to truly treasure this insight.

I think it started when I first came to Celebration Church. Thinking that perhaps this was just the typical ‘honeymoon phase’ of a new ministry, I didn’t give these positive feelings another thought. Is this just a passing thing, Lord? “No,” said my Lord! If this is not just a passing thing, then Lord, what is it? “It is gold, pure gold!” This is the unexpected treasure found hidden in a field. This is finding the pearl of great value. Not many people can confess that their life’s occupation is pure gold. Yet, here I am. I take a tiny step towards this gleaming, “too good to be true” realization; then another step; then another until I am close enough for it to fully embrace me. Lord, why have you so blessed me? I am so not

worthy. How did this amazingly good thing come about in my life? Show me Lord.

This spiritual autobiography is the expression of the Lord showing me just how He has led me to this spiritual realization at this point in my life. The pages which follow trace God's gracious activity in my life from early childhood to the present. I have tried to capture how God has called me and recount the times when I have heard His voice. I have tried to describe in detail the gracious invitations of Jesus in every season of my life. I have tried to name them and interpret the things God has said to me and my subsequent responses to Him.

The truth is God is active in every person's life! Of course He is! It is up to each one of us to become more fully aware of His presence, to acknowledge Him, and to respond to His gracious invitations. In reading my story, I hope you will follow me as I have followed Christ. My prayer is that afterwards, you will be more able to recognize for yourself His gracious invitations in your own life as you follow Him.

Childhood

But Jesus called them to Him and said, "Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of God." Luke 18:16

Just as the gospel writer documented Jesus calling the little children to Himself, I believe Jesus called me to Himself. Before I was born; before I had accomplished anything; before I ever did anything to please Him, He loved me. All the days of my life are really just about recognizing the opportunities He has

given me to hear His invitation, “Come to Me” *and to follow Him. But was the Lord really present and active in my life when I was a little child? And how did He call me to Himself?*

Although my recollections of early childhood are few and faint, the ones that I do recall are mostly memories of happy and eventful times full of love and warmth. It was only much later as an adult, as I began to make sense of the past that I realized my early years were not as carefree and idyllic as I remembered.

Take for example my birth. I was born on Chinese New Year’s Eve, February 12, 1964, in a hospital in Klang, Malaysia, my parent’s first born son. Hours after I arrived, firecrackers were lit and set off outside the hospital to welcome in the Lunar New Year. This Chinese tradition of lighting firecrackers was meant to create as much noise as possible in order to ward off evil spirits. My dad always related this event by recounting how each loud explosion of the firecrackers (a strand of firecrackers may consist of several hundred mini-explosives), would cause me, his newborn, to startle and twitch uncontrollably. Oddly enough, my father had always been the one to tell this part of the story of my birth, always with great dramatic flair and sometimes even mimicking my convulsing little body movements. I could never figure out *why* he told this story of me crying inconsolably with such relish and such joy!

Years later, around the time I was in my last year at university, during a particularly prolonged marital conflict between my parents, my mother confided that I was *not* their first born child. In fact, my parents had had their first born a

year before me, in 1963, a baby girl who had died at childbirth. This fact was such a taboo subject for my parents that, except for that one solitary occasion, it had never been talked about openly nor has it ever been mentioned since.

No wonder my father tells the story of my birth with such mirth and pride, never failing to describe how I cried and shook violently with each ear-popping firecracker. I believe it was because he is releasing his suppressed feelings of grief for his only daughter (they would eventually have three sons, but no daughter). He cannot help but express his joy each time he recounts the story about my birth as if to say, “*This* baby of mine is alive and healthy! See how he reacts to the loud noises like other *living* babies.” I was born a precious child to bereaved parents.

As a youngster, I was never concerned about money but my parents were apparently quite poor when they were newly married. Perhaps for this the reason their first child was delivered in a less-costly “maternity home” operated by a distant aunt. It was truly unfortunate that the midwife was simply unable to handle the complications which occurred during the birth of my sister. Thus, for my birth, my father insisted that I was to be born in an expensive, modern hospital. I was told that after my birth, my parents had to move, presumably because of a lack of money, into a one room apartment. At the time, my mother was still a guardian over a few of her younger siblings. Consequently, these siblings, my uncles, had no place to sleep except outside on the porch of their one-room apartment. Despite the cramped quarters, the presence of these uncles meant that there was always somebody around to look after me while both of my parents were at work.

My mother was an elementary school teacher. My father, also a teacher, taught high school, but he soon became a successful sales manager of shoes, then later of automobiles and motorcycles.

My father's rise in his career must have been rapid, because by the time I was only three or four years old, we were already living in a new, brick house and we had a new car. By then, I had a younger brother, so we were truly the model family of four. I have seen the snapshots of my father's success: photographs of my father posing with Mr. Bata, of Bata Shoes; there were also pictures of the family at the motor race track, pictures taken from the time when my father represented Kawasaki motorcycles in Southeast Asia.

My parents were good providers, not only for our family, but for the extended family and also for their church. Both my mom and dad taught Sunday School and were respected leaders of their congregation. So it came as quite a shock to everyone when my father, out of the blue, announced in 1969 that he felt God's call on him to go into full-time ministry. As a result, he would resign from his lucrative career and accept a seminary scholarship which required a move from Malaysia to Singapore.

The consternation and resistance put up by the extended family was not unexpected. The extended family disagreed with the move because it would take us too far away from them and out of the country. "Why not attend a local seminary?" they protested.

More surprising was the reaction of our home church, which was just as opposed to our family's move! They bemoaned the loss of leadership resulting from my parent's departure and even more significantly, the loss of the offering income from my parent's givings. Nevertheless, undaunted and resolute, my parents resigned from their jobs, packed up our belongings into four suitcases, and moved the family to Singapore in order to follow God's calling and to be trained for full-time ministry.

Barely two months after our move to Singapore, the most violent race riots in Malaysian history, a bloody conflict between ethnic Chinese and Malays, took place; the epicenter of those riots, would you believe, was in the vicinity of our former hometown. The race riots of May 13 and 14, 1969 in Malaysia saw casualties of hundreds of Chinese killed by machetes and thousands displaced after their homes and businesses were torched.

My parents no doubt feared for the lives of their own family and relatives. It was a terrifying and dangerous time to be a Chinese living in Malaysia. Fortunately, our own family's timely move meant that we were safe and sound in Singapore. For my parents, this must have been the ultimate confirmation that the calling to which they had committed themselves must have been authentic and must have been from God.

Again, as a child, I was oblivious to all of these dangerous and life-altering events. However, I believe my parents made the connection then, that obedience to God and experiencing the protection and provision of God were

inexorably linked. Time and time again in later years, my parents would venture forth in faith, seemingly counter-intuitive to me and to other people because they were convinced that this spiritual principle was true and could be relied upon.

Many more years later, I too would make decisions for myself and for my family based on this same spiritual principle:

So do not worry, saying ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.
(Matthew 6:31-33)

Although God’s protection and provision does not necessarily guarantee our safety, I know that whatever happens, I can always count on God to be there with me through the difficult times. Proof of this truth is evident to me as I reflect on my early experience as a five year old boy in Singapore. By God’s grace, this memory of sexual molestation as a young child was blocked from me until I grew up. It was truly God’s grace, because only as an adult, was I able to understand and be healed from the sins committed against me.

After moving from Malaysia to Singapore, there were a few months when we lived off campus while awaiting the residences for married students with children to be made available for our family. I recall our family living temporarily above a garage, which had been converted into a book warehouse.

There was a family living in the main house whose generosity had provided for our interim accommodations. In that family there was an older boy who took care of me and my brother while our parents were away attending classes. When we were alone, this older boy began to initiate sexual acts with me

and taught me to do the same for him. He also told me to keep what we had done our secret.

I remember feeling important and special because this older boy had paid more attention to me than my younger brother, whom he always sent away. My brother often cried at being left out. Although we ended up living in this temporary housing arrangement for only a few months, nevertheless, I believe that this early childhood exposure to inappropriate sexual activity, in part, perversely propelled me towards sexual sin throughout my whole life. I am convinced that it is only by God's grace, my struggles with sexual temptation and sin have not resulted in destroying my life, or someone else's life, or brought shame and scandal to Jesus' name.

Despite the potential of lingering trauma from sexual abuse, despite living in a part of the world that was so susceptible to racial violence, despite my parent's unresolved sorrow and grief at the loss of their firstborn infant, despite the stressful re-location from one country to another and the loss of financial security, and despite all the things that could have gone wrong, I mostly grew up remembering my early childhood years as ones which were filled with laughter and joy!

For example, I can remember my parents getting me a pet, a big German shepherd, who became the nuisance dog on campus. My dog would routinely search out my father from amongst the student body gathered at chapel time by sniffing everyone's behinds when the entire assembly was kneeling in prayer! I

remember my brother and I once found a dish of delicious pork spareribs outside the seminary cafeteria which we promptly ate clean to the bone. As it turned out, these were discarded food scraps that the school cook had saved from the student dining hall to give to our dog! I remember my mom had this great idea to supplement their meagre student allowance by raising chickens from chicks. My brother and I had the dubious responsibility of taking care of these tiny animals. The whole enterprise failed miserably because, despite our best efforts, every last one of the chicks was attacked and killed by giant rats! I remember our neighbors on campus, a family from Tanzania; they were the very first Africans we had ever met. They had two children with whom we loved to play. I still remember thinking how their beautiful dark skin made them virtually invisible at night except for the whites of their teeth and eyes! For whatever reasons, when I think back on my early years, these are the delightful and extraordinary memories that God has imprinted on my heart and mind. Through them, I felt loved; I felt safe; I felt secure and certain of His presence with me always, even to this very day, shielding me from forces beyond my control that would have taken me away from Him. So, even in my earliest childhood I can conclude that God *was* there, graciously calling me to Himself. I may even have felt His hand of blessing on my head.

Jesus loves me!
This I know,
For the Bible tells me so.
Little ones to Him belong;
They are weak but He is strong.

Yes, Jesus loves me!
Yes, Jesus loves me!
Yes, Jesus loves me!
The Bible tells me so.

(Words by Anna Warner, 1860; Music by William Bradbury, 1862)

This was my favorite song as a young child in Sunday School. It is my intention to include the lyrics of a song which encapsulates the spiritual insights and discoveries from that particular period of my life after each chapter of my spiritual autobiography.

Conversion

Then Jesus turned, and seeing them following, said to them, “What do you seek?”

They said to Him, “Rabbi, where are You staying?”

He said to them, “*Come* and see.”

They came and saw where He was staying, and remained with Him that day (now it was about the tenth hour). John 1:38-3

Jesus invited John the Baptist’s disciples, the few whose interests were piqued when John identified Jesus as “the Lamb of God,” to spend a day with Him. That day was not a day when Jesus performed any miracle. Nor did John (the gospel writer) mention Jesus sharing any special teaching on that particular day. Jesus and the curious seekers mainly just hung-ou’ together. They said they wanted to see where Jesus was staying. So, Jesus showed them where He was staying. But their simple act of remaining with Jesus, even for one day, was enough to make ‘that day’ into a memorable, spiritual turning-point day for them; because on ‘that day’, John, the disciple of the Baptist, one of the seekers, became

a disciple of Jesus. On ‘that day’, John, who would later become known as the beloved disciple and who later still became the gospel writer, remembered even the time of day when his whole life changed; it was about the tenth hour, or about 4 o’ clock in the afternoon.

After completing his Bachelor of Divinity degree in Singapore, my father accepted a call to be the minister of St. Andrew’s Presbyterian Church in Penang, Malaysia. Why did that church choose my father to be their minister? Was it because my father spoke both English and Chinese? This church had a small English-speaking contingent, a dwindling group of ex-patriots, mainly Scottish and British Christians, as well as a predominantly Chinese-speaking congregation. Was it because his profile showed that he had had a successful career in business management prior to becoming a minister? I’d like to think that it was because he had a young, capable wife, and because he also came with two energetic children (their third and my youngest brother would be born one year later); just the kind of demographics the church was hoping to reach! At any rate, our family moved from Singapore back to Malaysia, this time to Penang Island, which was and still is a beautiful tropical paradise.

I remember clearly the Sunday evening in 1974, when my father was finally ordained (after completing a two year probationary period) as Minister of Word and Sacrament by the Presbyterian Church in Malaysia denomination. The church presented their new minister with a gift: a precious leather-bound Bible. It must have been a rare and expensive item at that time because though it was a

‘gift’, it was a used copy of the Living Bible (the first printing of the Living Bible had only just been available in 1971 through Tyndale Publishers in the United States)! Perhaps out of sheer joy and thanksgiving, my father turned to me and without another thought, inscribed in it “*To Alan Goh, on Daddy’s ordination day!*” and he re-gifted that Bible to me! I have treasured that gift to this day and have only recently begun to ponder its shaping role in my faith development. This was just one of the many early spiritual influences that helped me to later discern God’s presence in my life and to hear His personal invitations to me.

Growing up in a Christian home, living at the manse, which was a house situated just next door to the church, meant that my life was totally immersed in the life and activity of the church. You could say that this was how I ‘hung out’ with Jesus in my childhood years! According to my Sunday school teacher, on whom I had a secret crush, I was a star student because at the age of ten, I knew more about the Bible than any of the other children. And even though I was much younger, I was already a part of the youth group by virtue of being the PK, the pastor’s kid.

When Operation Mobilization’s ship, *Logos*, docked in Penang, not only did I tour the ship, but our family also billeted some of the young missionaries in our home. I was so taken with the ship’s ministry I made a mental note to myself that one day I would also like to go on one of those mission trips. One of the pamphlets I received from OM offered a correspondence Bible study course. Naturally, I signed up for the course and worked diligently to complete it. As you

can see, I loved being involved in the church. It didn't matter what the activity or program was—it could be a potluck dinner, or a fundraiser, or a choir concert, or an evangelistic meeting, if my parents were involved, I felt that I too had to have a part in it.

I think I knew, even back then, how proud my parents were of me. And that made me want to please them even more and remain their 'favored' one. Not only was I a straight 'A' student and a prefect of my school, I was also equally keen about spiritual things and about serving the church. For example, as a child, I would often practice reading the Bible aloud simply because I wanted to be able to do the Scripture reading at Sunday worship.

In my mind, about the only disappointment I ever brought on my parents was that I didn't do better at playing the piano. My piano teacher, Mrs. Lee, a well-known musician on the Island, had grudgingly taken me on as a student only as a favor to my father, the local church minister. Perhaps, in part, due to her militant methods and in part, to my unwillingness to obey, I did not become the piano virtuoso of my parents' dream. To this day, I regret not trying harder at piano, only because that would surely have put my parents 'over the top' with joy.

Life as a PK soon became one filled with church responsibilities. Like the 'Von Trapps' from the musical, *The Sound of Music*, our family was the complete package, only we excelled at "doing church"! My father preached while my mother was the greeter and the principal of the church's nursery school. In time, my younger brother became an accomplished pianist, and I took on the role of the

youth group leader and guitar player. Even my baby brother, 9 years my junior, would serve as the ‘ring-bearer’ at wedding services! Our family did it all!

I grew up doing all the things that needed to be done in and around the church, such as: setting up for worship, helping out in children’s Sunday school, leading singing at youth fellowship, attending training events, and even counting the children’s offering. It was what my parents came to expect of me as the eldest son. For the most part, I welcomed the responsibilities and enjoyed receiving the adulation of people; at other times, I marveled at how natural doing church tasks was for me; but most of the time, I just fulfilled my responsibilities out of obedience to my parents.

However, by hanging out at church as much as I did, it was only a matter of time before I got a glimpse of the darker side of ministry because sooner or later, the sinful nature of people emerged. Even in my youthful experience, I had figured out that conflicts seldom arose in the church because of a difference in theology. Typically, at the root of most of the church fights I saw, they invariably had something to do with money; who controlled it or desired to control it, who was becoming too arrogant because of it, or who felt they needed to put someone back in their rightful place.

For example, at St. Andrew’s church in Penang, my mother, who was a very capable and enterprising teacher, started a nursery and kindergarten, initially as an outreach program. In time, the school became quite a successful program financially for the church. Each year the nursery school was able to contribute a

significant portion of its profits back into the church's general fund. With some of the income from school fees, the school also hired new staff; a caretaker-gardener was retained for the church; new furniture was purchased; a new playground was constructed; the church parking lot was paved.

On the surface, everything was going splendidly well but murmurings of jealousy and discontent soon began to emerge. As a young person, I did not know all the precise details of what happened. One church member was upset because his daughter was not hired on as a teacher; some questioned why the amount transferred from the school wasn't higher insisting that more money could have been channeled to the church were it not for frivolous purchases; some felt there should have been more supervision over the school principal's decisions (i.e., my mother). Whatever the reasons, soon there were people on opposing sides who escalated the conflict.

The ensuing church storm was predictable and violent; in its wake, it left my parent's first ministry shredded in tatters. For the first time in my life, I saw my dad and mom cry as they prayed for the church. They felt unjustly attacked, hurt and betrayed. It pained me to see them seeking forgiveness from the very ones who, in my eyes, were the troublemakers in the first place. I felt angry, resentful, and disillusioned. I harbored ill-will towards particular people in the church. Then, one day, just four short years after starting at St. Andrew's, my parents announced to me and my brothers that we were leaving that church. Immediately, I felt such tremendous relief and happiness! It was as if a huge

burden had been lifted off *my* tiny shoulders! Although I was sad to have to leave my friends from the church, and sadder still to part with my Sunday school teacher, I felt righteous indignation. I felt happy that the church would no longer benefit from all of *our* hard work! Why did I feel this way? Was I simply mirroring my parents' sentiments about the situation? I can't say for sure, but I don't believe I was. Even as an eleven year old kid, I had already begun to see the work and ministry of the church from the perspective of someone in full-time service! Seeing the ugly side of ministry was an inevitable result of 'hanging around' the church.

Despite this bitter episode from the Penang church, it didn't change the fact that God was actively working in my young life, drawing me to Himself. For this reason, my most vivid recollection from that period of my life was not about the church conflict; instead, it was a cherished memory of the final youth retreat I attended before we left the church in Penang.

Once again I was simply just a tag along PK at this retreat which was intended for much older youth. The guest speaker at the retreat was training the church youth to share their faith using "The Four Spiritual Laws" booklet. As he explained the content of the booklet, he came to the following questions: "Which circle represents your life? Which circle would you like to have represent your life?" "Do you want to have Jesus sit on the throne of your life?"

Subsequently, he asked whether there was anyone present who had not yet or never prayed to accept Jesus as their personal Lord and Savior. I hadn't. But

clearly, I had understood the message and the invitation to accept Jesus as my Savior. So I raised my hand, stood up, repeated the ‘sinner’s prayer’ and accepted Christ! Even though I was the youngest in the group to have taken that step of faith, the decision to invite Christ into my life was profound and real. On a scale of low to high intensity, I would have to say that this decision to accept Jesus ‘that day’ was highly intense. It was a spiritual experience that filled me with joy and excitement. More significantly, like the beloved disciple, it was a decision that I clearly remembered from my childhood and which would change my whole life.

I can still recall the emotions I felt on ‘that day’ after all these years. That would be the first of several conversion experiences I would have as a Christian growing up. It wasn’t because this first one was not an authentic encounter with Jesus. It most definitely was. But reflecting on it now, I believe the process of my conversion which started ‘that day’ would nevertheless require other spiritual commitments to continue the process of yielding every aspect of my life up to Jesus. This process of surrendering to Jesus would be on-going until Jesus is enthroned in every area of my life.

Whenever I have gone astray from God, whenever I have stumbled into sin, whenever I have encountered doubts, I have been able to return to Jesus simply by recalling the unalterable fact that I had, on ‘that day’ asked Jesus to come into my heart. I am fully convinced that because I did accept Christ into my life that day, Jesus will never leave me nor forsake me. The Bible promises,

For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth,

nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:38-39)

To this day I am in wonder that, despite the traumatic experience of the church conflict which ousted my parents from their first charge, I did not distance myself from God or from the church. I do not know how much of my conversion was me choosing Jesus or Jesus choosing me. But I am sure that God had to have played a huge part in orchestrating those events in my life which culminated in my praying to accept Jesus. God called my parents into full-time ministry. God provided their opportunity to serve in their first church. God impressed my mind with so many positive and memorable experiences of just ‘hanging around’ the church. God gifted me at a very young age with spiritual hunger to learn, to serve, to understand, and to have a sincere willingness to say ‘yes’ to Jesus on that day. Did I choose Jesus or did Jesus choose me? Likely, it was both: God *gave* me the heart to say ‘yes’ to Him but I also had to choose to say ‘yes’!

It only takes a spark to get a fire going
And soon all those around can warm up to its glowing
That’s how it is with God’s love
Once you’ve experienced it
You share His love to everyone
You want to pass it on.

What a wondrous time is spring
When all the trees are budding
The birds begin to sing
The flowers start their blooming
That’s how it is with God’s love
Once you’ve experienced it
You want to sing
It’s fresh like spring
You want to pass it on.

I wish for you my friend
This happiness that I've found
You can depend on Him
It matters not where you're bound
I'll shout it from the mountain top
I want my world to know
The God of love has come to me
I want to pass it on.

(Words and Music by Kurt Kaiser, 1969)

This was the first song I learned to play on the guitar in the youth group in St. Andrew's, Penang.

Challenge

If you want to be perfect go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then *come*, follow me. (Matthew 19:21)

These challenging words of Jesus to the rich young man stopped him dead in his tracks. He had sought to follow Jesus, but the Bible says, he “went away sad.” Jesus’ invitation was gracious, but it was not without conditions! He knew that the young man loved his wealth more than he loved Jesus, even if the young man didn’t or couldn’t see the idolatry in himself. Therefore, Jesus revealed to the young man what was hidden in his heart: his love for money. Before he could follow, Jesus required the young man to give up that which was already enthroned in his life. In the same way, I believe that Jesus’ invitation to follow Him required me to give up certain things. What were these things which were idolized and hidden in my heart and to which I was blind?

For me, it wasn't the love of money, at least that wasn't my idol in my adolescent years. For me, there were two things which I craved more than wealth which hindered my following Jesus completely: first, I craved belonging to a group of friends—I longed to be significant to a social peer group; and second, I burned with lust for sexual experiences and gratification—O what I would do to have a girlfriend! The pursuit of these two preoccupations seemed to engage my every waking hour in my junior and senior high school years.

Why did I yearn so much for peer acceptance and why was I so obsessed with sex? I believe it had to do with the dramatic changes that were about to occur in my life after our family left Penang, Malaysia. When my dad announced to me and my brothers that we were leaving St. Andrew's, he didn't just move us across the city or country; he declared that we were moving to the United States! That just wasn't the kind of move that I had ever anticipated or thought possible; in fact, it was beyond my scope of imagination. Needless to say, that announcement was a huge surprise and a shock to me at the same time.

In my parent's thinking, the situation in Malaysia was becoming less and less tenable for non-Malays living in the country. Politically, economically, socially, and religiously, the country was becoming more unjust towards non-Malays and non-Muslims. It was government policy at that time to systematically elevate the standard of living of Malays at the expense of the non-Malay population. The government did so by routinely discriminating against the Chinese, unfairly ruling against their companies, business interests, career

advancements, educational opportunities, and even curtailing their religious freedoms. Many Chinese who had the means to leave began to migrate to other countries such as Singapore, Australia, England and the United States. My parents, who dreamt of better opportunities for their three sons and themselves, were part of that early wave of immigrants who left their homeland in search of a better life.

In 1976, we initially moved from Malaysia to Princeton, New Jersey, where my father utilized his student visa (obtained through enrollment in Princeton Seminary's post-graduate program) as a means to take our whole family out of Malaysia and to gain entry into the United States. Less than two years later, an opportunity opened up for my father to be called to pastor a Chinese church in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada. Therefore, instead of waiting further for our 'landed immigrant status' to be approved in the U.S., a process which was fraught with uncertainty and unknown expense, my parents opted to move to Canada instead and to accept the pastoral call in Winnipeg. That was how our family ended up settling in Canada and how we became Canadian citizens.

Needless to say, leaving Malaysia and moving to the United States and then shortly thereafter to Canada, had a profound impact on my life. On the one hand, everything was new and exciting: my first time boarding an international flight (en route to Princeton, we also made stops in Karachi, Moscow, London, Paris and New York); the first time to eat at McDonald's; the first time to watch American football; the first time to experience a four-seasons climate; and my first time to play with snow. I was enthralled by all the sights and sounds of my

new surroundings: TV, music, shopping malls, winter garments, cars driving on the right-hand side of the road, drive-in restaurants, squirrels (there were lots of squirrels in Princeton!), and even handling American coins and dollar bills was fascinating to me.

On the other hand, for the first time in my life, I felt tremendously insecure, anxious and uneasy in my new surroundings: I was a visible minority; I wasn't fluent in English; I spoke with a foreign accent; I was self-conscious about my hairstyle, my clothes, my shoes, my school bag—everything of mine from Asia just seemed to be and to look out of place.

When we first arrived in the United States, a local church had donated second-hand winter clothing for each member of our family. These 'donated' items, which we were very grateful to receive, only served to heighten my sense of awkwardness and insecurity because the appearance of my hand-me-down clothes still stood in stark contrast to the very 'preppie look' of the wealthy school kids in Princeton.

On the outside, I tried to reassure my parents that everything was fine with me and that I was adjusting well to my new school, new teachers, new classmates, and new routines. But on the inside, I was very nervous, insecure and afraid. To put it mildly, I was experiencing culture shock. The familiar context I had grown up in and had known was gone. I now found myself in a strange new world where I perceived and felt like I was looked down upon as the poor foreign kid and who soon became the focus of his schoolmates' teasing.

School life in America was often lonely and cruel. My classmates' teased and poked fun at me incessantly. The times of recess and lunch breaks were the most unbearable. It didn't take long for me to learn a colorful vocabulary of derogatory and hurtful swear words. To avoid the school yard teasing and harassing, I would often hide in the school library. I consoled myself by vowing to triumph over my peers through excelling in my studies, which I did. However, the reality was, getting straight A's in my schoolwork did little to endear me to my peers. Becoming the teacher's pet only served to increase the gulf between me and my classmates and got me no closer to being accepted by them.

After only spending parts of grades seven and eight in New Jersey, our family then moved to multi-cultural Winnipeg. To my relief, in 'Winterpeg', almost everyone in my school was an immigrant—my classmates' were from all around the world! Many were first or second generation Polish, Ukrainian, Filipino, Italian, Portuguese, Pakistani, Vietnamese, and Chinese from Hong Kong. In fact, you'd be part of the minority if you were in fact a local-born Canadian from Canada! What a relief it was for me to finally feel like I could find a group in which to belong.

I immediately got busy and started making friends and soon surrounded myself with a group of loyal buddies; even now, recalling these names feels like wrapping myself in a warm blanket: Brock Storey, Stephen Yurkiw, Rick Lentowich, Robert Schmidke, Stewart Fraser, Ken Fritzke, Ted Mikolash, Ken Edwards, Sheldon Johnson, Matthew Lee-Wing, Rodney Hunchak, Tim Walker,

and many more. I didn't realize until now just how many friends I had grabbed and latched onto, but at the time, I still felt that I needed more.

With some of these friends I walked to and from school each day. Some were lunch period buddies. During lunch break, I would be at Brock's house making Kraft dinner with him three to four times a week. There was another group with whom I played sports. Still another group with whom I hung out on the weekends to consume illegally bought beer, smoke weed, and share *Playboy* magazines. I remember always going the extra mile to endear myself to these friends: oftentimes, I would pay for the beer, or I would laugh at their inane jokes, or I would listen to their problems, or I would help them with their homework. I did everything I could to try to keep everyone as close to me as possible.

I was overjoyed when nearly all of these friends were with me when we moved on together from junior high to the same high school. The safe feeling of belonging to a peer group at that time became even more important than church friends, and it certainly became more significant than church. I determined I never want to feel like an outsider again.

A second area of brokenness in me in my adolescent years was my obsession with sex. I was a teen with raging hormones, constantly fantasizing and thinking about girls, and feeding my mind with pornography and illicit material. This was entirely a secret obsession which I shared with no one else because even then, I knew how shameful, immoral and wrong it was for a believer to behave

like I did. Yet, guilty feelings aside, I could not help but indulge in these fantasies daily.

In the theatre of my mind, I would always play the part of the courageous, handsome, and sensitive man who could attract any girl he desired. In reality, I was painfully shy around the opposite sex and rarely, if ever, talked with a girl. I recall having such a huge crush on a classmate named Susan, but kept this secret infatuation to myself for all of grades eight, nine and ten! I also went through a phase when I felt I needed to improve myself so as to make myself more attractive and desirable to the opposite sex. I did this by literally trying out for every sports team in grade nine: basketball, handball, volleyball, track and field, badminton, soccer, and softball! In grade ten, I joined all three school choirs in an attempt to get nearer to girls. I kept a part-time job as a bus boy and dishwasher in part to earn pocket money so I could buy the right kind of clothes I thought would make me more appealing. Unfortunately, or fortunately, none of my attempts to upgrade myself helped me get a girlfriend.

Finally, in grade eleven, at the tail end of a school dance, a girl I barely knew asked me for a dance. I accepted the request like a starving man who had just been offered a hunk of steak. As it turned out, that one dance alone was all it took to propel the two of us into an intimate, physical relationship.

By God's grace, and because the fear of God was still in my life, there was still a line I could not, and dare not cross. All that time, my conscience was screaming out at me. The guilt I experienced often manifested itself physically as

a throbbing headache. I literally felt hot around the collar and had the sensation that my ears were burning due to my shameful behavior. To this day, I'm haunted by how close to disaster I came when I gave into sexual temptation. I have only God to thank for rescuing me from that relationship, and others like it. If God's alarm bells had not awakened me to the perils of sexual sin, where would I be now and what would my life have become if I had continued past the point of no return? *I praise God for His mercy and grace to me.* Forgive me Lord for my moral recklessness and spiritual indifference.

At the end of grade eleven, my parents announced that, once again, we would be moving to a new church, this time across the country to Victoria, British Columbia. Looking back on this move now, I believe this was simply God's merciful way of protecting me from further temptations among that common group of friends in Winnipeg.

However, at the time, I truly didn't see this as God's providence at all. For the first time in my life, I openly opposed my parents and put up such a huge fuss to stay put in Winnipeg and not to move with the family. I made it quite clear to my parents that I didn't want to go to a strange school in a new city for my final year of high school. I didn't want to leave my school friends or abandon my involvement in the school choirs. I even went so far as to arrange for a church family to let me stay with them for a year until after I graduated from high school. You can imagine my deep resentment and bitterness when my parents insisted that we must stay as a family. The reason they gave was that they needed me to

help them serve the new church! The furthest thing from my mind was church or God. In truth, I was dreadfully afraid of finding myself in yet another context where I would be an outsider in a new school.

In the end, I was not allowed to have my way and was forced to move with my family across the country from Winnipeg to Victoria. But the inner rebellion against my parents, against God, and against all things concerning church intensified. On the outside, I played the part of the ever-obedient son and faithful believer. But on the inside, I led a double life of sin, immorality, and hypocrisy.

What experience served to help re-connect me with the spiritual dimension of my life? God used my younger brother Victor, to reveal the idolatries in my life and to challenge my hypocrisy. At the time, he had been listening to a Christian singer and song-writer named Keith Green. I, too, was impressed with Keith's music and doubly impressed that his records were offered free of charge to anyone who requested them even if they couldn't afford to pay for them. Not long after being introduced to Keith Green's music ministry, I learned that Keith's plane had crashed and he had been killed, along with 11 other people, two of whom were his own children. Keith was only 28 years old.

This tragic news hit me hard. I felt saddened and guilty that Keith, who had so much to offer to God, had had his life cut short so suddenly. Here I was, also with much to offer to God, but was wasting my life chasing after more friends and personal pleasures. I had not even considered the possibility that my

life could also be cut short before accomplishing anything significant for God. It was at this very moment, when my heart was primed and opened to hearing from Him, when God spoke to me through my brother.

Victor challenged me to be a real Christian. He said he saw through my phony double life and my hypocrisy. He said, “If you don’t want to be a Christian, then don’t be one. Why do you pretend to be one? You are such a hypocrite!” Those stinging words cut me to the core. I was extremely upset and went away seething with anger. But when I calmed down, I knew he was right. I knew God had used my brother to finally get through to me. I confessed and repented before God. I promised God that I would not be a hypocrite anymore! And that was how God led me back to faith in Him.

It is obvious to me now that God’s presence was strong in my life when He used Victor’s challenge to reveal to me the idolatry and hypocrisy in my life. But was God also present during those times when I was not at all aware of His presence? Of course He was!

As far as my parents were concerned, God had miraculously made it financially possible for our whole family to leave Malaysia and move to the United States—with borrowed money. My parents were able to show U.S. Immigration that they had just enough funds to cover the family’s expenses for one academic year. Also, upon arrival, my parents found unofficial jobs even though visa students were not legally permitted to work. My father washed dishes in the seminary cafeteria while my mother was hired on as a nanny with an

American family. And just before the money ran out, in-the-nick-of-time, God opened up a ministry position in Canada which resolved both our family's financial crisis and immigration difficulties.

During my own trials at school, God provided nurturing and compassionate teachers who did their best to help me acclimate to my new life in America. In particular, Mr. Adams, my English teacher, was especially kind to me. He worked tirelessly, one-on-one with me, to help me improve my English.

I must also mention the generosity of the Presbyterian congregation who had 'adopted' our family when we first arrived in Princeton. Besides providing us with warm winter clothing, they also started a collection called "Judy's laundry fund" (Judy is my mother's name) to provide my mother with coins for the laundromat. These kind believers also came over at Christmastime with a tree and a turkey to help us celebrate our first American Christmas.

Finally, moving our family to ethnic Winnipeg was exactly what I needed because I didn't think I could have endured another day of the schoolyard bullying that I had endured. It would be impossible to name or list all the gracious and loving ways God took care of us and blessed us during that time through the generosity of other believers. After so many years, I can now testify that God was especially present even when I was unaware of Him.

While some people may balk at the thought that Jesus' invitation to the rich young man and to me was conditional, I certainly do not. Jesus only wants to reveal and expose the false things in our lives which we think are so great but

which can never truly satisfy. When I decided to follow Jesus, I gave up my desperate need to surround myself with friends, I surrendered my fears and insecurities, I repented of my sexual sins, and I entrusted all my neediness for love and significance to Him who alone knows all of my sins and yet, still loves me. It is this realization of Jesus' love for me that kept me from turning away from Jesus like the rich young ruler and going away sad.

Create in me a clean heart, O God
And renew a right spirit within me
Create in me a clean heart, O God
And renew a right spirit within me

Cast me not away from Thy presence, O Lord
And take not Thy Holy Spirit from me
Restore unto me, the joy of Thy salvation
And renew a right spirit within me

(Psalm 51: 10-11; Music by Keith Green, 1984)

This is my all-time favorite song as sung by Keith Green.

Commissioned

“Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will send you out to fish for people.” (Mark 1:17)

Jesus' first four disciples were fishermen. Jesus creatively described the new mission to which He was calling them as fishing for people. I wonder whether Simon, Andrew, James and John would have responded as enthusiastically as they did had Jesus called them to a ministry of public speaking and preaching! Many fear public-speaking more than life's worst fears! Therefore, it was practical and reasonable that before long, Jesus would send out those whom

He had called for some on-the-job experience. In Mark 6:7-12, Jesus sent out His disciples “two by two” with specific instructions on what they were to do on their short-term mission trips. In my own following after Jesus, no experience has been more significant in preparing me for a lifetime of faith and ministry than participating in short-term missions.

In my life prior to full-time ministry, I have had no shortage of work experiences due to a wide variety of part-time employment opportunities. In fact, I can definitely say that God has made good use of nearly all of my positions to benefit my ministry later on in life. I am astounded and grateful for all of these short-term employment experiences: I delivered newspapers as a paper boy for the Trenton Times, for the Heights Town News, and for the Winnipeg Tribune. I washed dishes at Caesar’s Palace restaurant in Winnipeg and later progressed to stock boy, short order cook, prep cook, baker, and supervisor assistant. After leaving Caesar’s, I made and delivered pizza at Casa Grande restaurant in Winnipeg. Another restaurant which I worked at for several years was Golden City Palace restaurant in Victoria where I served as a waiter and bartender. I had four eventful years of University of Victoria work-terms employed as a cartographer with the Peace River-Liard Regional District Planning Department, then as an aerial photo librarian with the Patricia Bay Institute of Oceanography, and lastly, as an information officer with Transport Canada in Vancouver. When I moved to Toronto, I worked as an assistant librarian at the University of Toronto Faculty of Education library. I was also employed as a fundraising assistant

manager for the Big Brothers charitable organization. Other part-time jobs included drawing street maps for Metro Maps which I absolutely loved and signing up new customers for department store credit cards which I absolutely detested. The most intriguing job by far that I had was being hired by local rental car companies to appear in court on behalf of the rental agencies to plead down parking ticket charges!

All of these positions taught me valuable lessons such as the importance of working well with other people; the wisdom of gaining respect through following direction; working diligently while taking responsibility for your own work; discovering and appreciating personally satisfying work; and the value of a paycheque. I believe the wide variety of life experiences gained from these jobs greatly helped me to discern other career options when I was contemplating going into full-time ministry. However, in my estimation, none of these jobs compared to the experiences gained on the mission field.

The summer after I vowed to become a ‘real Christian’, I applied and was accepted by Operation Mobilization for their summer ‘Love Europe’ outreach campaign. I was overjoyed to be accepted by Operation Mobilization because it had been my childhood dream to go on a mission with this agency since visiting OM’s Logos ship. In addition, I felt I was fulfilling Keith Green’s call for “100,000 North American believers to take up the challenge of going out to the mission field.” This was the vision Keith shared shortly before his tragic plane crash. I had just completed my freshman year when I embarked on this adventure

for the Lord of the harvest to use me and to open my eyes to the great need of the harvest and the great need for more workers in His harvest field (Matthew 9:38). I was elated when my home congregation commissioned me to go on this summer short-term mission.

On this first mission trip, I was assigned to a small team of eight members consisting of young people from Canada, the U.S. and Europe to evangelize in northern and central Italy. Our team went around to rural villages and towns to conduct week-long evangelistic meetings. First, we would seek permission to put up a tent in the village square; then, during the day we would go door-to-door to hand out Christian literature and invite people to the evening tent meetings; in the evening, our team sang, presented gospel skits, and shared our testimonies with those who came to the meetings. We also played soccer with the local kids, visited and encouraged the local believers, preached on street corners, prayed with strangers, and loved people in Jesus' name.

Within our team, we worshipped, prayed, studied God's Word, fasted, learned to live in community, served one another, trusted in God to provide for our daily needs, and waited on God to show us His answer to our daily prayers. And God did answer our prayers in remarkable ways! Village officials who had earlier refused to give us permission to set up a tent relented; our team's finances were often short, but somehow we always had just enough; although rare, we also witnessed the occasional conversion of an unbeliever. Throughout the summer, a number of conflicts occurred between team members, but by God's grace, they

were all resolved. We also had the sense that God was protecting us against those who outwardly opposed our ministry, and especially when those who opposed us appeared to be demonized by evil spirits.

Although the team was only together for two short months, in that brief but intense period of time we had grown so intimate and close-knit that all of us were in tears when we said our good-byes at the end of the summer! I had never experienced such closeness; in comparison, it was even more satisfying than being with my high school friends in Winnipeg. In fact, I was so moved that I recall making this mental note to myself at that time: my future wife will have to be someone who is as sold on missions as I am!

I have named the many things I learned on the mission field. However, the preparations for the mission trip were equally significant. I had to decide how much of my own savings to put into the cost of the missions trip; and because that wasn't enough, I had to trust God for raising the rest of the required funds; I also had to be disciplined enough to listen to and read all the training materials; and then, I had to followed through on all the logistical needs for the trip like readying my passport, getting the necessary medical shots, and making the travel arrangements. It was at this time that I was encouraged by OM to keep a spiritual journal and to spend daily quiet times with God. As a nineteen year old who had never left home on his own before, I also had to grow up quickly because the mission orientation conference required me to take a cross-country bus trip by myself from Victoria, B.C. on the west coast to New York City on the east coast.

Completing these preparation activities also greatly contributed to my growing in maturity.

This short-term mission experience was also impactful because it put me in contact with many godly role models. I was mentored by my team leaders, Mike Hack and Felipe Medaschi, whose lives and faith I got to see up close; I had team members who daily challenged and kept me accountable for all that I said and did; and there were outstanding teachers and leaders who taught God's Word and shared the vision for fulfilling Jesus' Great Commission. I can still remember being inspired, listening to George Verwer teach about the power of prayer, about uncompromising discipleship, and about the need for purity. Up to that point, I had never heard such honest preaching about sexual purity and the need for confession, repentance and receiving forgiveness after sexual sin. This kind of practical teaching went a long way to helping me stave off and overcome sexual temptation and sin in my life.

When I returned home from mission, a couple of school friends told me that I had come home 'different'! I did feel that I had matured in my commitment and knowledge of God. But more importantly, I felt that I had truly begun to 'own' my faith in Jesus. More than at any other time in my life, even when no one was watching, I felt I had an authentic faith by which I could remain faithful to Jesus.

I applied all I had learned from the mission field to my church, campus ministry, and friendships. I renewed my efforts to lead the youth group at church,

I got involved with Inter Varsity Christian Fellowship to share Christ on campus, and I began to actively seek opportunities to share my faith with everyone. Even in my university courses, in Geography and Environmental Studies, I found myself writing essays and research papers from a Christian perspective. Clearly, Jesus had taken a powerful hold of my life and I was enjoying life, “in favor with God and man.” (Luke 2:52)

At that time, God surrounded me with a group of friends from both church and school, friends with whom I could be more serious about faith in God. I can see now that God was simply gifting me with the same close and intimate team experience I had previously enjoyed on my mission team in Italy. There was Janet, Gavin, Geof, Bonnie, Becky, Tiong, Tak, Brian, Christina, Tennys, Marcia, and Victor. Together we endeavored to fellowship with one another as the early church had fellowshiped in Jerusalem. We saw each other nearly every day, we ‘hung out’ at the University library in our reserved ‘study carrels’, we ate together, we studied the Bible together, we served in the church together, and we shared whatever we had with one another.

On one occasion, Becky’s father became ill, requiring Becky to return home to San Francisco during the middle of the school term. Led by the Holy Spirit after a time of prayer, each one of us within the group chipped in to collect the funds necessary to buy another air ticket so that one of us could fly to San Francisco to stay with Becky while she was absent from the group.

Some of our most memorable times were the Friday evening gatherings during crabbing season. After finishing worship and Bible study at church, we would carpool and drive to Sooke Harbor, about an hour away, to do some crabbing (i.e., catch crabs using baited crab traps). While waiting to pull up the traps, we would break out the guitar and sing. We would stay until we had caught our limit of crabs and then return to my house (by then, well past midnight) to clean, cook and eat the crabs. After eating, the whole group would then sleep over until the next day! Those were really memorable times! And what spiritual fruit did this kind of fellowship produce? God used our tight knit fellowship group to change our lives and call us into ministry: ten out of the twelve of us would eventually enter full-time ministry either as missionary, as pastor or as pastor's spouse!

The impact of missions on my life would not just be a one-time experience. God would continue to shape my life as I sought out new opportunities in missions locally, nationally, and internationally. Since that summer with OM in Italy, God has opened the door for me to be involved in church planning in Taiwan, doing children's ministry in the Dominican Republic, and encouraging the First Nations believers in Northern Ontario. I have been fortunate to have worked among the Cree and Ojibway people in Northern Ontario for more than ten years.

In the churches I have pastored, I have continued to lead congregational mission trips, mobilized and supported church members to go on missions, and

accompanied young adults to attend Urbana, the global missions' conference. I continue to champion all of these mission-related activities because I so believe that involvement in missions is essential for forming and maturing disciples of Jesus.

Borrowing a metaphor from sports, going on missions is like 'getting into the game'; in contrast, attending church alone can sometimes be just like going through the motions in the 'practice'. Without the end goal of actually 'getting into the game', practice times quickly lose their meaning and urgency. Every coach would agree that great players never emerge from such lackadaisical practices. Likewise, I strongly believe that all of us who follow Jesus will be even more effective as disciples if we would go on missions at least once in our lifetime. The knowledge and faith that we have in our minds must somehow find its way into our hearts, and then from our hearts out through our hands and feet.

When the disciples whom Jesus had sent out returned from their mission trips, they said with joy, "Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name. (Luke 10:17) Jesus replied, "do not *only* [emphasis mine] rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven." (Luke 10:20) Since that summer in Italy, the joy of the Lord in my life continues to be my strength.

Majesty,
worship his majesty,
Unto Jesus be glory, honor and praise.

Majesty,
kingdom authority
Flows from his throne unto his own, His anthem raise.

So exalt, lift up on high the name of Jesus;
Magnify, come glorify, Christ Jesus the King.

Majesty,
worship his majesty,
Jesus who died, now glorified, King of all kings.

(Words and music by Jack Hayford, 1976)

I first learned and sung this song at Operation Mobilization orientation conference in Belgium.

Canada Chinese Christian Youth Winter Conference

On the last and greatest day of the festival, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, “Let anyone who is thirsty *come* to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them.” (John 7:37-38)

When Jesus taught in Jerusalem at the Festival of Tabernacles, there were many in the crowd that day with differing opinions about Jesus’ identity. Some were impressed by Jesus’ learning especially ‘when he had never been taught’ (John 7:15). Others whispered that Jesus was a good man. But the majority of those who heard Jesus were truly skeptical about His claim to be the Messiah. The chief priests and Pharisees had already plotted and were ready to act against Jesus. They were looking to arrest Jesus and anyone else who publicly supported him.

Didn't it seem strange and out of place then for Jesus to give a public 'altar call' at this time to this rather hostile crowd?

Amongst the crowd however, there was a lone Pharisee whose heart was beginning to be opened towards Jesus. Behind the scenes and among his peers, Nicodemus defended Jesus. "Does our law condemn a man without first hearing him to find out what he has been doing?" (John 7:51) I believe Jesus' public invitation, "let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink," a call which Jesus literally had to stand up and shout in order to be heard above the crowd, was directed at everyone, but none heard the call more clearly than Nicodemus!

Sometimes, Jesus' gracious invitations do come at 'odd' moments. However, when you realize the Lord is speaking personally and directly to you, all that matters is how you respond to Him. The Lord's timing is perfect. He knows precisely when we need to make the next commitment to Him. I was about to experience a spiritual 'watershed' moment, one in which all the streams of what God had been doing up until then were identified and they all came together and began to flow as one undeniable river of God's will in my life.

I had said 'yes' to Jesus when I was eleven years old; then again when I was sixteen at my confirmation. Following my brother Victor's challenge to live more authentically, I affirmed once again my desire to follow Christ 'for real' at age eighteen. When I returned from my mission trip to Italy at age nineteen, I felt as though I was truly 'set': my relationship with God was firmly grounded; I was

active and growing in my faith; my relationships with friends and family were solid; I was doing well in school; my future looked promising and bright.

I thought to myself, “from here on in, just finish my degree, get a good job, get married, serve in the church, go on mission trips whenever possible...truly, my life ahead is all set!” At that time, I had been toying around with the idea of ‘tent-making’; the idea of using a secular job as a means by which to gain entry and do mission in countries closed to the Gospel intrigued me. But I felt that would be something I could look into at a later date after graduation and after I had established myself in a career. Unbeknownst to me, God had other plans for my life.

CCCYWC stands for Canada Chinese Christian Youth Winter Conference. In the winter of 1983, this conference was held at the exclusive Westin Bayshore Hotel in Vancouver, B.C. As I recall, a group of us decided at the last minute to attend the conference together. It was just something we thought would be fun to do after a busy Christmas since we still had a few days before the start of the new semester. The hotel venue looked impressive, and besides, the shopping and nightlife would be fun in Vancouver. I had no other motivation or expectation in going except to enjoy a few days away with friends before resuming my studies after the Christmas break. As it happened, the two main speakers for the conference were Dr. John Oswald Sanders and Dr. James Hudson Taylor III, both affiliated with Overseas Missionary Fellowship. I remember having this thought

about the plenary speakers: “That’s wonderful, native English speakers, no Chinese accents!”

When I try to remember what happened at the CCCYWC, my most vivid recollection was centered around the last evening session when Dr. Taylor gave an altar call and I responded by going forward. I remember the altar call was for anyone who wanted to respond to God, “Lord, I’m willing to go anywhere and to serve you in any way you call me to. I am willing even if you call me to serve in full-time ministry.” I remember feeling the warm tears of surrender streaming down my face as I went forward. I remember Dr. Taylor laying his hands on me and praying for me. For many years after the conference, I still had in my possession the light blue conference handbook with Dr. Taylor’s autograph in it. I have since lost this keepsake handbook, but not the moving emotional imprint of that night on my heart when I made this specific promise to God: “If you call me, I am willing to serve you in full-time ministry.”

But what is truly strange to me is that I don’t remember anything else about that entire week at the conference! For instance, I don’t remember how we travelled to Vancouver to the conference or how we returned to Victoria from the conference. I don’t remember what else we did that whole time we were in Vancouver. Did we go out to eat? Did we go shopping? I’m not even clear at this point who from our close group of friends attended the conference with me. I don’t remember what the hotel looked like even though it must have been a first-rate hotel with a fantastic view and must have included all the amenities of a

luxurious hotel. I don't remember what the other speakers preached about, or what we did in the small groups, or how many people responded when the altar calls were given. All I remember was that I had this remarkable spiritual watershed moment when I gave God a blank cheque and asked Him to use my life in whatever way He wished. In contrast to the call, everything else had dimmed.

When I returned home from the conference, school resumed. My life returned its hectic pace: there was study, church, IVCF, small group, work, friendships, growing through prayer, study, service, fellowship, and so on and so forth. Everything seemed the same. Yet, everything was not the same! The trajectory of my life was no longer shaped according to my own plans or ambitions. I was now anticipating and waiting on God to call me for the next new adventure that He had in store for me.

Before the start of my fourth year at university, once again, my parents were on the move. My father announced his intention to accept a call to a Chinese church in Toronto. This time around however, he said I would have the option of not moving with the family! My parents would move to Toronto with both of my younger brothers. But if I so chose, I could stay behind to complete my degree program in Victoria. It would however please them if I moved to Toronto to join them after my studies, but I could perhaps make that decision when the time came.

By this point, I was already nearly financially independent due to an on-going part-time job at a local restaurant and my having been reasonably well-paid by the school work term placements. That meant I had the means to rent my own

accommodations as well as to pay for tuition and food. Finally, in my parent's eyes, I had achieved 'adult' status as a twenty year old. As far as they were concerned, from that point onward, my parents were willing to give me the freedom to choose for myself where to live, what career to enter into, and how to live my life. I had shown them that I was mature, trustworthy, and above all, that I was diligently following Jesus. God's timing was perfect. Isn't it ironic that as far as I was concerned, at that particular point in my life, I had already relinquished my freedom to follow and obey Jesus; I was willing to let Him lead and guide me in every one of these decisions!

Almighty Father, give us a vision
Of a dying world that needs Your love and care
We see the need, the yearning for a Savior,
In Jesus' name, grant this our prayer

To be God's people in this place,
Live His goodness, share His grace
Proclaim God's mercy through His Son
Be His love, to every one

And when we falter, be Thou our comfort
Guide us as Your children that our lives may be
A beacon in this darkness that surrounds us
A light that others then may see.

(Words and Music by Charles Brown, 1974)

This was one of the new songs I learned and sang at the CCCYWC conference.

Called

“Lord, if it's you,” Peter replied, ‘tell me to come to you on the water.’

‘Come,’ Jesus said.

Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came towards Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, 'Lord, save me!'

Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. 'You of little faith,' he said, 'why did you doubt?' (Matthew 14:28-31)

Peter was the only disciple who asked Jesus for the ability to walk on water. Perhaps there were others who wished it but Peter was the only one who climbed over the side of the boat. Peter was a seasoned fisherman. No doubt he knew how to swim. This probably wasn't the first time he had encountered big white-capped waves. But all his bravado melted away when it suddenly dawned on him how impulsive and foolhardy he had been. He couldn't walk on water! What was he thinking? The words which escaped from his lips as he began to sink and Jesus' gentle chuckle afterwards revealed the real Peter: he was a man with fears and little faith just like the rest of us, but only cockier!

In my own walk with Jesus, a time was coming when I could not delay or defer any longer the decision to go 'all in' with Jesus. I thought I had already gone 'all in' at the CCCYWC but God needed to continue to peel back the layers of cockiness and false bravado in me until I could see for myself what was truly hindering and holding up my following after Jesus.

After living on my own for a year, I left Victoria to re-join my family in Toronto in 1986. As I only had a few outstanding electives left to complete my Bachelor's degree, I decided to fulfill these required courses at the University of Toronto and graduated as planned in 1987. That same year, I took some time off to travel in Asia. I went back to Malaysia after an absence of eleven years to visit

my grandmother and all the uncles, aunties, cousins, and schoolmates. When I left, I was just a boy. Now I was a grown adult; I was a man with the whole world before him. I was an adult; I was educated; and more importantly, I was an eligible bachelor! But what was to be my next step?

My travels eventually led me to Taiwan. Why and how did I end up in Taiwan? I was in Taiwan in 1988 as a volunteer for Send International, a mission organization that was church planting in that country. I had signed up for a 6-month mission which consisted of teaching conversational English to locals as an outreach program and helping out with the missionary team in miscellaneous ways. Typically I was involved in leading worship, sharing my testimony, and befriending the youth who came to the church.

The six months in Taichung, Taiwan flew by rapidly. I was thoroughly enjoying my mission experience thus far, but the term was drawing to a close, and I still had no idea what I would do next. My options at that time were: 1) extend my mission work in Taiwan for another 6 months; 2) do more travelling around Southeast Asia; or 3) return home to Canada and get a 'real' job.

Option one was always available, but admittedly, I knew that I did not come to Taiwan in the first place with a specific desire to do long-term mission work in that country. Intuitively, I knew that I came to Taiwan for a short-term period so I could 'buy more time' to figure out what I was going to do for the rest of my life. Since I had always wanted to visit Taiwan anyway, it became a convenient way for me to combine both mission trip and 'sight-seeing'!

Option two was appealing, but I had already exhausted all of my savings travelling around to Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei, and Indonesia for 4 months prior to my arrival in Taiwan. I was earning a modest income at that time teaching English privately in Taiwan, but that only paid for my daily living expenses. It was not enough to fund any other extended sight-seeing trips.

So I was left with option three, which was to return home to Canada, and get on with the rest of my life, a life I had practically left 'on hold' after graduating from university with a Bachelor of Arts in Geography.

My undergraduate degree in Geography was originally intended as a pre-requisite degree for Architectural school. I had always had an interest in building buildings. Even as a child, I would spend hours engrossed in constructing skyscrapers and designing homes with my wooden block set. In high school, I was skilled at drafting. In university, my interest had broadened to include cartography, policy-making and planning, and environmental studies. It would have been the logical next step to apply to graduate school in Architecture. But I never did. I really don't know why I never did apply to grad school after graduation. Perhaps the desire to be an architect simply wasn't strong enough.

Instead of applying to graduate school in Architecture upon graduation, I chose to take a year off to travel and see Southeast Asia. I believe I had always contemplated full-time ministry at the back of my mind, but I also had a lot of reservations about becoming a pastor.

I wanted to become a pastor, albeit a different kind of pastor than the kind modelled by my parents' way of doing ministry. My parents' ministry in the congregations they served often followed this pattern: their initial arrival would usher in a flurry of activity which would revive the church; this brief 'honeymoon period' also included a period of intense relationship building; then, typically, some divisive conflict would ensue to make it uncomfortable and untenable for my parents to remain longer in that congregation; so, it would be time to leave and move on to the next church. While this may be an overly simplistic critique and an unfair characterization of my parents' ministry, this was certainly how I perceived their ministry growing up. By the time I was considering whether or not to enter full-time ministry myself, my parents had already pastored 5 different congregations in 16 years of ministry. I knew it was unfair, but at that time, I had used this as my excuse for me to not take seriously the option of enrolling in seminary and going into full-time ministry.

I had another major reservation about going into full-time ministry. Deep down, I always wanted to be wealthy and successful. So here it was: all along this was what I had not wanted to face and was too ashamed to admit to myself! My idolatry was my love of money. If I went into ministry, I would first have to enroll in seminary. And going into seminary and full-time ministry would have meant giving up on the dream of becoming wealthy. No one goes into ministry to become financially independent. On the contrary, and I know this first hand from observing my parents, in ministry you are more than likely to find yourself in a

position of financial dependence and need. That was why despite the natural pull towards ministry, there was an equally strong push back nullifying any forward progress towards ministry.

Thus, I had continued to lay the ground work for going into architecture because it was the route to “success.” It certainly would have been the world’s way to achieve significance, security, wealth, and success. Being an architect would have totally satisfied my ‘immigrant’ notion of not wasting my opportunities. The immigrant mentality was certainly strong in me. I had seen the sacrifices made by my parents as immigrants in order to give me the best opportunities in life to succeed. As an architect, I could make my parents truly proud and have enough money to take care of them in their retirement years. And besides, I already had the pre-requisite degree, along with what I felt were the natural interests, skills and aptitude for this field of study. All I had to do was apply and see if the school would accept me as a student. Yet, I did not do so!

Seminary on the other hand, in my estimation, could always be my fall back option. The trouble was, if I went to seminary after failing to get into architectural school, I was worried that I would be perceived by some people as “settling.” If I was not able to make it elsewhere, I could always settle on going to seminary. I didn’t want anyone to label me as having “settled” for second best. I was bright, intelligent, gifted in many areas, and I didn’t want anyone to look down on me. But the irony was, I feared, even if seminary and full-time ministry

were my first choice, people would still believe I had “settled.” I was truly conflicted.

There were other drawbacks of going into seminary too, which, whether true or false, gnawed at my mind: I felt I would be less eligible and less attractive to potential life mates (I knew of no girls who wanted to marry a potential pastor); and due to my parent’s many encounters with conflicts in church ministry, I absolutely detested church conflicts and was filled with dread and anxiety about them: Would I be able to manage the inevitable conflicts that would surely arise in ministry? Would I still love ministry if I had to do it for a living?

Hence, despite my love for God and my promise to be open and willing to serve Him in full-time ministry if He called, these were the nagging misgivings I had about seminary and ministry which I could not readily dismiss. So how did God gently transform me and guide me past my internal conflict and dilemma?

God placed wonderful people in my life to lead and guide me. From my childhood, this has consistently been God’s way to counsel me when I couldn’t figure out by myself what He wanted me to do. I can name them all, the mentors and spiritual friends who have come alongside to assure me of God’s faithful presence and to parse His calling to me into baby steps. Up until then, there had been Rev. Kingston, Mr. Adams, Mike Hack, Tana Clarke, and Bill Steele.

In Taiwan, God placed Bill Lee in my life as my mentor. He was a career missionary and ‘tent-maker’ in Taiwan. At that time, I thought what Bill did was so ‘cool’! He taught in a local university and led the Navigators parachurch

organization in Taiwan. Bill invited me to his home in Taiwan. He listened to me. He prayed with and for me. He encouraged me to spend more time with God. He assured me that in God's time, God would lead me to make the right decision. Bill's gentleness and grace gave me the sense that God would also be gentle and gracious with me; that God would not force me to do anything I didn't want to do, even if that thing was His will!

God also spoke to me through the missionaries whom I was helping in Taiwan. They all acknowledged that I had been a tremendous help and an asset to their church plant. Although they would have liked me to stay and continue to support their ministry, they also believed that if I was serious about serving God full-time, I should first attend seminary. I felt blessed by their affirming clarity concerning my ministry in Taiwan.

God spoke to me through two couples who visited me during my time in Taiwan. They were elders from my home church in Toronto. They shared about the shortage of and need for second generation pastors to serve the English-speaking members of the Chinese churches in Toronto. They told me I would make a fine English Ministry pastor. They prayed for my stay in Taiwan to be fruitful and that God would make things clear in my heart.

And finally, God also spoke to me through my parents. They had come to Taiwan to attend a global mission conference as well as to see how I was getting on. My dad also reiterated the great shortage of English Ministry pastors for the Chinese churches in Toronto. He pointed out that many young people from Asia,

especially from places like Hong Kong and Taiwan, were trying to immigrate to Canada to study and live. Churches in the West would need to be prepared to minister to them in English when they came. (I had studied Chinese for 6 months in Taiwan and had found it difficult. This was another reason why I knew I wasn't equipped to stay on in Taiwan.) He then added that if I had ever hoped to serve God full-time, in whatever capacity, a proper theological training would be essential. Both my mom and dad said that if I was short on money for tuition after my travels, they would be willing to loan me the money to return to school—whether Architectural school or seminary.

It then became quite clear what all the people around me, who cared deeply for me, were thinking and saying to me. Their unified counsel was for me to return to Toronto, to enroll in seminary, and to be open to becoming a full-time English Ministry pastor. However, what I desperately needed to be fully persuaded, and to put me 'over the top', was for me to hear clearly and directly from God Himself that this was His will for me: "return to Toronto and enroll in seminary." This was no longer just a hypothetical exercise. I was now determined that if and when God spoke to me, I would obey. Within a few days, God did speak to me clearly and directly, and it made all the difference in the world. God spoke to me in the elevator and by the pool!

The global mission conference that my parents were attending in Taipei was held at a large convention centre. While I did not personally attend the conference, I stayed at the hotel to be near my folks. This large venue had the

facilities to host multiple events at the same time and as it turned out, one wing of the hotel housed the global mission conference while the other wing hosted the Miss Universe pageant 1988! Since I wasn't attending any sessions of the mission conference, I was free to take in the sights and the extravaganza of the beauty pageant.

One morning, while I was in the hotel elevator, a whole group of dressed-up and glamorous Miss Universe contestants entered the elevator I was in! Up until then, I had only seen the contestants from afar. Suddenly, in the elevator, I was face to face and squished up against these contestants! All the beautiful models were so tall that they seemingly and literally towered head and shoulder above me! In that very instant, I heard and understood through that unexpected encounter in the elevator that God was speaking and saying to me, "Alan, the world is not for you!" I clearly understood that God was saying a personalized message to me alone: "Architectural school is the way of the world; it is not for you."

That same afternoon, I was lounging by the side of the swimming pool, trying to relax. But the Lord had so clearly spoken to me earlier in the elevator that I found myself deeply unsettled. I had my journal with me, but I couldn't even write in it. All I could do was close my eyes in prayer, and then these two profound questions circled round and round in my mind: "Lord, what can I do with my life that would please *You* most?" and, "Lord, what can I do with my life that would please *me* most?" After a silent pause, both questions were answered

with the same response: “Go to seminary and find out!” Hearing these words, though not audibly, but clearly and unmistakably in my heart was the thing that sealed it for me!

God had spoken to me a second time! I knew then what I had to do. I had return to Toronto and enroll in seminary. Lord, I will keep my promise to You and will serve You full-time in ministry because that is what You have called me to do! I had wanted to please Him and Him alone but in my heart I knew that choosing to go to seminary was also going to bring me great joy.

Before making the decision, I felt apprehensive, paralyzed with fear to take the risk, uncertain, stuck, and powerless to move forward. After hearing clearly from God in the elevator and by the side of the pool, combined with the weight of so much gentle and wise counsel from people who wanted only God’s best for me, I was invigorated and elated. I felt a powerful joy welling up from within me. I also felt a deep sense of peace and sureness. I didn’t care anymore about what anybody else thought about my going to seminary. All that mattered was “I was in the middle of God’s will.”

It didn’t matter that I didn’t yet know how I was going to settle my affairs in Taiwan—I was still engaged to teach several private classes—these would now have to be wrapped up somehow. I didn’t know which Toronto seminary I would apply to—I felt sure that it was already well past many of the schools’ application deadlines. And if it was too late to go to seminary in the fall, what would I do then? I didn’t know whether I had enough money to fly home or how much

tuition would be. I didn't know how things would work out living back home with my parents—I had lived on my own for some time now and the prospect of moving back home was something I still hadn't had any time to process through or consider.

But none of these things mattered at all at that moment because I knew God had called me and He would somehow work things out. I just needed to trust Him. I actually felt spiritually powerful having discerned God's calling for my life. That was exactly how I felt; nothing mattered to me more than following through on God's call.

As it turned out, everything did work out seamlessly. Another missionary had recently arrived from the Philippines and was willing to take over all of my private tutoring classes. I had just enough room on my credit card to book a flight home, but not before taking a few additional side trips to the Philippines, to Hong Kong and to China! When I got back from Taiwan to Toronto, it was well passed the application deadlines for both Knox College and Ontario Theological Seminary. But I applied anyway, and surprisingly and unsurprisingly, both schools agreed to waive their application deadlines for me! All I had to do was decide which seminary I wanted to attend and then to apply.

I decided on OTS because of its youth ministry major. My home church gave me a scholarship and a paying part-time youth worker position which enabled me to pay for my own tuition. And moving back and adjusting to my parent's home turned out not to be a problem at all. All of these signs confirmed

that what I had discerned in Taiwan was indeed from God. I couldn't have been happier. God had spoken directly to me and it was a deal breaker. As a result, I was in the middle of His will!

God never moves without purpose or plan
When trying His servant and molding a man
Give thanks to the Lord though your testing seems long
In darkness He giveth a song:

O rejoice in the Lord, He makes no mistakes
He knoweth the end of each path that I take
For when I am tried and purified
I shall come forth as gold!

I could not see through the shadows ahead
I looked to the cross of my Savior instead
I bowed to the will of the Master that day
Then peace came and tears fled away!

Now I can see testing comes from above
God strengthens His children and purges in love
My Father knows best and I trust in His care
Through purging more fruit I will bear!

(Words and Music by Ron Hamilton, 1978)

Another moving hymn I learned and sang from the CCCYWC.

Ordination

Then the King will say to those on his right, "*Come*, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world." (Matthew 25:34)

If Jesus had a favorite 'hang-out' spot, it might have been the Mount of Olives. Here Jesus had a panoramic view of the whole city of Jerusalem and also of the Temple. Here he could find shade and quiet hideaways to spend time alone with the Father and with His disciples. It was from the Mount of Olives that Jesus

began His triumphal entry into Jerusalem and later, it would be the place from which He would ascend back to heaven. This same Mount of Olives was also the ‘outdoor seminary’ where Jesus taught His disciples about His second coming and about the events of the end of the age. It was here Jesus prepared his disciples for their future ministry. It was here Jesus encouraged his disciples that in the future, there would be trials that lay ahead for each one of them who followed in His footsteps. Despite the challenging times ahead, Jesus also promised them that they would be blessed, that they would inherit the kingdom, and that they were the chosen ones God had set apart since the creation of the world!

No doubt the disciples must have felt special and privileged to hear Jesus say these things to them and about them. I know I certainly would have felt that way. When I entered seminary, this was the realization which permeated my whole being. Seminary was where I felt set apart, blessed, encouraged, and readied to do the ministry to which God had called me. To me, seminary didn’t feel like a school; it felt like an extended retreat!

On my year long trip in Asia, I had mainly just lived for myself. I did whatever I wanted to do. I did whatever seemed pleasing and good for me. Now, as I entered seminary, I felt I was beginning to live for God. My concerns were now all about how I might bear fruit for Him. I enjoyed working hard on my studies because through them, God was shaping and preparing me for His ministry.

That said, seminary studies were not easy for me; in many ways, the four years of the Master of Divinity program were a humbling experience. I discovered just how little I knew of the Bible, of theology, and of the basic rules of biblical interpretation and application. I struggled mightily to learn New Testament Greek. I was often stressed out about writing essays and had difficulty handing assignments in on time. I found my childhood faith was inadequate and filled with many inconsistencies. I experienced the pressures of trying to juggle and meet all the combined demands of school, of church, of my part-time job, and of home. I discovered early on that God's call and being in the middle of God's will didn't necessarily make everything easy and smooth. Yet, because I was absolutely convinced that this was exactly where God wanted me to be - to be formed, to be transformed, and to be re-formed for His glory and purpose, I persevered.

While the academic work was challenging, nevertheless there were also a whole host of blessings which greatly encouraged me: seminary often felt like an extended Christian conference or retreat; my professors knew me and their prayers for me truly expressed their genuine care for me. I was relieved that in seminary, it was relatively easy to make friends with my peers and some of these friends would become my life-long ministry colleagues. I had no trouble finding opportunities to apply what I was learning—frequently I was sharing and applying at church what I had just learned that same day in school.

I was also especially grateful for the Presbyterian professors who went out of their way to ensure that this Presbyterian student was settling in nicely at

seminary. In time, Dr. Renee, Dr. Vissers, and Dr. Sherbino would advise me to fulfill some of my course requirements at Knox College so that upon graduation, I might also become eligible for ministry within the Presbyterian Church in Canada. So, did I believe that God was looking out for me? Most definitely!

Discerning God's will for me to enter seminary also set me up to discern other things from God. I began to understand that discernment was a faith process: by faith, one open door leads to another; one obedient step builds upon another. While in seminary, I discerned that God was calling me to be part of the renewal of the Presbyterian Church in Canada; that God was calling me to be trained in youth ministry; and that I was to be involved in second generation ministry. Through my professors in seminary, I would receive more specific affirmations about my strengths, weaknesses, gifting, and suitability for particular ministry contexts. Given my own anxieties about conflict, I also made sure to focus more attention and effort to learn about managing church conflicts and how I might lead more effectively when they occur.

The process towards ordination for ministry was a long and rigorous one. Surprisingly, I wasn't the least bit worried about it. I figured that if it was indeed God's will for me to enter into full-time ministry, then God Himself would confirm me and open the necessary doors for me to be qualified through the process. I spent two years at OTS and two years at Knox College. Throughout my time in seminary, I was also serving as a part-time youth pastor at my home church. In addition to this part-time ministry position, Knox College required me

to gain a broader ministry experience because my previous church experiences were primarily in homogeneous, first and second generation Chinese congregations. As a result, I signed up for a summer of clinical pastoral education serving as a chaplain at Centenary Hospital. Following that, I also completed a full year field education placement at a multi-ethnic congregation which was not my home church. These varied experiences provided me with invaluable training and insights for effective ministry to the whole church.

Before I could qualify for ministry within the Presbyterian Church in Canada, I also had to go through Guidance Conference, a five-day affair where candidates for ministry were put through a battery of psychological tests and interviews to determine one's fitness and suitability for ministry. Praise God I went through all the tests and interviews and still felt positive after the gruelling experience!

Next, I had to be interviewed and certified for ordination by my own Session and Presbytery. Through all of the discernment process for ordination, I heard God say to me, "don't worry; you are my child; I have called you." After becoming certified for ordination, only then was I eligible to apply to ministry vacancies throughout Canada.

A year after I became eligible for ordination, St. Andrew's Church in Calgary contacted me and invited me to apply for their Associate Minister position. I sent them my profile and upon their request, a video tape of my preaching. I later found out that the video tape I sent them was defective, but

despite this glitch, the church still invited me to fly out to Calgary to meet them and to preach for the call. I went and was thrilled to learn soon after that St. Andrew's Church had voted to call me as their Associate Minister! I felt St. Andrew's Calgary was a good place for me to begin my ministry because I would be serving with and under a veteran senior minister. Also, it made me happy just to think that my first charge would also be at a St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, like my father's first charge!

I was duly ordained to the ministry of Word and Sacrament by the Presbytery of Oak Ridges, in my home congregation in Markham, in February of 1993. I remember being on my knees as over a dozen ministers and elders laid their hands on me. The weight of their approval and affirmation was so heavy on me, but I felt an amazing warmth and joy. In the worship service, everything went smoothly, including the ordination vows and my officiating holy communion for the first time. All was going well until right at the end when I nearly lost all the words of the Benediction!

In attendance to witness my ordination were my parents, my brothers, my friends, several of my seminary professors, my field education supervisor, members of Session and ministry colleagues from Presbytery, and the youth from my home church. It seemed that God had brought in all the people whom He had utilized to equip and build me up into God's servant. I was presented with a preaching robe and a preaching stole as gifts to remind me of the vows I had taken. Words could not describe how humbled and grateful I was that night. Truly, I

have been blessed and set apart for God's service. A few weeks later, I flew out west to Calgary to begin my full-time ministry as Rev. Alan Goh. *Praise God from whom all blessings flow!*

I, the Lord of sea and sky,
I have heard My people cry.
All who dwell in dark and sin,
My hand will save.
I who made the stars of night,
I will make their darkness bright.
Who will bear My light to them?
Whom shall I send?

Here I am Lord, Is it I, Lord?
I have heard You calling in the night.
I will go Lord, if You lead me.
I will hold Your people in my heart.

I, the Lord of snow and rain,
I have borne my people's pain.
I have wept for love of them, They turn away.
I will break their hearts of stone,
Give them hearts for love alone.
I will speak My word to them
Whom shall I send?

I, the Lord of wind and flame
I will tend the poor and lame.
I will set a feast for them,
My hand will save
Finest bread I will provide,
Till their hearts be satisfied.
I will give My life to them,
Whom shall I send?

(Words and Music by Daniel Shutte, 1981)

This was the anthem presented and sung at my Ordination Service.

Marriage

Then Peter spoke up, "We have left everything to follow you!"

“Truly I tell you,” Jesus replied, “no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age: homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields—along with persecutions—and in the age to come eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last first.” (Mark 10:29-30)

One of the initial reasons why I was so reluctant to enter into full-time ministry after graduating from university was because I hadn't yet found someone with whom I could share my life. At that point in my life, I sincerely longed for a life partner. It wouldn't have minded having to leave home or brothers or sisters or mother or father in order to follow Jesus. But what I did fear was my becoming less eligible and less attractive to potential mates! At that time in my life, I knew of no girls who wanted to marry a pastor!

Like the disciple Peter, I had this mistaken idea that going into full-time ministry would require and involve making a great personal sacrifice. In particular, I wasn't yet ready to give up on my desire to find a woman to love and to marry. Little did I understand at that time that Jesus' invitation to me to follow and serve Him was also His way of opening up a channel to bless me a hundred fold! This was a spiritual life principle that I was about to discover and experience.

The way the Lord brought my wife Shirley into my life was and still is an undeniable story of grace and blessing. In 1988, I had decided to return to Toronto from Taiwan and to enroll in seminary. After spending a year away from home, my flight from Asia arrived at Pearson International Airport and I was met by my parents, my brother Jeff, and a girl I had never before met, Shirley. She was a work acquaintance of my mother. My mother had taken such a liking to her much

younger colleague that she decided to introduce her to her own son! Later, I learned that my parents had initially invited Shirley to have dinner with them but had conveniently failed to mention to her a planned detour to the airport before dinner. As evidence of our awkward first meeting, I have a photograph of my family with Shirley, trying not to look bewildered or upset, holding a “Welcome Home Alan!” banner.

My mother had chosen well. Shirley was a devout Christian, attractive, charming, well-spoken, and who knew instinctively how to please my parents. There was also a delightful mystery about her on account of her being Korean and not Chinese. To my knowledge, my parents had never ever before arranged for me to meet someone, let alone picked a non-Chinese girl. It was both amusing and surreal when I found myself strangely drawn to this girl whom I had just met. You will recall in an earlier chapter, I had made a mental note to myself that one day I would like to marry someone who shared my passion for the Lord and for missions. Well, a month after we met, Shirley embarked on a mission trip to South Korea joining an organization that aimed to share the gospel with those at the 1988 Seoul Olympics.

In the ensuing months that Shirley was away in South Korea, we corresponded often and got to know each other better as friends. Upon her return to Toronto, I promptly asked her out and she tentatively accepted my proposal to date. It was amazing that Shirley even said ‘yes’ to my painfully awkward proposal, “I’m a serious seminary student. I don’t play games. Would you please

go out with me?” The following months were pure bliss from my perspective. I was already feeling elated with my first year seminary experience. Being head over heels in love with Shirley made that an even more remarkable period of my life. I remember being constantly in awe and in thanksgiving to God because even then, there was no doubt in my mind that Shirley was the one, the woman I was going to marry.

Not quite a year after we began dating, on Valentine’s Day, Shirley broke the devastating news to me that she could no longer continue in our relationship. She had increasingly felt the pressure of our serious and rapidly progressing relationship and the truth was, she was not ready at all to marry someone, let alone someone who was going to be a pastor and which meant that she was also entering into the ministry via our relationship. Naturally, this revelation came as a huge shock and blow to me. It soon became clear after our long talk that I could not persuade Shirley to change her mind nor was it wise for me to try to do so. If this relationship was of God and from God, Shirley would have to come to an understanding of her own calling independent of me. I reluctantly and humbly accepted Shirley’s decision to break-up, but vowed secretly in my heart that I would not stop praying until God had changed her mind.

Off and on in the many months that followed our separation, I tried to keep tabs on Shirley without actually contacting her as I had promised. You would think that because the Canadian Asian community in the GTA was not that big, sooner or later we would run into one another. However, the Chinese

Canadian and the Korean Canadian church circles rarely intersect. Each had their own second generation ministries, church events and activities. At times, I would catch tidbits of news about Shirley's involvement or whereabouts, but there was nothing about her having changed her mind regarding me. And the reality was at that time, I had stepped up to another level of busyness in my life. I was swamped with responsibilities at school, church, and at my field education placements. Although I had not entirely given up on Shirley, it meant that any grieving I had to do, I had to do it while on the run.

I distinctly remember the day I received a letter from Shirley informing me that she was finally set to be engaged to another fellow and she was releasing me from my waiting for her to return to me. If my heart wasn't quite broken by then, this news definitely broke it for good. In sadness and disappointment, I committed Shirley and my broken heart into God's keeping. I prayed for the both of us. Then I resorted to pouring myself even more fervently into completing my studies and training for the ministry.

Now, nearly three years had passed from when we had ended our relationship. I had already graduated from seminary and was on the cusp of leaving Toronto after accepting a call to be an associate minister in Calgary. Out of the blue one day, I received a phone call from Shirley's brother to have lunch together. Surprised, but curious at the same time, I accepted the invitation and went out to lunch with Shirley's older brother. We ate and small-talked all through the meal. But right before leaving, Shirley's brother came right out and

asked me whether I was still interested in her sister Shirley. And if I was, I was to give his sister a call. And with that cryptic message, we parted.

As I was going to be leaving for Calgary soon, I decided that I would give Shirley a call. It would at least give me a chance to say ‘good-bye’ before leaving town. We spoke briefly on the phone and agreed to have lunch together. At lunch the next day, Shirley made this unforgettable and startling statement to me:

“Three years ago, I was not ready to be your girlfriend. Today, I am ready to be your wife!” Those words did and still send shivers of unbelievable joy and happiness right down to my core. God had come through for me and for us after all!

Within a few weeks of our being reunited, Shirley and I were engaged. I was ordained and had moved out west to begin my first ministry charge. Shirley, who was already in her final year and semester at university, also moved out to Calgary a few months later so we could be together. We were officially married that fall, celebrating two wedding ceremonies, one in Toronto and another in Calgary. Truly, I felt like God was intentionally underscoring this truth to me that He will indeed go out of His way to bless His servants, even a hundredfold.

The hundredfold blessings of God continued to be showered upon me and upon us after our wedding. Shirley and I still enjoy a remarkable love relationship, one that has grown in twenty-five years of being together. Sure, there have been difficult times, but the marriage vows taken before God have kept us together, “for better, for worse, in sickness and in health, till death do us part.” After six

years of marriage, God blessed us with two wonderful boys. It has been our delight and greatest blessing to see our two sons mature and come into their own relationship with Jesus.

God's blessings have included using our marriage relationship and our parenting responsibilities as tools for our own transformation. Shirley and I believe we are different people now after twenty-five years of marriage and parenting; we are more mature and humbler in our understanding of what it takes to follow Jesus faithfully. We still believe it is by God's grace that we are still faithfully married, still lovingly parenting, and still engaged in the ministry.

God's blessings have included growing our relationships with our siblings, and growing our understanding and appreciation for our aging parents. Our family relationships are no different than other families in that they also come with their share of misunderstandings and brokenness. These challenges invariably humble us and bring us to a deeper awareness of our constant need for God's continuing mercy and grace.

God's blessings have included more material blessings than we have ever hoped for or imagined, especially living within the limits of ministry incomes. Yet God has always provided us with our own residence, the comforts of living with everything we need, vehicles, travel opportunities, family vacations, continuing education opportunities, health and health care insurance, retirement savings, and blessings too many to mention.

God's blessings have included the opportunity for me to be enrolled in the Doctor of Ministry program, one that can be completed whilst engaged in full-time ministry. It was my wife who strongly encouraged me to consider upgrading myself through this program. It had been twenty-five years since I last was at seminary for my Master of Divinity studies. And it was my wife's loving insistence that finally gave me the impetus to enroll and do the work of completing this program. Like the hundredfold blessings of the Lord, the personal and spiritual benefits of listening to my wife have also been hundredfold!

Great is Thy faithfulness, O God my Father;
There is no shadow of turning with Thee,
Thou changest not, Thy compassions they fail not,
As Thou hast been, Thou forever wilt be.

Great is Thy faithfulness! Great is Thy faithfulness!
Morning by morning new mercies I see
All I have needed Thy hand hath provided
Great is Thy faithfulness, Lord unto me!

Summer and winter and springtime and harvest,
Sun, moon, and stars in their courses above;
Join with all nature in manifold witness,
To Thy great faithfulness, mercy, and love.

Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth,
Thine own dear presence to cheer and to guide;
Strength for today, and bright hope for tomorrow
Blessings all mine, with ten thousand beside.

(Words by Thomas O. Chisholm 1923; Music by William Runyan 1923)

Shirley and I selected this hymn of worship for our wedding.

Ministry

[To the servant who had been given two bags of gold] "His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few

things; I will put you in charge of many things. *Come* and share your master's happiness!' (Matthew 25:23)

The most fascinating detail of Jesus' Parable of the Talents in my estimation is that the master entrusted huge bags of gold into the care of his servants. Any Bible dictionary can confirm that an ancient 'talent' was equivalent to 3,000 shekels, which was anywhere between 82 to 94 pounds. Imagine being given 100 pounds of precious metal! Even to the least capable of his servants, the master entrusted more gold than his employee could possibly carry. This showed the master's amazing generosity and grace. In addition, the master was most wise to delegate assignments of varying difficulty and responsibility according to the abilities of each servant. Lastly, the master left each servant with all the freedom and time they needed to work at their own pace for a 'long time' so that each one could demonstrate what they truly intended to do with the wealth to which they had been entrusted.

I believe that I work for this kind of master! Imagining myself as one of the servants in the parable, I have determined that I am not the 'five talent' servant or the 'one talent' servant. I am very content to be the 'two talent' servant living my whole life just taking care of a 'few things' that the Lord has entrusted to me. I want to work to the best of my abilities in such a way that I will hear from the master at the end of my life these words of commendation, "Well done, good and faithful servant, come and share in my happiness!"

Reflecting back over my years of ministry, I have found that God has used all of my natural interests, skills and gifts. Nothing has been wasted.

Remembering my interest in architecture, God has given me opportunities to be involved in the design and construction of three church buildings! God has used my varied employment history, my travels, and living in many places in many parts of the world to help me be able to strike up a conversation with just about anybody. This ability to have friendly conversations has been very helpful and instrumental, and has led to deepened relationships with people from all walks of life. All I have had to do is wait and look for divine opportunities to point them towards Jesus.

Similarly, my experiences in playing a number of team sports, the ability to play the guitar and sing have also been used by God to help me connect with the youth. God has also used my personal brushes with sexual abuse, of being bullied, and of being the immigrant outsider to help me become more sensitive and compassionate towards people who may be struggling in similar situations.

Even in the area of my fears, for example, my fear of conflicts, God has been able to redeem this fear and lead me to build ministry teams and adopt working styles that are much more collaborative and consensus-based. Then when conflicts have arisen, I have generally had the backing of many other leaders to deal gently and pastorally with each opposing voice.

Truly, I am convinced that every aspect of my life, from my past experiences to my personality, has been redeemed by God because “in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.” (Romans 8:28)

Since my ordination in 1993, I have continuously been in full-time ministry and am now in my fourth charge. In terms of length of ministry, each term of the first three churches in which I have served has increased in longevity by increments of three years: St. Andrew's Presbyterian in Calgary – 3 years; Toronto Korean Presbyterian – 6 years; Markham Chinese Presbyterian – 9 years; and since 2010, I've been the lead pastor of Celebration Presbyterian Church. My prayer and hope is that Celebration Church will be the last congregation that I will serve until my retirement.

In contrast, in terms of size of congregation, the trend is decidedly reversed. Each church that I have subsequently been called to serve has had fewer members: St. Andrew's – 1,200 members; TKPC – 800 members; MCPC – 400 members; and Celebration Church – only 120 members. However, in terms of impact in ministry, I believe I have been the most effective and fruitful while at Celebration Church.

I believe I have been called to be a part of the renewal within the Presbyterian Church in Canada. I believe my role in this renewal process is to build up a second and third generation, multi-ethnic, intergenerational church with an on-going vision to pass on our faith in Jesus to the next generation.

This vision is about releasing the next generation to lead and to establish their own church; it is about empowering the next generation to own their faith and to reproduce from their faith through their own trial and error; it is about discipling the next generation and ensuring that they have the knowledge and

means for spiritual formation and transformation; ultimately, I want to be there to help and support the generation of my own children when they lead their own church. I believe that my current congregation, Celebration Church, is on track to fulfilling this vision.

This vision is what motivates me to continue striving and working diligently daily in full-time ministry. This is what brings me meaning, satisfaction and joy. From the very beginning, perhaps even since the creation of the world, this vision is what I believe God has entrusted into my care, and He has called me and prepared me to see that it is fulfilled. Although I know I am unworthy to carry out this wonderful vision, nevertheless, this is Jesus' gracious invitation to me.

Come, follow me! To God be all praise, honor and glory!

The splendor of the King, clothed in majesty
Let all the earth rejoice
All the earth rejoice
He wraps himself in Light, and darkness tries to hide
And trembles at His voice
Trembles at His voice

How great is our God, sing with me
How great is our God, and all will see
How great, how great is our God

Age to age He stands
And time is in His hands
Beginning and the end
Beginning and the end

The Godhead Three in One
Father Spirit Son
The Lion and the Lamb
The Lion and the Lamb

Name above all names
Worthy of our praise
My heart will sing
How great is our God

How great is our God, sing with me
How great is our God, and all will see
How great, how great is our God

(Words and music by Ed Cash, Jesse Reeves, and Chris Tomlin, 2012)

This has been a worship favorite of Celebration Church

Postscript

The Easter celebrations at Celebration Church confirmed once again this powerful realization which Jesus has been revealing to me all along during the writing of this spiritual autobiography. “God has called me to this!” I concur with all my being, that I have found my true calling and I am living it right here and now! The truth that was whispered to me in the dark while I slept can now be shouted from the mountain tops in broad daylight. And by means of this spiritual autobiography, essentially, I am doing all the shouting through these pages!

There is no doubt about it. I have been transformed by the Holy Spirit through the discipline of writing. I feel as though I am living a more examined life; there are no more skeletons in my closet that I know of; I have glimpsed my life from God’s perspective. I am now clearer than I have ever been about my calling to full-time ministry and the vision God has entrusted into my care. I know now what I need to do to fulfill that vision. I know my role, my responsibility, and the perseverance which will be required to see it through. This quiet certainty

coupled with inner confidence is the first obvious outcome of writing my spiritual autobiography.

Initially, I was not convinced that writing down these memories would lead to any discovery about God's gracious activity in my life. Now I am! For example, I never understood the odd way in which my father always told the story of my inconsolable crying at birth; I never recognized my unhealthy need to please; I never saw my parents' insistence for me to leave Winnipeg as a timely, divine way out; and I never realized that my travels to Asia were simply my running away from God's call to me to enter full-time ministry. These are just a few of the startling revelations I have personally gained which have now become part of my personal testimony. Only now can I begin to thank God retroactively for all those times when He has been so gracious and faithful even when I have been unaware of Him. Only now can I begin to advocate for this spiritual discipline of writing a spiritual autobiography as a truly effective means for spiritual formation and transformation.

I must confess that while I am pleased (and relieved) that this writing assignment is completed, I did struggle tremendously during the process of writing it. I have always struggled with the writing process, that is, the literary component of any writing assignment. I think I have yet to release my childhood fear of using English and expressing myself in my second language. But more than this, I struggle because writing in itself is so self-revealing. In the autobiography, I wanted to share myself and my vulnerabilities with the reader,

but I also desperately wanted to present or couch myself using only the best written skill and form that I could muster. Needless to say, I was often paralyzed and afraid to even put pen to paper.

For this assignment, I found the use of scriptures and relying on a theme to be the most helpful literary devices. When I was stuck, which was often, the Bible verses and the theme “Come, follow me” helped turn me from gazing at myself to focusing and gazing instead upon Jesus. These gracious invitations of Jesus in Scripture were ‘life-savers’ literally and literarily speaking! The Holy Spirit transformed these literary devices into guide posts for my life and in the process, transformed me as well. The songs which close each chapter in the autobiography were simply the unbridled expressions of worship emerging from the insights given by Jesus in writing that particular chapter. I am truly amazed by the emergence of these specific scriptures, this theme, and these uniquely fitting songs and how they all meshed together to tell my story.

This spiritual autobiography as it stands forms the base on which and to which future chapters can and should be added. I have limited my present scope primarily as it related to my calling into full-time ministry. But there remains many chapters of God’s activity in my marriage, in parenting, in encountering other adventures, and in experiencing both suffering and failures which still need to be written and examined. So this is by no means the final postscript.

I now understand why John ended his gospel with “Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the

whole world would not have room for the books that would be written.” (John 21:25) And why despite the impossibility of reporting everything, John still tried to leave behind a written testimony. He wrote because God called him to write. And he wrote because “these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.” (John 20:31) I too hope that God may also lead the readers of my story to a deeper faith in Him.

Probably the greatest blessing from writing this spiritual autobiography, that is, besides the transformative work of God in my life, is the opportunity forthwith to share my story with my wife, my two teenaged sons, my close friends, and the members of Celebration Church. I want my wife to know me better through all that I have been unable to share with her thus far in our marriage; I wish for my sons to learn the lessons from my teen years; I hope sharing this spiritual autobiography with friends will deepen my friendships with them; and I long for my present congregation to know the special place they occupy in my faith journey. And if God uses my story as a tool for helping them understand their own spiritual formation and transformation, then my hope would have been realized.

I am grateful to God for my life. I thank Jesus for His gracious invitations through scripture and in these significant moments of my life. I acknowledge the directing of the Holy Spirit who has steered me thus far and the way in which He

has helped me to respond in these divine moments. I shall continue to follow the Lord, wherever and however He shall lead.

SECTION II:
CHANGE MY HEART O GOD:
A MANUAL FOR TEACHING A BIBLICAL
MODEL OF SPIRITUAL FORMATION

Change My Heart, O God is an introductory course on spiritual formation. It seeks to provide believers with the basic biblical teaching and explanation on how people are changed into Christ's likeness. This teaching may be informative for those considering Christianity but it is primarily designed for those believers desiring to cooperate more fully with God in their spiritual transformation.

At the heart of this course is the conviction that at present, seekers and believers are not provided (or are not consistently provided) with all the essential information on what their saying 'yes' to Jesus means. Those who accept and believe in Jesus need to know that they are saying 'yes' to a lifetime of making intentional changes in their own lives, as well as saying 'yes' to letting God make changes in their lives after conversion. People also need to understand the process of how these life changes occur. The spiritual formation process includes making changes through human effort and through God's sovereign activity. This course will provide a working definition and framework of the spiritual formation

process. Moreover, it will guide each course participant to discern where they are in the process and to help them discern what is to be their next step in that process.

Churches that are intent on making spiritual formation instruction a priority in their ministry must necessarily commit to accomplishing the following three tasks: first, the gospel must be presented wholly and must spell out clearly that God desires to change us from sinful beings to new beings and that spiritual life changes are expected after one becomes a Christian; second, believers must be taught Jesus' verbal teachings as well as how Jesus lived; and third, believers must be taught about the spiritual formation process. This course accomplishes all of these three objectives.

It must be clearly stated and emphasized here at the outset that the above spiritual formation curricula only sets out the basic teaching requirements of the spiritual formation program of a church. While I believe the basic course is essential, the classroom instruction comprises only a small segment of what is a life long process of being formed and transformed into Christ's likeness. The life long process must necessarily include but is not limited to the following: the life long guidance and intervention of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer, the accountability of other believers, spiritual coaching and mentoring, the support and encouragement of the whole faith community, and much extended time and opportunity in the learning, adopting and practice of the spiritual disciplines.

Although this course was originally written with a Canadian-Asian, evangelical congregation in mind, in large part because that is the context that I

know and am in presently, the content should also be relevant and applicable to the wider Church. The Canadian-Asian evangelical congregations that I have served have not had the spiritual formation instruction that I have described. The intent is to encourage everyone in the congregation, regardless of faith experience or level, to go through the course. Similar to a new believer's orientation course, all believers should know, understand and practice the basics of spiritual formation.

In the original ministry context, this basic instructional material was designed to be covered in a six-week, 1.5 hours per session mid-week program. Alternatively, it could also be completed in a three-day weekend retreat featuring those original six sessions. Each session will consist of a 30-minute presentation followed by an hour-long break-out table discussion and prayer group of 4 to 5 participants per group. An accompanying participant's workbook (still to be developed) provides all the necessary worksheets and discussion questions. Upon completion of the course, participants are encouraged to put into practice what they have learnt and to assist one another to remain engaged in a life long transformation process. One way to do this is to invite participants to join accountability small groups that continue to meet monthly which will provide ongoing support and encouragement in the spiritual maturing process. Graduates of the course, aided by a leader's teaching manual, may be invited to teach the various sessions when the course is to be repeated. Given that the Lord Jesus spent the better part of three to three and a half years discipling the Twelve, it

should be clear that this basic course in spiritual formation does not and cannot be viewed as all that is required for disciple making. Clearly, gaining more information, even spiritual formation instruction, does not equate to transformation. This course only strives to provide an overview, but a much needed comprehensive view, of the spiritual formation partnership and process. The following paper is essentially the contents of the course leader's teaching manual.

Introduction Part 1: Why Am I So Slow to Change?

Not too long ago, I was in the car with my wife and another couple on our way to a restaurant. We had plans to dine out and to celebrate our friend's birthday. It was a Sunday evening and the city traffic was noticeably lighter as I ventured onto the highway. I had barely been on the highway when suddenly a vehicle came right up to my bumper and began to tailgate me. I checked my speedometer and noted that I was already travelling 10 kilometers per hour above the posted speed limit. Nevertheless, the vehicle behind us seemed to want me to go faster or to move out of the way. As I didn't wish to go any faster, I could have easily moved into the right-hand lane and just let the vehicle pass us by. But somehow, I didn't. Instead, I maintained the same speed and in effect said, "Hey buddy, if you're in such a hurry, you're gonna have to go around me!" When the driver behind realized I wasn't going to move over, he inched even closer and flashed his high beams. At that point, I intentionally slowed down my speed, causing the driver behind me to have to slam on his brakes. We continued driving

in this dangerous fashion for several kilometres! I was stubbornly unyielding of my lane while the other driver was equally determined to continue tailgating me. Thankfully, shortly after, we had to exit the highway and thus ended my shameful driving behavior without any further incident.

I reflected on my reckless driving the next morning during my devotional time. These questions were at the fore of my self-confronting thoughts: Why did I behave in such a shameful way? And was it shameful to me only because there were others to witness my behavior? If I was alone, would I still be as concerned about my selfish and childish conduct? How long would I have continued to blame the entire incident on the juvenile conduct of the other driver without acknowledging my own contributing error? How was it that I wasn't able to control my anger, stubbornness, and arrogance? Why wasn't my faith or any of the fruits of the Spirit manifested at all during my episode of foolishness? Was I truly surprised when my sin raised its 'ugly head'? Then at that very moment, I was pricked by my conscience and overwhelmed by God's Spirit. I acknowledged my own shameful sin and confessed to God as David did:

When I kept silent [about my sin],
my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long.
For day and night your hand was heavy on me;
my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer.
Then I acknowledged my sin to you
and did not cover up my iniquity.
I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord."

And you forgave the guilt of my sin. (Psalm 32:3-5)

I wonder often how little my sinful nature has changed over the many years since I have become a Christian. By my own admission, there have been significant transformations in many areas of my character, values, priorities, and motivations since becoming a Christian. However, there remains so much of who I am that is still largely a work in progress.

Why am I so slow to change? When will I truly become more like Jesus? How will this change occur and is there anything I can actually do to speed up the process? How does God actually transform me to be more like Jesus? I struggle with these questions and I believe many other Christians also are similarly perplexed by the elusive nature of lasting spiritual change. Even those who have believed in the gospel for many years and who have made serious commitments to follow Jesus, find it hard to change. No doubt we have all experienced what Paul described about his tendency to sin:

I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. What a wretched man I am! (Romans 7:15, 18-19, 24)

The spiritual formation model presented in this manual and course seeks to answer these questions asked by well-intentioned believers who have, so often in frustration and dismay, wrestled with their own resistance to becoming more like Jesus and who are still searching for sound biblical answers that will help them to stay the course. This spiritual formation model is for believers who wish not only to discover the spiritual formation process but to surrender themselves

fully to the process. Instead of resisting God's changing work in them, they wish to cooperate wholeheartedly with God to bring about the necessary changes in their lives to become more like Jesus. After all, the ultimate goal of the Christian journey is "to be like Jesus." (Mulholland 2006, 12) Ephesians 4:11-13 is a central text teaching that our goal is to becoming fully like Jesus. For this purpose, Christ gave to the church and equipped His people "so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ."

Therefore, *spiritual formation is a God and human partnership and process by which believers are transformed into Christ's likeness.* This definition of spiritual formation was inspired by Evan Howard's definition presented in his "Spiritual Formation" lectures: "A Spirit and human led process by which individuals and communities are changed into likeness to and depth of relationship with the person, the life and gospel of the Christian God." (Howard 2015) The definition used in this course is shortened and simplified to make it easier for course participants to memorize and adopt as their own working definition. The aspect of 'community' which is featured explicitly in Howard's definition is implied in my definition in "believers." The role, place, and importance of community is further expanded in the Reformation chapter of the spiritual formation course. Moreover, the mention of God in the definition is meant to represent the Trinitarian God of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. I will

elaborate on the significant involvement and responsibility of the Holy Spirit in shaping and transforming believers in the Reformation chapter of the spiritual formation course.

This manual and course will unpack the above definition of spiritual formation and will help every believer who desires to change to experience lasting change and to understand how that change can come about. My prayer for myself and others is that through this study, the earnest plea expressed in this song by Eddie Espinosa will be answered:

Change my heart Oh God, make it ever true.
Change my heart Oh God, may I be like You.

You are the potter, I am the clay,
Mold me and make me, this is what I pray.

Change my heart Oh God, make it ever true.
Change my heart Oh God, may I be like You.

(Words and Music by Eddie Espinoza, 1982)

This spiritual formation course is written for the benefit of all who seek to be transformed into Christ's likeness. For those who wish to know, the author is a Canadian-Asian, evangelical pastor, theologically trained in Canada in the evangelical tradition and presently serving in a conservative, multi-cultural, inter-denominational, mainline reformed church in Toronto, Canada. The goal of this course is to provide believers with the necessary biblical foundation and guidance to help them grow and thrive in their Christian faith.

Reflection and Discussion Questions

1. Are you often surprised at how little your sinful nature has changed since becoming a Christian?
2. How have you gone about trying to become more like Jesus?

Introduction Part 2: What Did You Sign Up for When You Become a Christian?

Do you remember the time and the place when you first said ‘yes’ to Jesus? Whatever the circumstance or age, whether it was at your baptism or at some midnight hour, when you first became Christians, you said ‘yes’ to desiring some kind of spiritual change to take place in your life.

For believers who had signed up for the offer of salvation through faith in Jesus, you believed that you would receive eternal life with God after your life on earth is done. This is the central message of John 3:16, “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.” You have in this gospel verse an outline of the basic requirements of being a believer: 1) you believe that you are a sinner bound for eternal life without God; 2) you believe Jesus came to rescue you from the consequence of sin and to pay the penalty for your sin; and 3) you believe accepting Jesus as your Lord and Savior to be the first step in receiving God’s salvation. At the very minimum, you would have understood that sin was undesirable and that you needed to change your sinful behavior after becoming a believer.

For believers who had signed up to become a follower of Jesus, you believed that being a Christian meant doing what Jesus did. Mark 1:16-17 described the occasion when Simon and Andrew were being presented with Jesus' offer of discipleship: "As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will send you out to fish for people." At the very minimum, by saying 'yes' to Jesus, Simon and Andrew must have understood that following Jesus meant changing their life activity, from fishing for themselves to fishing for people for Jesus' sake.

Whether you had signed up to be a believer or follower of Jesus, or embraced both terms as synonymous and interchangeable, at the very least, you would have understood that by doing so you had agreed to change some aspects of your life. However, and strangely enough, in most cases, you were simply not told *how* to change nor were you told *how long* it would be before these changes would become a part of your life. In my own case, I had struggled with sin and temptation throughout my whole Christian life without being taught how to change to become like Jesus. As Terry Wardle has stated, "The teaching that a new believer receives should include clear instructions regarding the place of difficulty, doubt, and trial in forming a person in Christ Jesus." (Wardle 2003, 11) However, this instruction which should have been taught was simply not provided. This certainly was the case in my own conversion experience. I did not find out

about how to make spiritual changes in my life until much later, and then it was only in bits and pieces of information.

This course contends that it would have been much more helpful and more transparent had we been told at the outset that our conversion requires spiritual change. Furthermore, the requirement for such change would only be possible through a life-long commitment to a God and human partnership and process by which we would be transformed into Christ's likeness.

Understandably, the occasion of a person's conversion, which oftentimes is an overwhelming spiritual and emotional experience in and of itself, may not be the most opportune time to provide a thorough discussion on the process of spiritual formation. Nevertheless, there ought to have been or should have been an appropriate juncture, either before or shortly after conversion, when this spiritual information should have been communicated to the seeker or new believer.

It is my position that the church, of whom I include the evangelists, those who disciple new believers, pastors and teachers alike, must take on the responsibility to instill and equip each believer with the facts about spiritual formation. While primarily intended for believers, in some circumstances, spiritual formation facts may also be shared with seekers and may prevent them from making premature decisions to come to Jesus.

As it pertains to spiritual formation instruction, the following should be communicated to the new disciple: 1) the process of changing to become like Jesus will be a life-long process; 2) the biblical principles of spiritual formation

partnership and process are biblical lessons which every believer must learn; and 3) the spiritual formation process will transform each believer into becoming more and more like Jesus provided that we faithfully do our part in the partnership while trusting in God to also fulfil His part in the process.

The decision to believe in and to follow Jesus is the single most wonderful and significant decision anyone can make in their lifetime. The good news of the gospel offers each person an incredible and incomparable gift of life through Jesus Christ. The gospel presentation must also convey the equally vital message that though our salvation is a free gift of God, nevertheless it was neither free nor cheap as the hefty price was borne entirely by Jesus. Ideally, when that message of the costly free gift of God is presented to the hearer, that occasion would and could have been the perfect opportunity to also present the essential information about the necessity of a new believer's post-conversion life changes.

Paul's teaching in Ephesians illustrates the kind of gospel presentation where both the gospel message and the need for post conversion life changes are simultaneously communicated to the new believer:

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. (Ephesians 2:8-10)

Here we are told that our salvation is definitely the unconditional gift of God. Yet in the very next breath, Paul promptly clarified that we are saved for some greater purpose other than to continue living our lives post-conversion as if nothing had happened. Our new life in Christ indeed has a new purpose: we have

been newly and spiritually re-created to accomplish God's good works. No one would accuse Paul of placing conditions onto our signing up for salvation. He had made it abundantly clear that salvation was a free gift from God. Yet at the same time, the apostle did also made it abundantly clear that in saying 'yes' to Jesus, we have also said 'yes' to making changes in our lives. It just makes sense, logically and logistically, that we would have to make changes in our lives if we are responsibly going to take on doing the good works which God had prepared in advanced for us to do. Those believers who assume that spiritual life changes will miraculously happen without any effort on their part are precisely those who would benefit from spiritual formation instruction.

But the good news of the graciousness of God is that even before we made the decision to believe in or to follow Jesus, Ephesians 2:10 stated that God already had 'us' on His mind. Not only had God thought about us, but He had also 'prepared in advance' all that we would need to come to faith in Jesus and to be transformed into Jesus' likeness. Ultimately, our salvation in Christ is much more about what God has already accomplished for us in Christ than it is ever about our faith in Him or about any life changes we might be willing to make for Jesus' sake after our conversion. Even with regard to these changes, the Bible left no doubt that it was God who had and continues to empower and enable us to persevere in making them: We can be confident of this, "that He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus." (Philippians 1:6)

So what did you sign up for when you became a Christian? I hope you will agree that when we said yes to following Jesus and being in a relationship with Him, our ‘yes’ to Jesus not only gave us God’s unconditional gift of eternal life but also set us onto the path of the great adventure to discover all the things God had prepared in advance for us to see and do. If we wish to be faithful to Him on this journey, we need to make changes in our lives so as to make room to accommodate all He had planned for us.

Remember, we need not be anxious about our ability or inability to make these life changes because God Himself will bring to completion the spiritual formation that He began in us. What we should do is to be at peace and to be filled with gratitude and praise because we are assured our spiritual formation is a God and human partnership and process by which we will eventually be transformed into Christ’s likeness.

Reflection and Discussion Questions

1. What did you sign up for when you became a Christian?
2. What information was most helpful or would have been helpful to you as you began your new life in Christ?

How and Why Did Spiritual Formation Become Neglected?

Before we proceed to a step by step unpacking of the definition of spiritual formation, it would be constructive for us to ask the question, “How and why did spiritual formation become neglected in the first place?” We have already noted

that the message requiring one's need to change following his or her becoming a Christian is inherent and implicit in the Scriptures. In my own experience, and perhaps this is the experience of other believers, I was simply not told how to change, nor was I told how long it would be before these changes would become a part of my life. Also, I did not hear that I would continue to struggle immensely with sin and temptation throughout my life. At best, the information I received regarding spiritual formation was incomplete, and at worst, compromised. So, why was this vital information overlooked or neglected in the first place?

The first explanation may well be that believers were told that life change was a necessary component after their conversion but that the message simply went unheeded or was ignored. Just as Jesus' teaching about the costs of discipleship so often went unheeded, so too perhaps the word about the necessity to make life changes post-conversion was ignored.

Second, the message of spiritual formation may well have been communicated but the follow-through and obedience may have been poor or lacking. Understandably, we acknowledge it is far easier to say you are a Christian than to live as one. This is illustrated when Jesus challenged his would-be disciples:

Then he said to them all: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it. What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit their very self?" (Luke 9:23-25)

Who among us believers have not heard these words from Jesus yet how many of us can truly say we have consistently fulfilled them? By far, it is easier

for believers to acquire the information on making life change than it is to be genuinely committed to being spiritual formed.

Third, the responsibility for failing to communicate, teach and implement strategies to bring about spiritual formation falls on the church. In my church, we often fall into the trap of providing informational ministry as opposed to doing formational ministry. In some cases, perhaps because the church communicate so many things all the time, the message concerning spiritual formation may have been drowned out by other competing interests or voices. For spiritual formation to become one of the central messages communicated to disciples, the strategy for churches must necessarily be:

1. Gospel presentations and invitations should clearly spell out that God desires to change us from sinful beings to new beings, and especially how life changes are expected of us after conversion;
2. Believers need to hear not only the spoken words of Jesus but they also need to be taught how Jesus lived. Jesus' Great Commission in Matthew 28:18-20 instructed the apostles to "teach them to obey everything I have commanded you." I confess that that has often led me to teach just the Lord's spoken teachings without also teaching how Jesus lived. But in showing believers how Jesus lived in stark contrast to how his contemporaries lived will serve to highlight the importance for present day disciples to live lives which are radically different from how the secular world lives. Learning about the way Jesus lived will inevitably challenge

today's disciples to include making changes in their lives as a direct outcome of their conversion;

3. Discipleship needs to include instruction on spiritual formation. Just as new disciples need to be taught how to study the Bible or to pray, they also need clear explanation and constant reiteration about the partnership and process God uses to transform His people to become like Jesus.

Finally, spiritual formation may have suffered neglect because for some churches, it is easier to aim at counting 'decisions' for Christ rather than to invest long-term in making 'disciples' of Christ. This was also my tendency. We often strategize for 'church growth' at the expense of nurturing 'genuine life change'. Kent Carson and Mike Lueken made the case that churches have succumbed to the influence of worldly secular consumerism by offering the easy promise of spiritual maturity without fully detailing the high costs of discipleship and that to be a disciple is to be an apprentice of Jesus:

Apprentices are learning from Jesus how to live in the kingdom of God, and to trust him with everything, not just their sin problem. They are learning how to experience the life they long for and are made for, under God's gracious, loving and good reign and rule. Apprentices are learning to turn away from self and bring their kingdom into God's kingdom. They are learning to let him have a say over their lives. As they restructure their lives around him, he gradually transforms their inner being in Christlikeness. They actually become more like him. They don't obey him because they have to or are trying hard; obedience flows out of the new heart God has fashioned within them. (Carson and Lueken 2011)

In the same vein, Eugene Peterson observed this subtle yet grave shortcoming of churches which may also have contributed to a neglect of spiritual formation:

The pastors of America have metamorphosed into a company of shopkeepers, and the shops they keep are churches. They are preoccupied with shopkeeper's concerns—how to keep the customers happy, how to lure customers away from competitors down the street, how to package the goods so that the customers will lay out more money. Some of them are very good shopkeepers. They attract a lot of customers, pull in great sums of money, develop splendid reputations. Yet it is still shopkeeping; religious shopkeeping, to be sure, but shopkeeping all the same. The biblical fact is that there are no successful churches. There are, instead, communities of sinners, gather before God week after week in towns and villages all over the world. The Holy Spirit gathers them and does his work in them. In these communities of sinners, one of the sinners is called pastor and is given a designated responsibility in the community. The pastor's responsibility is to keep the community attentive to God and to the spiritual transformation that God desires to work in us. It is this responsibility that is being abandoned in spades.” (Peterson 1987, 1-2)

While there may be other causes for spiritual formation to have become neglected, the aforementioned reasons are likely the most common shortcomings of many Christian communities.

Therefore, in summary, in order to reverse the general tendency of churches to neglect the message and implementation of spiritual formation, we must strive to provide people with the whole Gospel prior to, as well as, after conversion. We must clearly outline all the spiritual benefits of becoming a Christian as well as the subsequent spiritual transformations that should begin to occur after a person accepts Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. Jesus never shied from stating clearly the high costs of discipleship to His would be followers and neither should we shy away from clearly making known the facts and requirements of spiritual formation.

Reflection and Discussion Questions

1. When did you first learn or hear that receiving Christ as your Savior and Lord meant that you must make some changes in your life?
2. When did you first learn or hear about how to go about making those necessary changes in your life?

From Deformation: Why Am I the Way I Am?

Do not conform 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. (Romans 12:2)

As obedient children, *do not conform* to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. (1 Peter 1:14)

Spiritual formation is a God and human partnership and process by which believers are transformed into Christ's likeness. God in His wisdom and grace revealed in the Scriptures that after we have become Christians, we can no longer remain as we have been, in sin. Both Paul and Peter in the New Testament admonished the church "do not conform." (Romans 12:2, I Peter 1:14) We are commanded not to conform any longer to the sinful pattern of the world or to indulge in the evil desires we had before we became Christ's followers. Another Scriptural reference which used the verb 'conform' in the negative sense was when Paul, testifying before King Agrippa, confessed the error of his former way of life by saying, "I *conformed* to the strictest sect of our religion, living as a Pharisee." (Acts 26:5) Our model will use the term 'deformation' to represent the negative consequence of having sinfully conformed to the world and hence,

indulged in its evil desires. The use of the term ‘deformation’ is so we can differentiate it from the use of ‘conformation’ in the positive sense, as in Romans 8:29, “For those God foreknew he also predestined to be *conformed* to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters.”

The spiritual formation model presented here, utilizing a series of words containing ‘form’ within them, i.e., formation, transformation, and reformation, was originally inspired by the lectures given by Graham Standish on the topic of “The process of community discernment” (Standish 2015). However, those words were used in an entirely different way and had different meanings in his lectures. This model includes additional terms such as ‘deformation and conformation’ which were not part of Standish’s original usage but are part of this model and course.

So why am I the way I am? I am sinful because I have conformed to the sinful pattern of the world and therefore, am deformed. Put in another way, we have experienced the deformation caused by sin. As a consequence of the Fall, the reality is that all of us, without exception, are sinful and have conformed or have been deformed in some way to the pattern of this world. Consider our present consumeristic, selfish, greedy, driven lives, fed and immersed 24/7 in the secular media and culture of our day. We just might join in the lament with the prophet Isaiah when he cried out, “Woe to me! I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty” (Isaiah 6:5).

The Bible stated, “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). Though God created us originally to be His handiwork for His purpose (Ephesians 2:10), we are not able to carry out His good works. Instead, the Bible forewarned that “the wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23). Our sins are tangible and real. They plague us at every moment of every day. Daily, we reap the consequences of our sinful earthly nature: “sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry...[and] because of these, the wrath of God is coming.” (Colossians 3:5-6) As deformed sinners, we are most certainly incapable of saving ourselves.

But the good news is this: the antidote or solution to our sin problem is available to us from God. Isaiah experienced the pardon of God when an angel touched the prophet’s lips with a live coal from heaven’s altar and then declared, “See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for.” (Isaiah 6:7)

The point is, although atonement for our sin is readily available, we must also desire atonement. It is truly imperative for us to notice that in the Isaiah account, the prophet had initially grieved about his sinful condition when he lamented “Woe to me! I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips.” (v.5) That lament was also the prophet’s deep desire to repent from and turn away from his sin and which ultimately led to his atonement. God heard the prophet’s humble confession and sent the angel to take away his sin.

Until God opens our eyes so we can see and realize just how far we have fallen from God's holy standards, it is unlikely that we will ever seek to change. Unless we see just how utterly bleak and hopeless is our situation, we will not willingly change or desire to change.

In the gospel of John 5:1-15, Jesus ministered to an invalid man who had lain helplessly beside a pool for thirty-eight years waiting for the miraculous fulfillment of a myth. Countless others who were similarly disabled were also there by the pool, waiting for the waters to be stirred and to be the first to get into the pool and thereby be miraculously healed. In direct contrast to the myth, Jesus asked the invalid, "Do you want to get well?" (John 5:6) We might think that the paralyzed man's answer would obviously be "Of course I want to get well!" Nevertheless, the fact that Jesus had to ask the question should cause us to pause, to momentarily consider whether or not there might be some understandable reasons why the invalid might actually not want to be healed.

For starters, perhaps if healed, the man would have to work. He might have to start taking responsibility for his life. He might have to give up offering excuses for his sorry state of affairs and have to take up responsibility for the relationships he had abandoned. He might have to give up wasting his life reclining beside the covered pool.

The point being, if we truly desire to change for the better, we all have to arrive at a life turning point and intentionally make a personal decision to change. Some people need to experience great pain before they will consider and embrace

change. For example, when the pain of staying the same is greater than the pain of change, these folks may then look to change. Others embrace change only when they finally realize there truly is a better alternative to live their life than their present way of living.

The Scriptures told us that the prodigal son in Luke 15:17 “came to his senses” and as a result, he sought to make a change. He said to himself, “I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you.” (Luke 15:18) In the same way, the invalid, when asked “Do you want to get well?” must have come to a life turning point where he made a personal decision to want to get well. In that moment, deep in his heart, he must have decided, “Yes Jesus, I want to get well.” Thus, when he said to Jesus, “I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred...while I am trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me,” Jesus did not reject his request. Jesus saw into the man’s heart, had compassion on him, and healed him instantaneously! “Get up! Pick up your mat and walk.” (John 5:8)

In spiritual formation, God first reveals to us the sorry and sinful state that we are in. Whether through the hearing of the gospel or through seeing ourselves in the mirror of God’s Word, whether through experiencing the pain of being sinned against or through the unrelenting convicting work of the Holy Spirit, we begin to see God’s gracious offer as being a better way and a change for a better life. We then come to a tangible life turning point where we decide to humbly and earnestly confess to God, “Lord, I want to change! I don’t want to continue any

longer in my present course of action. I do not wish to conform any longer to the sinful pattern of this world nor do I wish to conform any longer to the evil desires of my heart. I do not wish to remain as deformed. Instead, I wish to repent. I want to turn away from the way of sin and to turn to You. I want to live as Jesus lived and be more like Him. Change my heart O God.” This is the “From Deformation” starting point where we all begin our life-long journey and process of moving from deformation towards reformation.

To illustrate the spiritual formation process in diagrams, I invite us to imagine the start of a marathon race as in Figure 1. All the participants in the marathon are at the Start/Finish line, ready to run, walk, or even wheelchair their way around the multiple laps in the race circuit in order to complete the entire course of the race. The spectators and cheerleaders are lined up on either side of the course to cheer on the runners.



Figure 1. The spiritual formation process is like a marathon race.

We are reminded of this scenario in Hebrews 12:1, “Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.” As believers, we are the participants in the spiritual formation process, a spiritual road course set up by God for us for the purpose of forming and transforming us into Christ’s likeness, as in Figure 2. The race course is a circuit where we will need to pass through that Start/Finish line, which is also the ‘From Deformation To Reformation’ line, many times in our lifetime in order to become more like Jesus. The marathon route ‘From Deformation to Reformation’, is the ‘Through Conformation’ road, which consists of three lanes, ‘Formation through the Gospel’, ‘Formation through Spiritual Disciplines’, and ‘Formation through Divine Transformation’, these terms to be defined as the model is explained. The dotted lane markings on the road indicate that the three ‘Formation’ lanes are not exclusive but are complementary with one another. Those who line the course on either side of the road are the great cloud of believers, both past and present, who inspire, mentor, encourage and cheer us along the way until we complete the race marked out for us. Notice that the runners wearing the same uniform are all part of the same team. This represents the community aspect of spiritual formation. We don’t run alone nor is spiritual formation just an individual pursuit. We need the encouragement and support of the faith community to persevere through the trials and challenges that will surely be encountered on the way, i.e. hazards found on the course itself, the weather

conditions, and even our own limitations. This spiritual formation process ends when, by God’s grace, we cross the ‘From Deformation to Reformation’ line one last time and then to see Jesus face to face. Only then will we be fully transformed in His presence. In 1 Corinthians 13:12, Paul reminds us of this truth, “For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face.”



Figure 2. The spiritual formation process begins at ‘From Deformation’

Another significant truth about our deformation due to the sinful world is that our sinful condition may be ‘active’ or ‘passive’. In other words, besides repenting from those ways in which we have actively sinned, we may also find ourselves in sin through having been passively compromised. There are countless life examples where and when we have been sinned against and as a result have been deformed into some sinful state. The invalid in John 5 may have been sinned against as the victim of an accident or when he contracted a disease through no fault of his own. But as a result of his illness, that unfortunate hardship may have

led him to become angry, or resentful, or bitter, or despairing, and which may have, invariably led him potentially to sin or to be sinned against. In the vicious cycle of sin, a life precious to God had spiraled downward into a thirty-eight year spiritual and human tragedy.

In examining how our lives might have been sinfully conformed or compromised, we may need to look at all those things which have shaped and molded us to become who we are. Howard stated, “attending to who we are, to the form of our lives at any given time—our embodiment, our story, our emotional needs, our experience of the Spirit of God, our relational networks, enables us to focus intention and means where they can best foster union with Christ” (Howard 2008, 272). In light of this, some life areas we can examine include the following:

- recall the significant, life-shaping events and times of your life during childhood, adolescence, youth, young adulthood, and adulthood;
- reflect on the significant molding of your life by these relationships: parents, siblings, extended family, friends, teachers, lovers, employers, and enemies;
- review the significant influences these institutions had on your life: family of origin, extended family, religious institution, schools, workplace, culture, and even country.

Invariably, we may find that much of our values, ethics, morals, goals, dreams, ambitions, interests, outlooks on life, views of God and faith have been compromised or deformed by sin in some way. An example of this from my own

life was my sexual molestation which led to impure and self-serving relationships. Except for the grace of God, we may not find any areas of our lives untainted by sin. Therefore, if we are serious about wanting to make spiritual changes and to turn from conformation, we also need to consider all of the above areas of our life. Prayerfully and carefully confess and repent from those sins in your life of which you are aware and also those areas which God’s Spirit has impressed upon you that you need to change.

A psychological instrument which I have found helpful to systematically ‘turn over’ the areas of our life for examination is the Johari Window (see Figure 3).

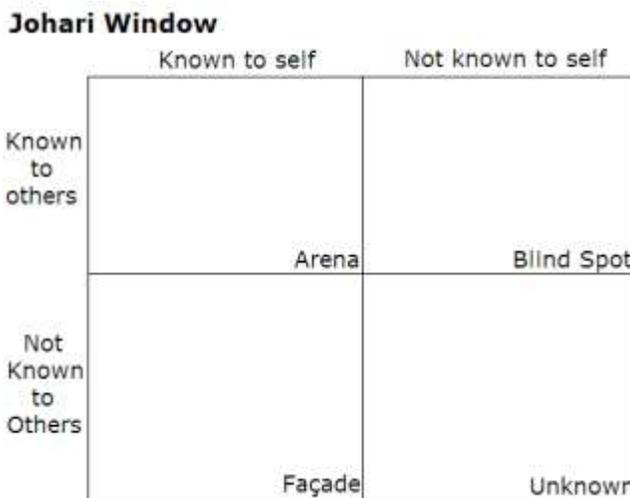


Figure 3. The Johari Window can be helpful in identifying the areas of our lives which have conformed or have been conformed to the sinful pattern of the world. (Developed by Joseph Luft and Harrington Ingham, 1955. cf. Joseph Luft. 1969. *Of Human Interaction: The Johari Model*. Palo Alto, CA: National Press Books.)

The *Johari Window* (Luft 1969) was a tool originally used to help people better understand their relationship with themselves and others. It was created by

psychologists Joseph Luft and Harrington Ingham in 1955. Luft and Ingham called their Johari Window model 'Johari' after combining their first names, Joe and Harry. We can use the Johari Window to examine where in the following areas of our lives also need to stop from conforming to the pattern of the world.

The sectors can be described as following:

Open Arena is the part of ourselves that we see and others see; i.e. the 'always happy face' that I show to the world.

Hidden Façade is our private space, things which we know about ourselves but which we keep from others; i.e. my insecurity and need to please others.

Blind Spots are the aspects of our person that others see but which we are not aware of. In order to see our 'blind spots', we will need the help of others who know us best; i.e. my mentor has disclosed to me that I often mask my true feelings behind my smile, that contrary to how I portray myself as an 'open' person, I am actually quite a 'closed' person and hard to know.

Unknown represents those unconscious or subconscious parts of ourselves which are seen neither by ourselves nor by others. Only God knows the things about us in this quadrant, things which God may, by His grace, reveal to us in His time and according to His wisdom; i.e. God revealed to me in my fifties how my 'having many friends' was not just because I was such a good friend, but was due primarily of my neediness and fear of loneliness.

Returning once again to the story of the invalid, Jesus, who had loved the man by healing him, later revealed something of which the man himself was not

aware. Jesus said to him, “See, you are well again. Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you.” (John 5:14) Essentially, this was a warning from Jesus. While the healed man may not have be solely responsible for all the sinful things which have transpired in his life from the previous thirty-eight years, Jesus now pointed out specific sins for which he was now responsible. This is an illustration of how the Lord may speak to us so that we may eventually come to know even the sinful things in our “unknown” quadrant.

In summary, so why am I the way I am? The simple answer is “because I have have been deformed by sin, whether actively by our sinful acts or passively by the sin of others, yet have chosen to stay this way!” If we really don’t want to stay this way, then we must make a personal decision and commitment to change and to turn away from the pattern of this sinful world. We must turn to Jesus and ask Him to make us “well” again. If and when we do this, Jesus will not refuse us. He will say compassionately and understandingly, “Get up, pick up your mat and walk!”

So go ahead, pick up your mat and walk! Don’t take it lying down anymore. Stand up, take responsibility for your own sins, confess and repent them to Jesus. Then walk. Take the necessary steps away from the place of sin, of shame, of feeling sorry for your-self, of being the victim, and of blaming others. If required, step away also from those who would hinder you from making the changes you need to make in your life in your quest to follow Jesus.

So, how do we turn “from deformation”? We must say: “I have sinned. I have been sinned against. I have lived among a people of sin. I need to repent and to turn from deformation in order to turn towards Jesus!

You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness. (Ephesians 4:22-24)

Reflection and Discussion Questions

1. How have you been deformed by your own sinful acts or by the sinful acts of others?
2. What areas of your life would you like to see changed in your quest to follow Jesus?

Formation Through the Gospel: What is the Gospel and How Does the Gospel Change Us?

But *these are written* that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name. (John 20:31)

For I am not ashamed of the *gospel*, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile. For in the *gospel* the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: “The righteous will live by faith.” (Romans 1:16-17)

The road ‘From Deformation To Reformation’ must necessarily pass ‘Through Conformation’, see Figure 4.

We are admonished not to conform to the world (Romans 12:2) or to indulge in its evil desires (1 Peter 1:14), but instead, we are to conform to the

image of the Son of God, “For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters” (Romans 8:29).



Figure 4. The spiritual formation process goes ‘Through Conformation.’

There are three ways by which we begin conforming to Jesus after saying ‘yes’ to Him. The first lane in the ‘Through Conformation’ road is ‘Formation through the Gospel’, see Figure 5.

The Apostle John’s purpose for writing his account of Jesus was so that his readers and hearers may have all the evidence they need in order that they ‘may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God’. John simply wasn’t writing stories like an author penning his first novel. He believed that the account of Jesus he was passing on to the next generation was of such importance that

their eternal destiny literally depended on their receiving the truth he had preserved through his writing.



Figure 5. We are spiritually formed through the Gospel.

Similarly, Paul earnestly urged his audience, the seekers and believers in Rome to consider the information he was bringing to them, because it literally is ‘the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes’ in it. The ‘it’ both John and Paul were referring to was the gospel.

There are several different aspects of the gospel that we need to consider in spiritual formation. The gospel is firstly, the content of a body of truth, the infallible principles or doctrine, the true message about Jesus by which we, believing in it, might be saved. Thus John wrote about Jesus’ life, his teachings, his parables, his miracles, how he ministered and interacted with people, how he answered the Pharisees’ questions, how he lived, died, and was resurrected back to life. John concluded his gospel with this statement, “Jesus did many other

things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written” (John 21:25). John sought to impress upon his audience the veracity, the uniqueness, and the incomparable human-divine person who was Jesus. It is as though John is still persuading us today: if you believe in this Jesus as the Messiah and the Son of God as I have described and portrayed Him to be, you will indeed have the eternal life that He offers.

Paul, in the beginning of his letter to the Roman church, added that this information regarding Jesus was so powerful precisely because it revealed the knowledge through which God’s people are informed about how they should live, which was, “the righteous will live by faith.”

When the reformer Martin Luther read Romans 1, his spiritual eyes were opened and his faith paradigm changed on the basis of this one Scriptural text alone (Stein 2000, 45). As a result, Luther went on to preach that sinners are justified by ‘faith alone’ by the revealed righteousness of God, which was Christ’s righteousness displayed while He was on earth and which was imputed on or assigned to those who believed in Him.

Thus, the first way of understanding ‘the gospel’ is that it is the message of salvation or the precious information detailing how God’s salvation can be accessed, even by sinners.

But there is a second way to understand ‘gospel’, and that is to identify Jesus Himself as ‘the Word’ (John 1:1), and as the personal agent through whom

and by whom we are saved. The focus here is not so much on the message of salvation, but on the messenger, the divine informant, the Savior Himself, whose sacrifice on the cross actually brought atonement for our sin. Jesus did not just preach about the way to God, but He proclaimed Himself to be “the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6).

An illustration to explain this dual understanding of the gospel is to consider how a drowning person is saved. The lifesaving information and training possessed by a certified lifeguard is precisely the ‘good news’ a person desperately needs when drowning. Parents routinely entrust the lives of their precious children to lifeguards when they leave their children to swim at the community pool. Now, in the event of a drowning incident, though the parents may dearly love their children and would do everything possible to rescue their child, yet in reality, their love alone may not be enough to save their child. In emergency situations like this when someone is drowning, what is needed is the expertise that only someone who has been trained as a lifeguard can provide.

That expert information is ‘the gospel’. But at the same time, all that lifesaving information are just words on a printed page in a training manual unless it can actually be put into effect by the timely and competent actions of a certified lifeguard to save the drowning child. The information about how to rescue the victim from deep water or how to administer C.P.R. is useless to the untrained lay person. Only the lifeguard implementing his or her skill and knowledge in the correct technique can hope to save the drowning child. In the same way, the

gospel is both the saving message and the Savior Messenger coming to save us in a timely way as only the Son of Man and the Son of God can.

So how does this dual understanding of the gospel help us to become more like Jesus? There are at least four common spiritual formation shortcomings that this dual and fuller understanding of the gospel might rectify:

First, some Christians are overly dependent on gaining information to right their lives. They hope that their listening to many sermons, subscribing to sound doctrine and correct theology alone will cause them to become more like Jesus. Some churches are great at communicating the word but lack the requisite follow-through actions which bring alive the Word of God. Even though some believers have the right information, information alone cannot build a mature faith. Jesus said so when he warned his disciples, “But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.” (Matthew 7:26-27).

Secondly, some Christians just don't have or want the right understanding of the gospel, or they don't have the whole gospel which hinders their spiritual development. This is the opposite extreme to the above but it is also a shortcoming. They may be reluctant to study God's Word, or they may simply wish to avoid any teachings that they find inconvenient, or they may be refusing to give up the world in order to fully obey Christ. Some churches fall into this camp when they preach only the health, wealth and success version of the gospel,

or the watered-down version of the gospel when they exclude the requisite costs of discipleship, or the simplified version of the gospel when the gospel is reduced into a bridge illustration, or the shortened version of the gospel when they neglect any teaching at all on spiritual formation. Paul's advice to his pastoral mentee, Timothy, addressed specifically this kind of Christian: "For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths" (2 Timothy 4:3-4).

Thirdly, some Christians are overly dependent on their good works alone to earn them favor with God. Their legalism and righteous deeds blind them to their own pride and sin. They are Pharisaical to a fault outwardly and publicly, but inwardly and privately they may not have any real relationship with God at all. Paul described these Christians as people who have "a form of godliness but denying its power." (2 Timothy 3:5) But the most damning judgement came from our Lord Himself when He said to his disciples, "Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'" (Matthew 7:22-23)

Fourthly, some Christians misguidedly refuse to engage in any acts of spiritual obedience whatsoever. This is a swing of the pendulum to the opposite extreme of #3. They 'throw up their hands' in frustration, or in false humility and

piety, as if to say that they are incapable of doing anything good for God. Paul recorded in his letter to the church in Rome the kind of arguments he heard from this group of Christians who had rationalized their remaining in sin: “If my falsehood enhances God’s truthfulness and so increases His glory, why am I still condemned as a sinner?” (Romans 3:7). Furthermore, “Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase?” (Romans 6:1). James in his letter also encountered similar folks who claimed to be believers but who lack any gospel initiative. So James addressed and countered their error:

What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, “Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,” but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead...you see that a person is considered righteous by what they do and not by faith alone. (James 2:14-17, 24)

In light of the above mentioned shortcomings, let us clarify and identify the right version of the whole gospel that would rightly lead us to Christ and to forming us into becoming more like Him. Wilhoit stated “the key to continual and deeper spiritual renewal and revival is the persistent rediscovery of the gospel. All our spiritual problems come from a failure to apply the [whole] gospel” (Wilhoit 2008, 32). The whole and complete gospel which can rightly inform us and lead us from deformation to reformation must necessarily include these six elements:

1. The message of salvation that saves and the revelation of the Savior-Messenger who saves. This message must articulate the words of truth and identify the person of the Word. It must provide details of the agency of redemption and how we can have a relationship with the Redeemer Agent.

It must help us to know about Jesus as well as to know and experience Him personally. Samuel Williamson summarized this point when he said, “We want information; God wants a conversation. We want to know answers; God wants us to know Him” (Williamson 2016, 24).

2. The teaching about how we are saved from sin as well as how we need to change from a life of sin. Information about salvation accompanied also by information and about spiritual formation. An explanation and discussion about what God through Christ has accomplished for our salvation and how we, who have been saved through faith, can respond in love to God by serving Him and His kingdom.
3. The overarching story of God working in humankind and in world history which can be traced through the Old and New Testaments, that God is always at work and intent on “making all things new” (Revelation 21:5).
4. A listing of all the benefits and spiritual blessings of becoming a child of God and a thorough consideration of all the costs of discipleship. We need to know our ‘rights’ as children of God as well as the ‘responsibilities’ of being the people of God.
5. The verbal teachings of Jesus as well as how Jesus lived, i.e. how Jesus often withdrew to spend time alone with the Father; how Jesus was soaked in the Scriptures; how He lived a life of thanksgiving; how the lost always mattered to Him; how Jesus observed the letter and the spirit of the law.

6. The promise that the Holy Spirit is always working to reveal to us God's will and truth (John 14:26, 16:13); and that our enemy, Satan, is also working to distort and to blind us to the truth of the gospel. (2 Corinthians 4:4)

In summary then, God revealed to us through Holy Scriptures and through His Son, the Word of God, all the truth we need to repent from the world and from the dangers of becoming deformed through sin (2 Peter 1:3-4). Additionally, the gospel also provided all the instructions we need post-conversion to journey faithfully from deformation to reformation.

The gospel is the overarching salvific plan of God for humanity. Spiritual formation instruction is only a subset of the gospel, but albeit, an often neglected piece of the whole. Although being only a subset, spiritual formation nevertheless points us towards the end goal of the gospel, our transformation, which is the objective for which Christ died and rose again to accomplish in us.

In Figure 5, 'Formation Through the Gospel' is identified as one of three possible lanes that move believers 'from deformation to reformation through conformation'. Although it is depicted as the first lane in the road to reformation, it does not necessarily mean that it is always the first path people take. The dotted lane markings on the road represent the idea that the process 'formation through the gospel' is dynamic. There would be a spiritual problem if one remained stuck indefinitely in this laneway and simply stayed here to accumulate spiritual information without making any forward progress. Also note the dotted lines in

between all the laneways indicate that the three lanes complement one another. Whichever lane one is presently on, one would be able to find helpful complementing and supplementing knowledge and insights about the spiritual formation process to help move them forward towards reformation.

Now, brothers and sisters, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. (1 Corinthians 15:1-2)

Reflection and Discussion Questions

1. Of the four spiritual formation shortcomings a Christian might have due to receiving an incomplete gospel, with which do you most identify?
2. Assess the gospel that you presently believe in and on which you have anchored your faith and life. What parts of the gospel are you missing and how has that affected your spiritual formation progress?

Formation Through the Spiritual Disciplines: What Is Our Part in Spiritual Formation?

And he said: “Truly I tell you, unless *you change* and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 18:3)

Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—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. (Philippians 2:12-13)

You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, *to put off your old self*, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and *to put on the new self*, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness. Therefore *each of you* must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbor, for we are all members of one body. (Ephesians 4:22-25)

Spiritual formation is a God and human partnership and process by which believers are transformed into Christ's likeness. Thus far, in the discussion of the previous two topics, 'from deformation' and 'formation through the gospel', we see that the God and human partnership had to have been active and working. There is a pattern: God does something, and then we respond.

For example, we have already previously pointed out in Ephesians 2:10 that God was active and involved in our lives, creating us and preparing in advance the good works for us to do, this even before we were conscious of Him. God surrounded us with His great love and grace and then waited patiently until we responded to Him by putting our faith in Christ. Our response is our part in the partnership. Next, we also observed that God had shown Isaiah the unspeakable grandeur and holiness of His sovereignty in the prophet's vision of heaven. Then the prophet responded in confession, in repentance, and in taking up God's mission. Then we also noted how Jesus offered healing to the invalid, "Do you want to get well?" Then the man must have said 'yes' in his heart because though unspoken, Jesus heard his inner desire and proceeded to heal him, "Get up! Pick up your mat and walk." Finally also, with respect to the gospel, God through Christ brought us the message of salvation and was Himself the Savior-Messenger. Our response must then be to humbly receive the gospel in its entirety, the written word and the living Word, and to carefully respond to them without corrupting any parts offered to us. We believe that only by having the whole gospel and responding to the whole gospel will we be properly led to the goal of the gospel,

which is our transformation into Christ's likeness. Therefore, as we have demonstrated above, the pattern of our partnership with God is always the same: God initiates, and then we respond; this pattern of our partnership with God is aptly summed up by John, "we love because He first loved us" (1 John 4:9).

The next lane "Formation Through Spiritual Disciplines" works no differently in terms of how the God-human partnership works, see Figure 6. It is God who firstly initiates and then we respond. However, the biblical texts which inform this step have seemingly placed the onus on humans as having the primary responsibility for the execution and accomplishment of this formational step. But be that as it may, we must always still remember and believe that ultimately, God remains integrally involved even when we consider the question, "What is to be our part in the spiritual formation process?"



Figure 6. We are formed through the spiritual disciplines.

When the disciples asked Jesus, “Who, then, is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” Jesus seized upon that moment to teach them about their need to have a humbler attitude if they wish to continue their quest to be kingdom people and to do kingdom work (Matthew 18:1-5). Jesus’ response to them was, “Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.” He clearly revealed that He expected his disciples to change; he expected them to be able to change; and furthermore, he expected them to be responsible for change--in their becoming less prideful and less intent on vying for a higher standing in God’s kingdom.

Similarly, when Paul was teaching the Philippian church about humility, he too was addressing a congregation that was dealing with, among other concerns, envy, rivalry, selfish ambition and vain conceit. Therefore, he charged the believers there to “in humility value others above [themselves]” (Ephesians 2:3) and finally to “work out [their] salvation with fear and trembling.” (Philippians 2:12) Clearly, Paul too, expected the believers in Philippi to change, he expected them to be able to change, and he held them responsible for their becoming more like Jesus, even to the extent of changing their mindset so as to have the same as Jesus’ mindset (Ephesians 2:5).

Likewise, the believers in Ephesus were experiencing conflict within their ranks (Ephesians 4:25-31). Apparently, there was lying, unwholesome talk, bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice, among the believers there. It sounded like they also needed to learn about

humility. Paul pinpointed their need: [they] “needed to be made new in the attitude of [their] minds” (Ephesians 4:23). So Paul admonished them, “put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires...and put on the new self, [which is] created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness” (Ephesians 4:22-24). Clearly again, Paul expected the Ephesians to be able to change and he made them responsible for becoming more “kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you” (Ephesians 4:32).

In light of the above examples, there is no doubt that in the spiritual formation process, there is a human role. And the human role in the God and human partnership also definitely has a significant part to play in the process of ensuring that we become more like Christ.

It is true that oftentimes we try and try only to fail over and over again in our efforts to change. As I mentioned at the very beginning, due to our constant struggle with sin, we are often tempted to simply give up trying to change. So what will help us get beyond our seemingly futile attempts to change when we have already failed time and time again? Historically and traditionally, the church has looked to the practice of spiritual disciplines to help believers get ‘over the hump’ when they have struggled repeatedly with the same sin. So how do spiritual disciplines figure in the spiritual formation process?

Back in the 1990’s, there was a popular Christian movement, particularly in the United States, which gave hope to believers who wanted to faithfully follow

Christ. It came complete with its own coined phrase and sported its own fashion accessory. You will no doubt remember Christians talking excitedly about “WWJD”, which stood for “What would Jesus do?”, and wearing rubber wristbands with “WWJD” imprinted on them. The concept was simple: whenever you encountered a situation where you were unsure of knowing what to do as a Christian, especially situations where the Bible says one thing and the world trended the other way, just ask the question, “What would Jesus do?” Then by proceeding to do what you believe Jesus would do, you would in theory be acting in a manner which demonstrated the love of Christ. Hence you would be successful in faithfully following Christ. Needless to say, that movement flourished for a brief period but it soon exited the public arena and it is even hard to find it now within Christian circles. Why was that? It was because the WWJD strategy simply didn’t work. But why didn’t “WWJD” work?

To illustrate, let us consider an analogy from sports. Torontonians who follow major league baseball know that Josh Donaldson was an All-Star baseball player with the Toronto Blue Jays team from 2015 to 2018. He was the ‘wannabe’ hero for many athletes, young or old, those who aspired to play baseball at a high level. For these and many baseball fans in Toronto, when it came to playing the game right, their motto might well have been “WWJDD,” or “What would Josh Donaldson do?” However, the reality is that very few fans or aspiring baseball players can do what Josh Donaldson can do, even though they might truly want to do what JD can do. That’s because JD had the physical gifts and he had also been

honing his baseball skills ever since from the time he was very young! He had lived and breathed baseball for the better part of his entire life. That commitment and obsession with his sport was precisely the reason why JD could dive, snag a line drive hit at more than one hundred miles an hour to the ‘hot corner’ and then get up, then accurately flip the ball to the first baseman for an automatic out! And that is also precisely the reason why it would be nearly impossible for an ordinary ‘joe’ to do what JD could do.

Likewise, we cannot do what Jesus would do in any given situation because we have not learned the Scriptures the way Jesus had, we have not obeyed the Word as Jesus had, we have not fasted and prayed and spent time in the wilderness to deny our fleshly desires and temptations as Jesus had, and we have not learnt to rely on the help of the Holy Spirit to help us in our time of need as Jesus had. It is no wonder why we cannot do what Jesus did simply because we have not trained or disciplined ourselves to do what Jesus did.

This is where spiritual disciplines enter in. Engaging or practicing the spiritual disciplines is our part in the God and human partnership of the spiritual formation process. God reveals where we need to change. We respond by practicing the spiritual disciplines. Over time and through our diligent practice of spiritual disciplines, we will begin to be able to do what Jesus did. When that happens, that in effect is how we accomplish our part in the spiritual formation process. Whatever we call it, changing, or working out our salvation, or putting off our old self, this is how the spiritual formation partnership with God works.

Carson and Lueken offered us the following three insights on how formation happens when we practice various spiritual disciplines:

1. Formation happens in the specific details of our hearts and lives, that is, formation happens when we choose to enter and change the messy details of our lives;
 2. Formation happens when we are willing to take counterintuitive action; “do the opposite of what you want to do or feel like doing;” and
 3. Formation happens when we remind ourselves of who we are in Christ; our identity as God’s beloved children will provide us with the freedom and courage to face our past and change the things we wish to change.
- (Carson and Lueken 2011, 124)

Now that we have detailed how spiritual disciplines work, how do we know that we personally need to engage in them? We know we are in need of spiritual disciplines in our lives when we find ourselves taking the following shortcuts:

- When we accept that it is enough to profess faith in Jesus without actually signing up for transformation;
- When we accept that it is enough to be frustrated about our spiritual complacency without truly experiencing transformation, i.e. being satisfied with our spiritual dissatisfaction;
- When we accept that it is enough to work hard at changing the outward behaviors of our lives, i.e. adherence to a list of rules but without being

genuinely transformed on the inside, such as seeing our desires and behavior becoming more like Christ's desires and behavior.

Once we are persuaded that we need spiritual disciplines and are willing to employ spiritual disciplines to aid in our formation, we then need to figure out what actually are the disciplines. What are we referring to when we speak of spiritual disciplines, which traditionally are also known as 'means of grace'?

A spiritual discipline can be anything which keeps us in constant relationship with Jesus. It can be anything which opens us up to God. The account of Jesus calling and appointing His twelve disciples in Mark's Gospel offers us a very practical insight into what a spiritual discipline is and what it is supposed to do:

Jesus went up on a mountainside and called to him those he wanted, and they came to him. He appointed twelve *that they might be with him* and that he might send them out to preach and to have authority to drive out demons. (Mark 3:13-15)

My own experience is one which other Christians may identify with because for years, I had shied away from spiritual disciplines simply because I believed them to be too difficult to understand or to be committed to. But according to Jim Wilhoit, although "spiritual disciplines in themselves can do very little by way of spiritual change, but when we use them to place us in God's presence, God can do his loving, restorative work" (Wilhoit 2008, 93). Every Christian can embrace spiritual disciplines for they simply cause us to spend more time in God's presence.

Jesus made it very clear to the Twelve that spending quality time with Him was a very important and essential condition of their discipleship. It was by spending time with Jesus that the Twelve heard what Jesus taught and caught what Jesus taught. It is therefore so surprising that many well-intentioned Christians today who want to become more like Jesus don't simply avail themselves to this very basic discipline.

Robert Mulholland in his book *Shaped by the Word* provided us with a very practical explanation of spiritual disciplines. A spiritual discipline can be “anything and everything we do...if we offer it to God as a means for God to use in our lives if God so chooses” (Mulholland 1985, 114). Furthermore, Mulholland elaborated, if we are willing to

offer something to God as a discipline and to keep offering it day after day, week after week, month after month, year after year, to continue offering it for God to use in whatever way God wants...then [we] are engaging in a spiritual discipline that will cut to the heart of all those debilitating dynamics of our culture and the false self it generates that tend to misshape our formation. (Mulholland 1985, 115)

Mulholland's perspective on spiritual disciplines indeed eases many Christians' anxieties about adopting and engaging in the practice of spiritual disciplines. His definition of spiritual discipline frees us up to focus on yielding control of ourselves to God while engaging in spiritual disciplines instead of just being caught up with the technique or methodology of practicing a particular discipline. It is the false self who gets caught up trying to become more righteous through religious works—what a Pharisee in Jesus' day might do. In contrast, the true self relies on God to help him or her deny themselves and take up their cross

to follow Jesus (Matthew 16:24). In this way, their denying themselves through the practice of spiritual disciplines actually results in their transformation into Christ's likeness instead of setting them up to become more arrogant and proud about their religious achievements.

In truth, we may already be able to count many of our present Christian habits as spiritual disciplines so long as we truly do them and offer them to God to shape us. For example, our regular attendance at worship, our pausing to give thanks before eating a meal, our commitment to a particular serving role at church, our regular and cheerful tithing, or even our engaging in intercessory prayer while doing the family's dishes. For many believers, this will come as a positive encouragement and surprise that they are already engaged in employing multiple spiritual disciplines in their lives without their even knowing it! In this case, what we need is to intentionally adopt new spiritual disciplines to target specific areas of our lives which we believe need to be re-formed.

If we accept Mulholland's definition of spiritual disciplines that they can be "anything and everything we do...[so long as] we offer it to God as a means for God to use in our lives if God so chooses" (Mulholland 1985, 114) then there certainly are many options available to all Christians to address every need and level of spirituality. When I taught this section in the course, I gave each participant a list of spiritual disciplines and went over their purposes and practices. I believe this served to demystify spiritual disciplines for the participants.

Adele Calhoun's *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook* (Calhoun 2005) is just one of many books by authors who have attempted to list and classify the more prevalent spiritual practices so that the church might be more persuaded to use them in their lives. Calhoun lists no less than seventy-five spiritual disciplines! She has organized all the spiritual disciplines by matching them up with the specific desire or need that believers might be seeking to address in the formation of a particular area of their lives (Calhoun 2005, 13-16).

For example, Calhoun matched the discipline of "Centering Prayer" with the desire "to quiet the heart and rest in God alone" (Calhoun 2005, 13). In this way, someone with this particular felt spiritual need may choose Centering Prayer as a possible spiritual discipline 'fit' for them. Within the body of the book, Calhoun also devotes pages of material to further define, explain, teach and guide believers to implement the specific practice of Centering Prayer into their lives. This is one of the most helpful handbooks on spiritual disciplines and a wonderful resource for any Christian wishing to do their part to advance their spiritual formation journey.

Other notable authors who have provided lists of spiritual disciplines and varying ways of classifying them are Richard Foster in *Celebration of Discipline* (Foster 1988), Kenneth Boa in his chapter on "Disciplined Spirituality" in *Conformed to His image: Biblical and Practical Approaches to Spiritual Formation* (Boa 2001, 82-97) and Tony Jones in *The Sacred Way: Spiritual Practices for Everyday Life* (Jones 2005).

One final helpful note from Mulholland on how to choose a spiritual discipline: “when God’s Spirit probes one of the areas of my deadness (sin), not only do I begin to see that portion of my own “dead body” but, at the same time, I begin to understand what wholeness in Christ looks like...[then] I have some initial idea of what the spiritual discipline needs to be...this is the point at which we offer to God a personal spiritual discipline, a discipline shaped to the unique configuration of our deadness” (Mulholland 1993, 130).

Once again, we have in Mulholland’s writing, affirmation that spiritual formation is a God and human partnership working in synch to transform us into Christ’s likeness. First, God’s Spirit will point to an area of sin in our lives. Then we respond by adopting a spiritual discipline to specifically address and change that area of sin into an area of faithful obedience.

Reflecting over the entirety of my relationship with God, I am astounded to discover the great number of spiritual disciplines God has prompted me to use in my own formation: going to church, serving in the church, being baptized and confirmed, going on short-term mission trips, enjoying intimate Christian fellowship, participating in early morning prayer, learning how to do inductive Bible study, having times alone with God when no one is watching, being part of a small group, being mentored, learning about discernment, enrolling in seminary and being engaged in formal theological education, entertaining a call to be a congregation’s pastor and going through the church’s ordination process, getting married, parenting children, persevering through suffering, and committing to

ministry for the long-term. These are just some of the spiritual disciplines I have practiced that come to mind!

Our formation takes time, perseverance and patience. We are to practice these spiritual disciplines until they become ingrained into our lives as an unconscious spiritual habit. Oftentimes, it is only when we look back that we will begin to see the evidence of the fruit of the spiritual disciplines gradually shaping and changing our lives and making us more Christ-like.

[We can be confident of this], that He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. (Philippians 1:6)

Reflection and Discussion Questions

1. Given Mulholland's definition of spiritual discipline, what are the spiritual disciplines that you have or already are practicing in your life?
2. What area of your life has God's Spirit been asking you to change?
3. After reviewing Calhoun's "List of Spiritual Disciplines and Desires," what is one new spiritual discipline that you can incorporate in your life?

Formation Through Divine Transformation: How Does God's Sovereignty Work in Spiritual Formation?

Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform 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. (Romans 12:1-2)

But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are

being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit. (2 Corinthians 3:16-18)

For, as I have often told you before and now tell you again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is set on earthly things. But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, *will transform* our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body. (Philippians 3:18-20)

The third lane in moving us from deformation to reformation is “Formation through Divine Transformation.” (see Figure 7) The reality is, despite all the spiritual disciplines we might engage in, we still cannot make all the



Figure 7. We are formed through divine transformation.

necessary changes in our lives by ourselves. We still need to be ‘delivered by God’, or to be transformed by God. Only God, working sovereignly, can change us in the way that we cannot. God has to do His part in order for us to be

transformed. And He will! We will now examine God's sovereignty as it pertains to how He changes us.

The sovereignty of God is the biblical teaching that "all things are under God's rule and control, and that nothing happens without His direction or permission. God works not just some things but all things according to the counsel of His own will. His purposes are all-inclusive and never thwarted; nothing takes Him by surprise. The sovereignty of God means that "He is free to do whatever he wills; He is not subject to or answerable to anyone" (Erickson, 915). We already know and believe this about God. However, the sovereignty of God often still takes us by surprise, especially in matters of spiritual formation, because we have come to depend on and even like the familiarity and predictability of the God and human partnership and process. God's sovereignty means that sometimes, we will not have a ready or easy answer, especially when God does something unexpected, something that we did not plan for or something happens that we cannot explain well with our model. This is especially true when we have to account for the pain and suffering that appears to be unrelated to an individual's choice or actions. Having a spiritual formation model does not make it any easier to answer those who seek to know why God in His sovereignty allowed pain and suffering to take place in their life. However, the spiritual formation model can and does affirm the following: 1) as participants in the race all similarly encounter the different challenges imposed by the conditions of the weather, the course, the road, and even the individual's physical level of fitness,

so all believers also encounter pain and suffering on their quest to becoming more like Jesus; 2) although the presence of pain and suffering may test our commitment to stay faithful in our belief of God, nevertheless such pain and suffering do not negate His continuing and abiding presence, guidance and comfort for His people; and 3) it is precisely because believers will inevitably encounter pain and suffering that God has surrounded His people with the church to help each believer, like the team mates who run on the same team, to finish the spiritual formation race.

In divine transformation, all the aspects of how God changes us, the work that God does in our lives, the way He works, the methods He uses, the time He takes, how He forms us, are entirely up to the mercy and wisdom of His sovereignty. That is to say, God doesn't have to answer to us nor does He. God does as God pleases. He is not beholden to anyone or working in any prescribed way or limited by any spiritual formation formula. This is not to say that God's sovereign activity has eliminated the God and human partnership altogether. Human cooperation with God is still required but God's sovereignty means that God has the right to work independently if He so chooses.

Although believers may acknowledge God's sovereignty, it may still come as a surprise how many primary Scriptures there are which support and affirm God's sovereign activity as it relates to spiritual formation. I believe the more convinced we are of God's sovereign activity in our lives, the more we may submit ourselves into His hands. The following are only a sampling:

Our God is in heaven; he does whatever pleases him. (Psalm 115:3)

I know that the Lord is great, that our Lord is greater than all gods. The Lord does whatever pleases him, in the heavens and on the earth, in the seas and all their depths. (Psalm 135:5-6)

In their hearts humans plan their course, but the Lord establishes their steps. (Proverbs 16:9)

Many are the plans in a person's heart, but it is the Lord's purpose that prevails. (Proverbs 19:21)

I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me. I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say, 'My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please.' (Isaiah 46:9-10)

For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the Lord. "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts." (Isaiah 58:8-9)

Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible." (Matthew 19:26)

He told them, "The secret of the kingdom of God has been given to you. But to those on the outside everything is said in parables so that, "they may be ever seeing but never perceiving, and ever hearing but never understanding; otherwise they might turn and be forgiven!" (Mark 4:11-12)

[Jesus said,] No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them, and I will raise them up at the last day. (John 6:44)

But who are you, a human being, to talk back to God? "Shall what is formed say to the one who formed it, 'Why did you make me like

this?” Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for special purposes and some for common use? (Romans 9:20-21)

For it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose. (Philippians 2:13)

These Scriptures illustrate and explain why there are so many variations of how people have been divinely transformed by God. Some are observed as changing very gradually. For example, Jesus' disciple, Simon experienced only incremental change after following Jesus for all the years of His public ministry. In fact, Jesus gave Simon the name Peter, “the rock,” long before Simon actually became the rock. (Matthew 16:18)

Some people experience dramatic changes after only one encounter with Christ. Saul became ‘Paul’ on that fateful journey from Jerusalem to Damascus. But in Paul’s case, what appeared as one moment he was “breathing out murderous threats against the Lord’s disciples,” (Acts 9:1) and the next moment, he had begun “to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God” (Acts 9:20) was merely the beginning of God’s sovereign work in him. Paul still had to spend many years in obscurity, three years in Arabia (Galatians 1:18), and fourteen years in Syria and Cilicia (Galatians 1:21, 2:1) before joining Barnabas in public ministry following his Damascus conversion.

Still others experienced what would appear to be almost instantaneous turn arounds, whether through conversion experiences or dramatic life changes, like the criminal who was crucified beside Jesus. Moments after encountering Jesus, the man said to Jesus, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom,”

to which Jesus assured him, “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise” (Luke 23:42-43). Later, this man died and we believe he must have experienced in a very short period of time God’s gracious justification, sanctification, and glorification, with the result that he could spend eternity in paradise with Jesus. Thus, it God’s sovereign activity which has the power to change us into Christ’s likeness however He pleases.

Given that God is sovereign and that He does not need to inform us of what He is going to do beforehand, nevertheless, in His wisdom and by His grace, God still provided us with these basic truths concerning transformation. First, God’s Word commanded that we *be transformed*. Romans 12:1-2 clearly stated that transformation is the direct opposite behavior to sinful conformation. We are commanded “Do not [sinfully] conform...but *be transformed*.” The term “transformed” is the Greek word *metamorphoo*, which forms the root for the English word “metamorphosis.” There are three critical observations related to the verb *metamorphoo*: 1) Paul used the present tense, therefore, this is not an “on again, off again” transformation, but a continuous one; 2) the verb is passive, the implication being that the driver and catalyst in the transformation is God Himself; and 3) the verb is imperative, indicating that we have been commanded and we do indeed have a responsibility. Our responsibility is, as the Spirit “changes” us and enables us, that we offer ourselves completely to God (Krell 2010).

Second, God's Word assured us in 2 Corinthians 3:16-18 that God desires for us to be transformed in our present life on earth. "And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are *being transformed* into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit." The three significant observations of this Scripture passage are: 1) transformation is for all who believe; 2) the tense used for "are being transformed" is the present perfect, meaning transformation is to occur in the present, and in a continuous manner; and 3) that this transformation is by the power and work of the Holy Spirit.

Third, God's Word promised us in Philippians 3:18-20 that our transformation will not be completed until the second coming of Jesus from heaven, and at which time, Christ will bring everything under His control. Scripture teaches that while we are on this earth, we will experience the spiritual transformation of our person into Christ's likeness according to God's work and timing in our lives. But when Christ comes, all believers will ultimately be transformed, spiritually and physically into beings fit to meet Jesus. One of His first sovereign acts when Jesus comes *will* be to "*transform* our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body" (Philippian 3:21). Consequently, believers are instructed to wait eagerly for 1) our heavenly citizenship; 2) the Lord's second coming; and 3) the completion of our transformation. Paul's great treatise concerning the resurrection of Christ leaves us without a doubt what God's ultimate intent is:

“I declare to you, brothers and sisters, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be *changed*— in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. *For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality.*” (1 Corinthians 15:50-53)

This passage teaches that those who are looking forward to the coming age when Christ shall reign supreme will live their lives being far less concerned about the things of this world.

These Scriptures concerning our sure and certain transformation should encourage us all the more to trust God, that in His own time and way, regardless of whether or not we fully understand what or how God is working, we can be confident that God will act sovereignly to change us to become like His Son.

These same Scriptures also provided us with ideas about the likely areas of our lives which our sovereign God desires to change. One of the primary targeted area for change which emerges from the Romans 12:1-2 passage is that God desires to transform our sinful thinking and behavior. Consequently, we are commanded to “not conform [any longer] to the [sinful] pattern of this world” but “be transformed by the renewing of [our] mind” (Romans 12:1). God’s abhorrence and hatred is directed at sin and the sin in us in all its vices and forms. That is what God wants to transform in us. We will know we have been gradually transformed when our minds become more focussed on and interested in the “testing and approving of what God’s will is” rather than on joining in with whatever the world is doing (Romans 12:2).

Another area in our lives that God seeks to transform is our capacity and appetite for loving Him. The 2 Corinthians 3:16-18 text highlights this understanding. God seeks to be with us face to face as He originally was, sharing face to face fellowship with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. However, due to the Fall and of the entrance of sin into our lives, Paul explained that there is now ‘a veil’ which has been placed around us, which obscures our vision of God and His glory. It is God’s desire then to remove this veil so that “we all, who with unveiled faces [might more ably and fully] contemplate the Lord’s glory.” Isn’t this what all of us as believers desire, the uninhibited freedom and will to love God and worship Him with all our heart, soul and mind? When this begins to occur, we will know that God’s transformative work has been effective in our lives.

We shall conclude our study of this divine transformation by considering two ways through which we might cooperate more fully with God while He is seeking to transform us. The first way mentioned in Romans 12:1-2 is that we might cooperate more fully with the Lord through our offering of our “bodies as a living sacrifice.” The imagery used here implies that we are to present ourselves as a burnt offering to God. Put bluntly, we are to be willing to die to ourselves and to surrender ourselves wholly to God for whatever changes He wishes to accomplish in us.

The concept of dying to self is not a new one to us. We understand that our conversion is a sort of death. Being “born again” involves the death of our

present self and the rebirth of a new self. No wonder Nicodemus balked at the thought, “How can someone be born when they are old?” Nicodemus asked.

“Surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother’s womb to be born!”

(John 3:4) Similarly, our understanding of baptism includes the idea of death:

Don’t you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his *death*? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into *death* in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. (Romans 6:3-4)

Even our understanding of repentance from sin is taught in terms of death:

“He himself bore our sins” in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; “by his wounds you have been healed” (1 Peter 2:24).

Finally, Jesus taught His disciples about their need to die to self in their quest to follow Him:

“The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. Anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. *Whoever serves me must follow me*; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me. (John 12:23-26)

But the most well-known teaching from Jesus about our need to die to self for His sake is: “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. (Luke 9:23)

If our desire truly is for God to transform us daily into becoming more like Jesus, our part in the God and human partnership must be to deny ourselves and to take up our cross daily. Willard summed up dying to self in this way: “What we

surely can say is that those who are dead to self are not controlled in thought, feeling, or action by self-exaltation or by the will to have their own way [any longer], but are [now] easily controlled by love of God and neighbor” (Willard 2002, 73). This is the first way we can cooperate more fully with the transformative work that God is already doing in our lives.

The second way we collaborate with God in transforming us is through the renewing of our minds (Romans 12:2). While God is certainly supernaturally involved in the renewal of our minds, the Scriptures also clearly taught us that we too can significantly alter how we think. Paul and Peter both offer excellent guidance on this subject. Even though Paul believed that we are sinful, nevertheless, we can still undermine our sin nature through our thinking and behaving Christianly:

Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. 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. (Philippians 3:8-9)

Peter, in a parallel passage, also recommended that we renew our minds by pursuing spiritual qualities. There is a great resemblance between Peter’s list of qualities and the list of the fruits of the Spirit provided by Paul in Galatians 5:22-23:

For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, mutual affection; and to mutual affection, love. For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But whoever does not have them is nearsighted and blind, forgetting that they have been cleansed from their past sins. (2 Peter 1:5-9)

In summary, divine transformation is where God works sovereignly to change us while we cooperate with Him by minimizing our resistance to His work. Even though God performed a dramatic transforming work on Saul on the Damascus road, nevertheless, God still required Paul to undertake many years of practicing the renewing of his mind and also to practice producing the fruits of the Spirit before God used him in public ministry. We believe that during those periods in obscurity, God continued to sovereignly transform Paul. But God's transforming work didn't stop there. God continued to work in Paul's life throughout the entire time he was active in ministry. At the end of Paul's life, he was able to testify of God's faithful and sovereign transformative work:

I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing. (2 Timothy 4:7-8)

There are no shortcuts to the divine transforming process. We may or may not like the way God sovereignly acts to change us. Sometimes God works

rapidly and at other times, nothing seems to happen for a long time. Sometimes, we can predict the results. But at other times, we can't even understand what is or had happened. But the spiritual formation partnership between God and us still holds and it still requires us to collaborate with God despite whatever way God may choose to transform us.

Reflection and Discussion Questions

1. What are some of your frustrations about God's sovereign activity in transformation?
2. Reflecting on your own life, what are some evidences that God has been transforming you?
3. What is one way you can cooperate with God while He is transforming you to become like Christ?

To Reformation: What Will It Be Like When We Have Been Transformed?

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the *new creation* has come: The old has gone, the *new* is here! (2 Corinthians 5:17)

Spiritual formation is a God and human partnership and process by which believers are transformed into Christ's likeness. A person who repents from sin and turns towards Christ is said to have turned from following the pattern of this sinful world and thus he or she has turned 'from deformation'. Consequently, he or she has taken their first steps on the road 'through conformation' towards 'reformation', Figure 7.

Through the three laneways, formation through the Gospel, formation through the spiritual disciplines, and formation through divine transformation, the believer is changed gradually and incrementally into Christ's likeness. Oftentimes, the believer will only realize that they have been changed spiritually when they compare where they were with where they presently find themselves. Only then will they be able to discern how they were previously deformed and how they have now been re-formed! The biblical image of a person who has made the journey from deformation to reformation is that of becoming "a new creation" (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Reformation is the final stage that we have to study and think about but ironically, it is not the final stage at all; it is yet another beginning! We will come to see this part of the spiritual formation process as the launching pad for the God and human partnership and process to cycle and to repeat all over again. The spiritual formation process continues to repeat itself in part because we recognize that while one part of our character has been re-formed, there remain so many other areas which still need to change. By receiving vital input and affirmations of our progress from self-reflection, from the community surrounding us, and also from the Holy Spirit, we will likely be called by God to begin the process again, see Figure 8.



Figure 8. We are gradually reformed each time we complete another lap of ‘From Deformation to Reformation.’

In my own spiritual formation journey, especially through this process of writing on spiritual formation, I have joyfully discovered through retrospective self-reflection, that indeed, I have been transformed in the some areas of my life.

To illustrate, I believe my life-long obsession with cars has been transformed by God. When I was younger, I would habitually be envious of other people’s automobiles, especially new cars! I grew up in a ministry family with limited means, and so my parents would always opt for buying cheaper domestic economy cars. I have no doubt that this only served to intensify my obsession to own my own exotic sports car when I became a grown up. Sure enough, when I became an adult, the kind of car I yearned to own and drive developed into something bordering on idolatry. I recall God speaking to both me and my wife about this materialistic fixation of mine. We decided after a time of prayer, that a

fitting way to curb my idolatry was to refrain from ever buying a new car, and that we would always, as a spiritual discipline, only own used practical vehicles. I am pleased to say that after more than a decade of keeping this rule, this materialistic craving is no longer an obsession for me!

Other examples of spiritual transformation that have taken root in my life that have been a direct result of practicing the spiritual disciplines include developing a prayer life through the use of a journal; learning how to tithe; and learning how to serve my family by doing household chores without grumbling. Despite these triumphs, there remain a whole host of areas in my life that God is still working to change in my life, and an equally impressive list which the Holy Spirit has already identified as areas which need to be addressed in the near future.

Thus having ascertained some progress in our spiritual formation, the reformation phase becomes an invaluable time to celebrate what God has done, what God is continuing to do, and to anticipate the new areas which God wants to address. This reformation stage is a most fitting time to celebrate with and appreciate the faith community around us. It is a time to acknowledge the indispensable role they have played in our spiritual formation. It is also a time to give thanks to God and to appreciate the continuing ministry of the Holy Spirit in our lives. It is also a time to recognize and appreciate the faith community as the safe refuge and place wherein we have experienced our transformation.

The Gospel of Luke records in chapter 15 Jesus' three parables concerning the lost sheep, lost coin, and lost son. After finding of the lost sheep, the lost coin,

and the lost son, there was much rejoicing and celebration. Jesus said, “Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.’ I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent. (Luke 15:6-7) This is the kind of celebration that needs to take place in the family and in the Christian community when believers have moved successfully from deformation to reformation. We already recognize baptisms and confirmations, so why shouldn’t we make a big deal when achieving spiritual formation milestones? When we cheer on someone who has made a break with materialism, or who has taken another step of faith in the right direction of transformation, we should celebrate them and rejoice with them (see Figure 9).

In all the congregations I have pastored, all the baptism and confirmation candidates, on the day of their ceremony, have been given an opportunity to share with the congregation their testimony of how they came to faith in Jesus. Most testimonies name one or several individuals who have played an influential role in helping them reach their spiritual milestone. This is a wonderful thing, and it should take place more often! For no believer can successfully journey from deformation through conformation, through various means of formation and transformation, and get to reformation without the support and encouragement of many from their faith family.



Figure 9. We celebrate with those who have been transformed by going through the spiritual formation process.

Paul Pettit added that the change we achieve from spiritual formation is not just for ourselves or solely for self improvement, but rather, “Christians are to be in process and undergoing renovation so that the individual believer is able to influence and interact with others in more Christ like manner. Christians are in process for influence” (Pettit 2008, 19). Thus, we see the community helping the individual in his or her transformation and in turn, the community is also affectively transformed by that changed individual believer.

The song “Change my heart O God” is a wonderful prayer expressing one’s most earnest plea to God for spiritual transformation. It would also be tremendously fitting to repeat the song but modify the lyrics to “Change *our* hearts O God” thus reflecting the prayers of the entire congregation. In reality, every individual believer is likewise on a spiritual formation journey, whether

they realize it or not. Some believers are making progress in their transformation while others are stuck at various stages between ‘from deformation to reformation’. But all of us need the concerted support and the encouragement of the whole community, our immediate family, our extended family, our small groups, our mentors, prayer partners, and pastors, if we are going to move successfully from deformation to reformation.

The author of the letter of Hebrews summed up the role of the believing community best: “Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith. (Hebrews 12:1-2)

Besides acknowledging the very necessary role that our Christian community plays in our spiritual formation process, the other person we need thank and to acknowledge is the Person of the Holy Spirit. While it may seem that I have merely added the work and person of the Holy Spirit onto the end of the spiritual formation model, the truth is that the Holy Spirit has been integrally involved in the formation of believers right from the start. Given that our spiritual formation model is structured as a repeating cycle, this mention of the Holy Spirit in the Reformation chapter means the Holy Spirit actually starts the spiritual formation process in believers.

The person of the Holy Spirit is the ‘God’ in the God and human partnership involved in our spiritual formation. The Scriptures abound with texts

which identify the Holy Spirit as the One most responsible for our spiritual formation and transformation. The unfortunate truth is, we often fail to fully and properly recognize and appreciate the ministry of the Holy Spirit in our lives. This is something in which we need to humbly confess, repent from, and ask for the Holy Spirit's forgiveness. The following list from J. K. Jones outlines the massive investment and effort undertaken by the Holy Spirit to divinely transform us into Christ's likeness:

1. The Holy Spirit enables us to know Christ through the Scriptures (John 14:17, 26)
2. The Holy Spirit enables the Church to make Christ known, leading to our hearing about Jesus (i.e. builds up the church - Romans 12:3-8; 1 Corinthians 12:1-11; 14:12; Ephesians 4:12-16; and 1 Peter 4:10, 11)
3. The Holy Spirit indwells in us after conversion, thereby the Spirit is able to continually form and transform us (Romans 8:9-11; 1 Corinthians 6:19; 2 Corinthians 1:21, 22; Galatians 4:6; and others).
4. The Holy Spirit fills us (i.e. on-going filling, *pletho* - Acts 2:4; 4:8; 4:31; 9:17; and 13:9)
5. The Holy Spirit teaches us (*dedaxei* from *didasko* - John 14:26)
6. The Holy Spirit reminds us (*hupomimnesko* - John 14:26; Luke 22:61; 2 Timothy 2:14; Titus 3:1; 3 John 10; and Jude 5)
7. The Holy Spirit guides us (*hodege* - John 16:13)
8. The Holy Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God, and makes them known to us (*eraunao* - 1 Corinthians 2:10, 11)
9. The Holy Spirit testifies to us (*summartureo* - Romans 8:16)
10. The Holy Spirit helps us (*sunantilambano* - Romans 8:26)
11. The Holy Spirit intercedes for us (*entunchano* - Romans 8:26)
12. The Holy Spirit convicts us (*elencho* - John 16:8)
13. The Holy Spirit enlightens us (*photizo* - Ephesians 1:18)
14. The Holy Spirit changes us (1 Samuel 10:6)
(Jones Jr. 2013)

In summary, when we perceived we have journeyed successfully from deformation through to reformation for some specific area in our lives, we need to

pause and do these four things: celebrate by giving thanks to God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit; acknowledge the support and encouragement we have received from our Christian family and community; reflect and reassess with God's help where in our lives we still need to change; and then relaunch and repeat the spiritual formation process all over again. And as we do this, we can be assured that God is pleased with us and will continue to help change us to become more and more like Jesus until the Lord Jesus comes again.

But now, this is what the Lord says— he who created you, Jacob, he who *formed* you, Israel: “Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine. (Isaiah 43:1)

Reflection and Discussion Questions

1. Who are the people in your life who have been the most supportive and influential in your spiritual formation journey?
2. How might you show them your gratitude?
3. Where have you experienced the transforming ministry of the Holy Spirit in your life?
4. Pause this moment to give your thanks and praise to the Holy Spirit.

Conclusion

My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is *formed* in you... (Galatians 4:19)

We have studied the biblical texts and described in some detail a model of a spiritual formation process which governs how each believer is changed by God.

Spiritual formation is a God and human partnership and process by which believers are transformed into Christ's likeness.

The Apostle Paul described this process to be likened to parents waiting for their baby to be born. Paul went so far as to imagine himself as the expectant mother in the "pains of childbirth!" We can certainly understand and appreciate with expectant parents how they might feel. There is great anticipation and hopefulness before the baby arrives. However, there is also a great commitment to caution, perseverance and patience during the entire pregnancy term until the child is actually born.

For all of us who labor in the ministry of helping people to be formed spiritually, such must also be our attitude and temperament. While we eagerly desire to see people formed in Christ, we cannot rush the process. We must patiently wait and continue diligently to pray, to care and to love. We see this in how physicians educate and guide expectant mothers all about the birthing process but let the baby determine the natural course and time of its birth. In the same way, for all of us who realize that we too are in the spiritual formation process ourselves and are ourselves being spiritually formed, we must be just as patient, diligent, and faithful while Christ is being formed in us.

So, what have we learnt about the spiritual formation process? We have learnt that when a person comes to faith in Jesus, his or her saying 'yes' to Jesus includes their saying 'yes' to making life changes and also to letting God change them. We have learnt that both seekers and believers need to be taught a biblical

model of spiritual formation; understanding how the God and human partnership and process works will truly alleviate the frustration and confusion which often arise when believers don't know how spiritual change will take place.

We have learnt that churches and church leaders need to be held responsible and accountable for not only teaching spiritual formation but also for implementing strategies to keep spiritual formation at the fore of their disciple-making efforts. We have learnt that spiritual formation begins when we realized we have been deformed by the sinful pattern of this world and we need to turn from our deformity and turn to Jesus in repentance. We have learnt that only by presenting the whole Gospel, which includes the instruction about the spiritual formation process, will believers be led to becoming more like Jesus. We have learnt that the 'human' part of the spiritual formation partnership involves the use and practice of spiritual disciplines. We have learnt that the God who divinely transforms us does so sovereignly; as a result, we must learn to trust and to submit ourselves to Him even more faithfully because only God knows best how to transform us.

We have learnt that spiritual formation is a lifelong process and that the cycle from deformation to reformation repeats itself many times in our lifetime until the day we finally meet Jesus. We have learnt that effective spiritual formation requires the involvement and support of the whole faith community; for it is only with their help that we will receive a true picture of our own spiritual progress. We have learnt that we need to celebrate the ministry of the Holy Spirit

often, to worship Him, and as much as is possible, to help our people appreciate and acknowledge the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

We have already alluded to the Apostle Paul's self-portrayal, envisioning himself as a pregnant mother awaiting the spiritual formation of his spiritual children. In the same way, Jesus awaits our spiritual transformation, "until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. (Ephesians 4:13) It is clear that God desires to change us into Christ's likeness. We simply have to know how to cooperate more fully with Him. We need to do our part and then allow the Holy Spirit to do His part in us.

SECTION III:
LEADING A GROUP OF LEADERS FROM
CELEBRATION PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH,
MARKHAM, THROUGH A SPIRITUAL
FORMATION COURSE
A RESEARCH PROJECT

This research project addressed a need of many Christians today, a need that has arisen in my own life as well as in the lives of many of my congregants. This need is for a cohesive understanding of how a Christian must and can change to become more like Jesus. Many discipleship and Christian education curricula used in our church only cover certain aspects of this topic. I believe there is a need to provide every congregant in my church with an overall understanding of how one is spiritually formed and transformed to become more like Christ. The spiritual formation course employed in this research project was written for mature believers who are familiar with the use of Scriptures.

Seekers who have not yet become believers could also benefit from being given the whole picture of what becoming a Christian entails. Besides Christ's offer of salvation and eternal life in heaven, seekers need to know that saying 'yes' to Jesus also means saying 'yes' to living their lives for Jesus and being

willing to change to become more like Him throughout their lives. The spiritual formation course used in this project would not entirely be suitable for seekers because the content presently construed rely heavily on Scriptural references and teachings.

Believers who are younger in the faith also need a better roadmap for their faith journey if they hope to progress consistently and intentionally. Although they cannot see what's coming around the next corner of their spiritual journey, they should be able to understand the process by which God will shape and transform them until the day they see Jesus face to face. With the addition of more relatable life and faith illustrations, this course may readily be adaptable for use among younger believers.

But this project and course was developed primarily for believers who have been Christians for a long time, who may have sinful areas of their life that are resistant to change. These faithful brothers and sisters need specific and practical insights to help them break through their spiritual plateaus and obstacles. They need the assurance that an overview of the spiritual formation process can provide—they need the assurance that they will eventually be transformed just as long as they persevere and are on the right track. The Session elders of Celebration Presbyterian Church, chosen for this project, are such a group of believers who, without exception, have followed Jesus for many years. Yet despite their years of faith and ministry, they have not yet learned nor been made fully aware of the spiritual formation process.

The mission of Jesus to the church as revealed in Ephesians 4:11-13 is to build us up until we attain “the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.” Spiritual formation is a God and human partnership and process by which believers are transformed into Christ’s likeness, thus attaining the whole measure of the fullness of Christ:

So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

For this same reason Paul explained to the believers in Galatia why he had labored so diligently in the ministry: “My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until *Christ is formed in you*” (Galatians 4:19, emphasis mine). This lack of understanding, the need to become like Jesus, but not knowing how one can become more like Jesus, must and should be addressed.

One way this need can be met is by means of a basic course on spiritual formation. As a pilot project, this project’s intention was only to address the needs of believers and not of unbelievers. Course participants were led to examine Scriptures which revealed a model of how believers are to progress in their faith. Besides providing focused biblical teaching, the course also provided individual spiritual growth assessment and feedback. Opportunities for deeper faith dialogues, prayer and accountability structured into the sessions were given to encourage participants to take the spiritual formation next steps that are needed for their continued spiritual growth.

Spiritual formation can be defined as a God and human partnership and process by which believers are transformed into Christ's likeness. Grasping this concept of partnership and process is fundamental for every growing Christian but this spiritual formation instruction is often weak or missing.

I only became aware of this deficiency through the discipline of writing my spiritual autobiography (see Section I). Reflecting back on my life, I discovered that there were many life periods, especially in my young adulthood, when a fuller understanding of spiritual formation would have been so helpful; times when I felt like I had lost my way; times when I had abandoned my faith and pursued other goals; times when I didn't and couldn't sense God's presence; and times when I didn't understand what God wanted from me nor what He wanted me to do with my life. Upon sharing some of these experiences as part of a talk given during a church retreat, many in the audience echoed that they too had encountered some of these same experiences of feeling lost and wished they had a more complete understanding of the process by which God forms and transforms us. The result was the writing of the "Change My Heart O God" curriculum, a basic course on spiritual formation (see Section II).

In looking at my own pastoral ministry over the past twenty-five years in Canada, I am critically aware that I have not provided this type of spiritual formation instruction nor used any curriculum which addressed this topic comprehensively. In reading Carson and Lueken's *Renovation of the Church*, my suspicions were confirmed that other pastors too have concluded that their

churches have failed to adequately provide this type of spiritual formation teaching for their people and now find themselves needing to “reshape the theological and conceptual foundation of [their] church around spiritual formation (Carson and Lucken 2011, 39). In Wilhoit’s *Spiritual Formation as if the Church Mattered*, he also addressed this need and consequently provided an entire chapter detailing the kind of curriculum churches must provide in order to adequately teach spiritual formation (Wilhoit 2008, 38-55). In Willard’s *Renovation of the Heart*, after the author went so far as to call most of what goes on in local congregations as simple “distraction,” (Willard 2002) he then grounded God’s plan for spiritual formation around Matthew 28:18-20, and formulated the church’s plan for spiritual formation to be: 1) making apprentices of Jesus, 2) immersing the apprentices in the Trinitarian presence, and 3) transforming apprentices (Willard 2002). I am in agreement with this literature and therefore conclude that teaching spiritual formation must also be foundational for the church’s teaching and disciple making.

The response to the identified need was therefore to employ “Change My Heart O God” as the resource for teaching a basic course on spiritual formation. This project offered this course initially as a pilot program to the church leaders: the pastoral staff and elders of the congregation. This initial course offering did produce a positive impact on the leadership, and with their support, this course will be offered to everyone in the congregation in the near future.

The impact of the course was measured by participants completing a spiritual life assessment tool prior to the course and again after the completion of the course; they also completed weekly questionnaires which tracked their progress while attending the course. Finally, a course feedback form ascertained what personal spiritual formation next steps, if any, were taken as a result of the course. This project found that going through a basic spiritual formation course was effective in providing participants with a cohesive picture of their spiritual formation and it contributed positively to their spiritual progress and growth.

The positive impact on the leadership was evidenced by hearing participants' testimonials of how the course had benefitted their spiritual lives. Another tangible impact would have been to see some actual life changes which could be attributed directly or indirectly to their participation in the course. However, due to short five-week period of the project, it was not possible to see or to verify these life changes. The project produced data which supported the conclusion that completion of a basic course in spiritual formation was indeed an effective way to help believers be fully informed of their need to become more like Christ, to understand how to change and the spiritual formation process involved in making those changes, and as a direct result of all that they have learnt, to be able to apply one spiritual formation next step into their lives. The spiritual formation course is only one small part in a life-long process of spiritual formation. The life long process must necessarily include but is not limited to the following: the life long guidance and intervention of the Holy Spirit in the life of

the believer, the accountability of other believers, spiritual coaching and mentoring, the support and encouragement of the whole faith community, and much extended time and opportunity in the learning, adopting and practice of the spiritual disciplines.

Since the results were positive and beneficial, the eventual goal was then for every congregant to be invited to have the opportunity to go through the spiritual formation course. Ideally, the future courses would be led and taught by some of these same leaders who have now completed the course. In this way, the principles of spiritual formation could be repeated and reinforced in the original participants.

A future hope, though this is beyond the scope of this project, is to envision the use of this basic spiritual formation resource by other Canadian Asian, second generation, evangelical pastors and leaders for the needs of their own congregations.

Spiritual formation is defined as a God and human partnership and process by which believers are transformed into Christ's likeness. The following diagrams illustrate the spiritual formation process and model as developed in the "Change My Heart O God" curriculum from Section II.

Imagine the start of a marathon race as in Figure 10 below (same as Figure 1). All the participants in the marathon are at the Start/Finish line, ready to run or walk the multiple laps in the race circuit in order to complete the entire course of

the race. The spectators and cheerleaders are lined up on either side of the course to cheer on the runners.



Figure 10. The spiritual formation process is like a marathon race.

We are reminded of this very scenario in Hebrews 12:1, “Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.” As believers, we are the participants in the spiritual formation process, a spiritual road course set up by God for us for the purpose of forming and transforming us into Christ’s likeness, as in Figure 11. The race course is a circuit where we will need to pass through that Start/Finish line, which is the ‘From Deformation To Reformation’ line, many times in our lifetime in order to become more like Jesus. The road ‘From Deformation to Reformation’, necessarily passes ‘Through Conformation’, which consists of three lanes, ‘Formation through the Gospel’, ‘Formation through Spiritual

Disciplines’, and ‘Formation through Divine Transformation’. All of these terms will be briefly outlined here but were fully defined and explained in the actual course. The dotted lane markings on the road indicate that the three ‘Formation’ lanes are not exclusive but are complementary with one another. And those who line the course are the great cloud of believers, both past and present, who inspire, mentor, encourage and cheer us along the way until we complete the race marked out for us. This spiritual formation process ends when, by God’s grace, we see Jesus face to face and are then fully transformed in His presence.

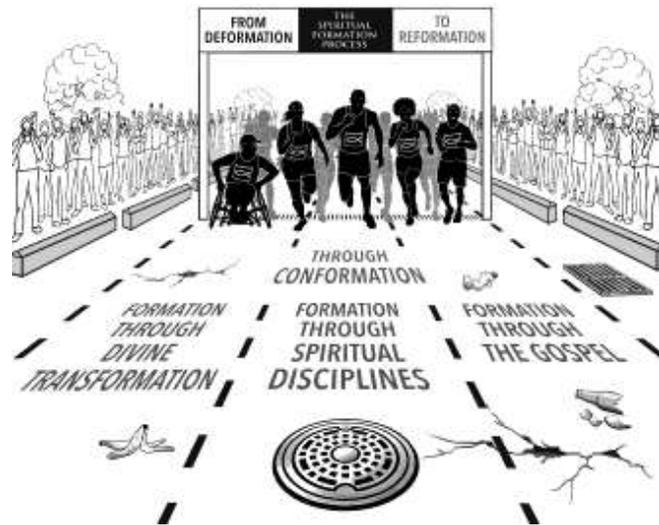


Figure 11. The spiritual formation process begins at ‘From Deformation.’

“Deformation” is the sinful status in which we find ourselves when we have conformed to the “pattern of this world” (Romans 12:2). Our lives are deformed on account of our “evil desires” and our living “in ignorance” (1 Peter 1:14). We cannot begin to change to become more like Christ until we have willingly admitted and repented of becoming deformed and turned towards

reformation, through godly conformation, which is “to be conformed to the image of his Son” (Romans 8:29). When repenting from deformation, we have to be mindful of both active and passive sin. Active sin occurs when we actively choose to sin or when we actively choose to omit doing the things we know we ought to be doing, thereby also resulting in sin. Passive sin is when the sinful actions of others indirectly compromised us and those acts inevitably also lead to our sinful condition.

“Formation through the Gospel” describes the believer’s discovery, understanding, acceptance, and surrender to the revealed Word of God. Formation through the whole Gospel includes being shaped by the message of salvation—the Gospel presentation (John 3:16-18) and the messenger of salvation—the risen Lord Jesus Christ (John 14:6). God alone is responsible for providing us with the Gospel but we are responsible for embracing the whole Gospel.

“Formation through the Spiritual Disciplines” describes primarily our responsibility in the God and human partnership to “change” (Matthew 18:3), to “work out [our] salvation with fear and trembling” (Philippians 2:12-13), and to “put off [our] old self” and to “put on the new self” (Ephesians 4:22-25). In this spiritual pathway, believers lovingly and willingly respond to God’s love by engaging in the practice of spiritual disciplines. A spiritual discipline can be anything which keeps us in constant relationship with Jesus and which opens us up to God (Mulholland 1985, 114).

“Formation through Divine Transformation” describes God’s responsibility in the God and human partnership to transform us “until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ” (Ephesians 4:11-13). The Scriptures clearly showed that divine transformation is God’s sovereign activity in the believer’s life even as we are commanded to be open to the Lord’s transforming work (Romans 12:2), even as we cooperate with the Lord’s present on-going transformation (2 Corinthians 3:16-18), and even as we anticipate our future transformation which will only be completed at Jesus’ second coming (Philippians 3:18-20).

Finally, “To Reformation” is the state of joyful recognition that by God’s grace, by our humble obedience, by the constant ministry of the Holy Spirit, by our faithful practice of spiritual disciplines, and by the sovereign transforming work of God, some tangible change has finally taken place in the believer’s life. The believer has now been re-formed in some area of his or her life and the believer now reflects a bit more of the Savior than before. It is a time for rejoicing and celebration with the Christian community, and a time for thanksgiving to God. It is also the time when oftentimes, the Holy Spirit re-directs the believer’s attention to another area of his or her life that needs to change. And so the spiritual formation process repeats itself again in the “from Deformation to Reformation” cycle. The full manuscript of the five sessions of the curriculum

used in the research project was taken from the *Change My Heart O God* manual found in Section II of this portfolio.. The five sessions of the course were:

Session 1 – Introduction to Spiritual Formation

Session 2 – From Deformation to Reformation through Conformation

Session 3 – Formation through the Gospel

Session 4 – Formation through the Spiritual Disciplines

Session 5 – Formation through Divine Transformation

As the project director and pastor of Celebration Presbyterian Church, Markham, I am accountable to the Session and consequently needed their permission and blessing to 1) take the necessary time to conduct this research, and 2) make use of church facilities and resources to conduct this research. At the September meeting of Session, I introduced the proposed project and requested Session's formal approval for permission to conduct this project in the church and in the time frame set out for the project. I received Session's approval.

The next step was to recruit the participants for the research project. Information letters outlining the objectives of the project and requirements of the participants, and consent forms were distributed to the entire Session. The Session consisted of eight elders and two pastoral staff. See Appendix A for the Information Letter and Consent Form. Out of ten possible participants, five elders signed their consent form and agreed to participate in the research project by attending the five-week spiritual formation course.

**Context:
Where Are We Now?**

I am the pastor of Celebration Presbyterian Church, Markham where this project was carried out and from which the participants of the study were recruited. I have been leading this congregation for the past eight years and believe I now have the requisite understanding of the faith needs of the people and their trust in terms of providing this spiritual care to them. Moreover, I strongly believe that Celebration Church is where God has called me to serve long-term.

In total, I have been in pastoral ministry for twenty-five years, all of which have been carried out within the Presbyterian Church in Canada (PCC). My conversion and subsequent growth in faith and maturity have also taken place within this same denomination. So, there are strong reasons for me to want to see some new development in disciple making in the PCC through this spiritual formation research project. My hope is that this research will lead to an increase in ministry effectiveness, both in the local congregational context and in the larger denominational context.

Celebration Church is a church plant which emerged from the downtown Chinese Presbyterian Church, Toronto in 1996. When commuting downtown became too time consuming for suburban families with young children, some of these families started a new congregation in the suburbs with the blessing of the mother church. Celebration Church is a predominantly Canadian-Asian, second and third generation, English-speaking congregation with a membership roll of 127 members and adherents.

As a suburban congregation, the people of Celebration Church are mainly middle to upper middle class in socio-economic status, with most of the working adults being white-collar professionals. Of the 63 households on the membership roll, nearly 80% of the families comprise of married couples with or without children and the remainder 20% of the households are singles. At present, the children of many of the families have already grown up and are now at young adult age. These young adults, which number over 40 individuals, are our congregation's greatest pride and joy, and they are also our greatest ministry challenge and concern.

From its inception, Celebration Church has tried to take seriously the task of providing quality Christian Education to ensure that the parents' faith gets successfully passed on to the next generation. Now that the children have grown up, the church anxiously awaits to find out whether the efforts invested in the children and youth ministry in earlier years have been adequate and whether these young adults will indeed continue in their faith. Although no formal study of our young adults has yet been attempted, there are early signs indicating some mixed results; while the majority of the young adults have thus far held onto their faith, some young adults have indeed left the church and some have also not continued in their faith.

While this research project is relevant and important to all believers in general, I believe it could be especially timely and relevant to our congregation at present time in this way: the conclusions from this research could provide the

church with a more effective tool to better safeguard the faith of the next generation young adults. Although the project was not originally designed to address the needs of the young adults of the church, as pastors and elders, we all want to ensure that our young adults are secure in their faith, and potentially through the outcome of this project. Now that they are on the cusp of leaving home and coming into their independence, we want, all the more, to be assured that the faith of these young adults will not just survive, but will thrive in the world.

Providing and teaching an overview of the spiritual formation process is really about further equipping each believer to know how to self-diagnose where they are at spiritually. The 5-week basic spiritual formation course does this by providing participants with feedback through a spiritual life assessment tool; the course also equips participants with an overall understanding of how a believer can grow and become more Christ-like throughout his or her life; and lastly, it will show them what they need to do to take their next spiritual growth step.

This research project, while seeking to initially equip the Session leaders with spiritual formation instruction, will be a pilot project for the congregation. If participation in the 5-week basic spiritual formation course proves effective and produces a positive outcome, then the entire congregation, and especially the young adults, will be encouraged to complete the course.

This project recruited participants from the Session for the following four reasons: 1) they were already matured believers – they will put my conviction to

the test that some mature believers may not have received a cohesive understanding of spiritual formation and may still benefit from taking a course in spiritual formation; 2) they were the most open to participating because they too were keen to improve in their faith and ministry; 3) they were the most dedicated members on my ministry team and were leaders with whom I am most motivated to equip and develop; and 4) they were best positioned to support the future delivery of the course if and when the course will be offered to others in the congregation.

The Session consisted of 8 elders who have been elected and ordained by the congregation to serve 6-year terms. The average age of the present eldership is approximately 49 years old; the gender ratio is balanced with 4 men and 4 women; all of whom have university/college level or higher education and are employed in professional careers. All the elders have made vows to serve according to the following terms of their eldership:

- be a committed Christian
- be a regular attendee of public worship
- be a professing member of Celebration Church
- be a person of sound judgment and upright character
- be a person knowledgeable or prepared to learn of the government of the church
- be an “example to the believers in speech, conduct, love, faith and purity (1 Timothy 4:12; see also 1 Timothy 3:1-13, Titus 1:5-9, 1 Peter 5:1-4)

- be a spiritual leader for the congregation

Additionally, the Session also included two supporting pastoral staff responsible for the small group ministries and the youth and young adult ministries.

From my vantage point, I believe these Session members do enjoy their leadership roles and also that our congregation deeply appreciates their ministry. All of them have served multi-years and have have been voted to stayed on beyond their initial term of service.

Models: Where Are We Going?

The spiritual formation model which undergirded my faith, philosophy and practice of ministry was shaped through my own faith journey. It emerged gradually and primarily as a result of the learning received through the Doctor of Ministry program courses and assignments undertaken in the past three years.

In writing my spiritual autobiography, *Come Follow Me: Following the Gracious Invitations of Jesus*, I came to the realization that God had been graciously calling me to follow Him throughout my entire life. In many instances however, I only saw God's gracious activity in my life in retrospect. Many times, because I didn't yet know or recognized God's calling, I didn't and couldn't consistently follow Him. But despite my many failures to follow, I also realized how God never abandoned me.

Early in life, before I came to an effective understanding of how God calls, I based my life choices according to my own knowledge of right and wrong, and

of good and bad. Some of these decisions caused me to distance myself from God, but other decisions drew me back to God. I didn't know it then but I was being shaped—sometimes negatively and sometimes positively through these life choices. Eventually, by God's grace, God used a variety of ways to draw me back to Himself: through my parents' encouragement, through difficult times and challenging life circumstances, through mentors, preachers and evangelists, through mission trips and even through attending seminary. Later still in life, after I had learned a bit more of how to recognize and accept God's invitations, I was then more able to follow Him consistently and intentionally.

My spiritual autobiography led me to ask the question: "Don't other Christians, especially those in my congregation, also have the same stories and experiences of being graciously called by God? Although the details of my life and my congregants may differ quite a bit, aren't the ways and the processes through which God calls and invites people to Himself similar in nature and in principle? I suspected that God's ways of calling us to Himself through His Word, through life's challenging circumstances, through people of faith, and through spiritual experiences may actually be quite similar.

Therefore, in writing my spiritual formation models paper, I began to explore this topic of how God calls and forms His people. I wondered, "Wouldn't it be beneficial for all of us at Celebration Church to become familiar with the basic spiritual formation principles that God uses to call us and to invite us to be shaped and transformed to become more like Jesus?" I then looked into Scriptures

and discovered that indeed the Bible had a lot to say about the God and human process and partnership that He uses to form and transform us into Christ's likeness. And although we all have unique lives, there is a common, basic process of spiritual formation. This is therefore the biblical model which I wish to share with the leaders at Celebration Church, and hopefully and eventually, with the whole congregation.

The key Scriptures used in teaching the model are: Romans 12:2 and 1 Peter 1:14 (From Deformation); Romans 1:16-17 and 2 Peter 1:3-4 (Formation through the Gospel); Philippians 2:12-13 and Ephesians 4:22-25 (Formation through Spiritual Disciplines); Romans 12:1-2, 2 Corinthians 3:16-18, and Philippians 3:18-20 (Formation through Divine Transformation); and 2 Corinthians 5:17 and Revelation 21:5 (To Reformation).

Key works on spiritual formation relevant to this project are: Kent Carson, and Mike Lueken's *Renovation of the Church: What Happens When a Seeker Church Discovers Spiritual Formation*, 2011; Robert Mulholland's three books on spiritual formation: *Shaped by the Word: The Power of Scripture in Spiritual Formation*, 1985; *Invitation to a Journey: A Road Map for Spiritual Formation*, 1993; and *The Deeper Journey: The Spirituality of Discovering Your True Self*, 2006. James C. Wilhoit's *Spiritual Formation as If Church Mattered. Growing in Christ through Community*, 2008; and Dallas Willard. *Renovation of the Heart: Putting on the Character of Christ*, 2002 (Carson and Lueken 2011, Mulholland

1985, 1993, 2006, Wilhoit 2008, Willard 2002). An annotated bibliography for these and a few other relevant books is in Appendix F.

Another key resource used in this research was the instrument used for data gathering and for measuring the participants' spiritual life. The instrument is Randy Frazee's *Christian Life Profile Assessment Tool* first developed in 1998 (Frazee, 2000). Since then, the author has had several updated versions of the assessment tool (Frazee, 2005). I was fortunate to be able to find a free version of the assessment dated 2000 (Frazee 2000) on the internet; the assessment tool has since been edited and published commercially. I formally asked for and received permission from Frazee to make use of his assessment tool for this project (see Appendix B). See also his Workbook (Frazee 2005).

**Methodology:
How Will We Get There
and How Will We Know We Are There?**

This section details the step by step decisions that were made to carry out this research project and their rationale for how this study was organized and carried out.

The Session of Celebration Church, which included two other pastoral staff and eight elders, all of whom are the recognized spiritual leaders of the congregation, were invited to participate in the research project. In the end, five of the ten leaders participated in the research project. In recruiting from the Session, I was careful to not coerce them into participating in the project. I assured the participants that their involvement was strictly voluntary. Participants must be

available and able to attend all five sessions of the 5-week course, once a week for 5 consecutive weeks, from 7:30 to 9 p.m., starting October 4th through to November 1st, 2017, to be held at Celebration Centre. The project's duration was five weeks to coincide with the five sessions of the course.

In this pilot project, the participants were all adults, both male and female, with ages ranging from the 40's to 50's. The participants all agreed to do the following: 1) to attend the spiritual formation course that was taught weekly by me; 2) to complete a spiritual life assessment instrument before and after the course and which was completed anonymously, identifiable only by a secret code known only to the participant; 3) to fill out a weekly questionnaire about their spiritual life, once again kept anonymously by secret code; 4) to complete a final course feedback form and evaluation form, also kept anonymously by secret code; 5) to actively participate in group discussion; 6) to select one spiritual formation 'next step' to apply into their lives upon completion of the course; and 7) to agree to allow all class and discussion sessions to be digitally recorded.

All of the participants were members of the Session, the leadership ministry team with whom I have a close working relationship and ministry oversight. The invitees do constitute a suitable group to participate in the project without causing undue awkwardness or feelings of unfairness to others in the congregation. The pilot status of this research project was communicated to the whole congregation.

This project explored and measured the impact the spiritual formation course had on the spiritual lives of the participants. I saw some of the following evidences of the impact of the course: changes in how participants described their daily or weekly spiritual routines, habits and disciplines; changes in how participants recorded their attitudes about faith and ministry; changes in thoughts and ideas about the Scriptures; and changes in convictions about God's will or God's work in their lives. The scoring results derived from the *Christian Life Profile Assessment Tool* taken before and after the course were compared and evidenced that changes had occurred in participants' beliefs, practices and virtues over the five weeks of the course. I also saw that the participants were able to indicate their application of some specific spiritual formation next step into the lives as a direct result of completing the five-week spiritual formation course.

This project was designed to be a participatory action research project following the principles set out in Tim Sensing's *Qualitative Research: A Multi-methods Approach to Projects for Doctor of Ministry Theses* (Sensing 2011). Sensing advocates a form of action research "that employs a multi-methods approach within a community located in a specific setting and is intended to bring transformation" (Sensing 2011, 54-55). More specifically, participatory action research is ideal for Doctor of Ministry projects which "introduces an intervention in order to provide ministerial leadership for the transformation of the organization" (Sensing 2011, 8). Key characteristics which make action research the methodology of choice for this project include: 1) the purpose of the research

is to solve a specific problem within a program, organization , or community (Sensing 2011, 59); 2) the approach of the inquiry is participatory and collaborative—participants and the inquiry facilitator work together as a group and as co-equals (Sensing 2011, 58-59); 3) the data to be collected, analyzed, and interpreted is qualitative data—“culturally specific and contextually rich data [that is] critical for the design, evaluation, and ongoing health of institutions like churches” (Sensing 2011, 58); 4) the intervention or solution that emerges from the research project is owned and shaped by the participants and researcher (Sensing 2011, 64), is repeatable and can be improved upon through an action research cycle (Sensing 2011, 64). An action research project cycle should flow in this way: 1) contextual experience; 2) identifying a problem; 3) taking action; 4) collection and analyzing data; 5) decisions about future actions; and 6) cycle back to contextual experience (Sensing 2011, 64).

Following the methodology outlined above, this project was originally organized to be an action research project. However, due to two missed steps in the action research methodology, namely, the failure to collaborate with the project participants at the outset to discover a solution to the problem together and also the failure to incorporate any input from the participants prior to writing up the research, this cannot be formally classified as an action research project. The project did set out to address a perceived problem; which I, the researcher, proposed a solution to the problem. The data collected was largely qualitative data. The outcome and implications of the project now jointly belong to the researcher

and the participants. And finally, the project can be repeatable and improved upon following the action research project cycle.

The following describe in detail how the spiritual formation course was taught, how data was collected, what data collecting instruments were used, and how the collected data was interpreted and will be shared. The purpose for this research 'recipe' is to enable other like-minded inquirers to be able to repeat and build upon the findings and outcomes from this project if they so choose.

The spiritual formation course was taught using appropriate pedagogical methods for adults: for example, there was use of interactive lectures, use of visual aids, use of personal stories and illustrations, use of participant's worksheet, use of break out small groups, use of voluntary responses, and the use of primary sources from the Bible. An overview of the 5 sessions of the course is as follows: Session 1 – Introduction to Spiritual Formation; Session 2 – From Deformation to Reformation through Conformation; Session 3 – Formation through the Gospel; Session 4 – Formation through the Spiritual Disciplines; and Session 5 – Formation through Divine Transformation and Reformation.

Data was collected from the participants in the following four ways:

1. Before the start of the course and again after the end of the course, participants completed the Christian Life Profile Assessment Tool (CLPAT) by Randy Frazee (Frazee 2000);

2. Each week, prior to the beginning of the session, participants were asked to answer in writing this question “What was your spiritual life like this past week?”—See Appendix C for Participants’ Weekly Questionnaire
3. Each week, the lesson presentation, all dialogue and discussion were recorded with a digital recorder; in addition, observational notes were made which were added to the pool of data collected from the questionnaires and assessment tool;
4. At the end of the course, participants also completed a course feedback and evaluation questionnaire—See Appendix D for Spiritual Formation Course Feedback and Evaluation Questionnaire

In order for the participants to respond freely and frankly to the assessment tools and questionnaires, all written responses collected were anonymous. The identity of each respondent was kept anonymous through the use of a secret code, a letter of the alphabet chosen and known only by the participant. Care was taken to ensure that no names were mentioned in the project write up.

As project researcher, I co-participated with my Session elders in going through the spiritual formation course in this way: whenever a thought-provoking question was posed to the participants, I also offered up my personal response to those questions. I hoped in this way, I too was learning and being formed through our mutual and collective interactions.

After the data was gathered, analyzed and written up, I shared with the participants the completed paper and its conclusions. The participants did not

provide any input prior to the research project’s final report. However, it is my future plan to gather back the participants in a year’s time and at that time, to give each one the opportunity to provide their own analysis and insights which would then be incorporated into the future plans to address their own and the congregation’s needs.

The project kept to the phases and schedule as outlined in **Table 1**.

Inherent in action research is the potential for participants to be put at risk and to suffer indignity through their involvement in the research project. The following details the safeguards that were put in place to protect the human rights and dignity of every participant in the project. A separate review of the ethics of this research was submitted and approved by the Research Ethics Board of Tyndale University College and Seminary—See Appendix E for the approved Application to the Research Ethics Board.

Table 1. Project phases and schedule

Phase	Task	Date	Responsibility	Notes
Preparation	Hand in Project Proposal	Sep 11, 2017	Researcher	
	Get Project Approval	3 rd week in Sep	Professor	
	Hand in REB Application Draft	Aug 24	Researcher	
	Get REB Application Approval	Sep 8	Professor	
	Apply to REB	Sep 11	Researcher	Email in application
	Get REB Approval	After a couple of weeks	REB	Approved Sep 20

Phase	Task	Date	Responsibility	Notes
Implementation	Send out Information Letter and Consent Form	Sep 24	Researcher	To Session pastors and elders
	Get back Consent Forms	By Sep 30	Participants	
	Administer 1 st CLPAT	Before Oct 4	Researcher	
	Begin Course Week 1	Oct 4	Researcher	
	Course Week 2	Oct 11	Researcher	
	Course Week 3	Oct 18	Researcher	
	Course Week 4	Oct 25	Researcher	
	Course Week 5	Nov 1	Researcher	
	Administer 2 nd CLPAT	Nov 1	Researcher	
Analysis	Analyze Data	Nov-Jan	Researcher	
Interpretation	Write up Project draft	Jan-Feb 2018	Researcher	Email in draft for peer review
Reporting	Present to peer group	Feb residency	Researcher	In class
	Complete Final Write-up incorporating group feedback	Mar-Apr	Researcher	
	Hand in Final Paper	April	Researcher	

The primary ethical concern of this research are the potential institutional and formal power relationships present between me, the researcher and lead pastor, and the participants in the research project, who are my staff and congregational members.

Of those invited to participate, there were two persons who are my staff: one is a volunteer Pastor of Adult Christian Education; and the other is a half-time Pastor of Youth and Outreach Ministries. As I have direct ministry supervision over them, my invitation to them to participate in the project needed to clearly state and reassure them in private and in public that their participation or non-participation in the project would not affect in any way their present role,

responsibilities or employment status. I was also transparent with them about the objectives of the research project. It was my hope that through their voluntary participation, they too might have a share in the project's ownership and benefit from any positive outcomes. In the end, the two staff chose not to participate in the project due to their workload.

All the other invited participants were volunteer church elders. Although they already have the freedom to choose whether or not to be involved in any church activity, I assured them that their participation or non-participation in this project would not have any effect on our relationship, their leadership status, or their responsibilities in the church. Furthermore, I reminded all potential participants that within the Presbyterian system of church governance, all teaching elders (pastoral staff) and ruling elders (elders) of Session have equal standing in terms of power and authority. Any member of Session can and may appeal to the next higher court should there be a need to address any unjust treatment or misconduct.

In the end, five out of the eight elders from Session chose to participate in the project. The others had declined to participate due to personal time constraints. Therefore, I had a total of 5 participants take part in the project.

Findings, Interpretation and Outcomes: What Do We Hope to Find?

The following section details the data that was collected, the analysis of the data through appropriate coding, the interpretation of the data and the summary of the conclusions which emerged from the research.

Firstly, the research generated some quantitative data from the completion of the *Christian Life Profile Assessment Tool* (CLPAT) (Frazee 2000). This assessment tool was designed to measure the extent to which each believer follows Christ’s greatest commandments, to ‘love God’ and to ‘love neighbor’ (Luke 10:27). It further distills the loving God and neighbor command into beliefs, practices, and virtues. The assessment defined beliefs as ‘what we think’; practice as ‘what we do’; and virtues as ‘who we are’, and all in relation to how we practically live out Christ’s greatest commandments. Table 2 summarizes the key

Table 2. Summary of the key ideas behind CLPAT’s Beliefs, Practices and Virtues Assessment questions (Frazee 2005)

Key ideas of <i>beliefs:</i> What we think	Key competencies of <i>practices:</i> What we do	Key ideas/competencies of <i>virtues:</i> Who we are
1. God	1. Worship	1. Love
2. Personal God	2. Prayer	2. Joy
3. Salvation	3. Bible Study	3. Peace
4. The Bible	4. Single-	4. Self-Control
5. Identity in	Mindedness	5. Hope
6. Church	5. Total	6. Patience
7. Humanity	Surrender	7. Kindness/Goodness
8. Compassion	6. Biblical	8. Faithfulness
9. Stewardship	Community	9. Gentleness
10. Eternity	7. Spiritual	10. Humility
	Gifts	
	8. Offering My	
	Time	
	9. Giving My	
	Resources	
	10. Sharing My	
	Faith	

ideas behind the development of the 120 questions posed in the assessment as stated by the author of the assessment tool (Frazee 2000).

In order to give a sense of the scoring of the assessment tool, the highest score for each question was 5, with 0 being ‘does not apply at all’ and 5 being ‘applies completely’. A high score of 90 to 100 per section indicates the participant’s high agreement with the posed assessment statements. There are 20 questions in each of the 6 sections (three ‘love God’ sections of beliefs, practices, and virtues and the same for the three ‘love neighbor’ sections). So the maximum score for each participant would be 600.

Table 3 shows the ‘Before’ scores taken before beginning the spiritual formation course. Table 4 shows the ‘After’ scores collected after participants had completed the 5-week course.

Table 3. Participants’ CLPAT scores before spiritual formation course

Love God					
Participant	Beliefs	Practices	Virtues	Total	
A	99	86	79	264	
B	98	81	64	243	
D	99	83	83	265	
E	99	83	92	274	
F	100	84	88	272	

Love Neighbor					
Participant	Beliefs	Practices	Virtues	Total	God and Neighbor: Total
A	94	78	78	250	514
B	92	79	71	242	485
D	95	83	78	256	521
E	94	83	93	270	544
F	98	78	81	257	529

Table 4. Participants' CLPAT scores after completing spiritual formation course

Love God				
Participant	Beliefs	Practices	Virtues	Total
A	98	90	75	263
B	100	97	81	278
D	100	93	89	282
E	100	90	97	287
F	99	84	83	266

Love Neighbor					
Participant	Beliefs	Practices	Virtues	Total	God and Neighbor: Total
A	96	81	83	260	523
B	97	89	76	262	540
D	97	93	89	279	561
E	99	89	100	288	575
F	99	85	85	269	535

Figure 12 highlights the differences in participants' CLPAT grand total scores before and after taking the spiritual life course.

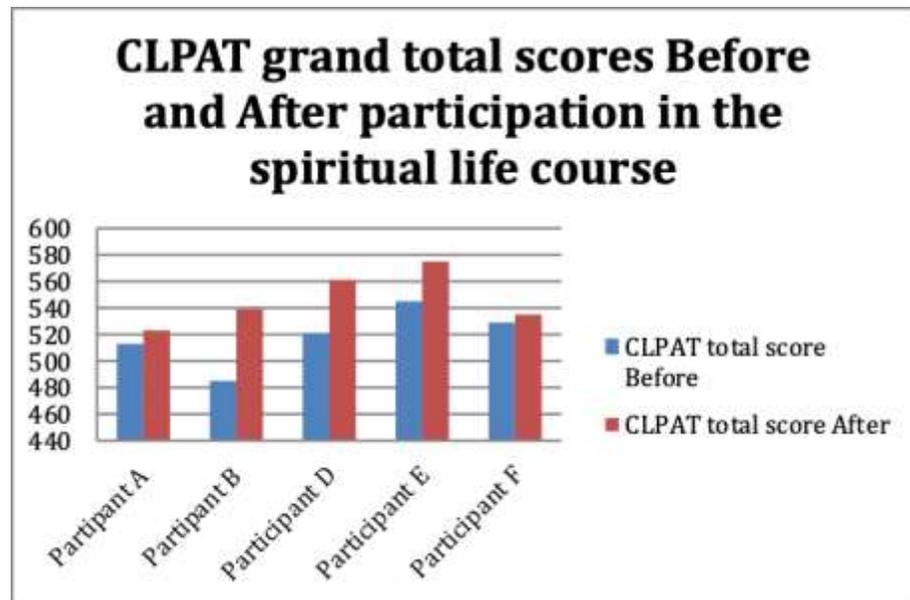


Figure 12. Total scores before and after the spiritual formation course.

Secondly, the research collected qualitative data through the participants' completion of the weekly questionnaires, and also the course end feedback and evaluation questionnaire reproduce in Table 8 (Appendix G) for Participants Responses to Weekly Questions and Course End Questions #1, #2, #5.

By reading and reflecting on these responses over and over again, I began to see that each of the participants' responses were actually statements which remarkably coincided with the categories already set out by the assessment, that is, they were statements of 'beliefs, practices and virtues'. Although the participants were not told at all to respond in this or any specific way using beliefs, practices, and virtue statements, the description of their spiritual lives in their own words could easily be categorized into these types of statements. I decided to re-state the participants' own statements into simple statements of belief, practice and virtues, and code all the statements into belief (B) statements, or practice (P) statements, or virtue (V) statements. By coding them in this way, it enabled me to see more clearly how each participant had responded and it also helped me to more easily compare and contrast the participants' responses with responses from their peers.

In turning the participants' statements into codes, I proceeded by going through each response, item by item, and assigned each response to a generalized belief (i.e., I believe...), practice (i.e., I did...) or virtue (i.e., I am...) statement. For example, for Participant A's response in **Error! Reference source not found.**, Oct 4 entry, "making an effort to pray and read Scripture each day," this

response was coded as three P statements (P stands for practice): P1 – I spent time with God; P2 – I prayed; and

Table 5. Coding of responses to question “What was your spiritual life like this past week?” into belief, practice, or virtue statements

Belief (B) statements	Practice (P) statements	Virtue (V) statements
1. I believe God spoke to me	1. I spent time with God	1. I am submitting to God
2. I believe God hears me	2. I prayed	2. I am comforted by God
3. I believe God is near to me	3. I prayed with/for someone	3. I am thankful/grateful
4. I believe God is in control of my life	4. I read the Bible	4. I am blessed
5. I believe God is helping me	5. I quoted/memorized Bible verses	5. I am joyful
6. I believe I can be honest with my feelings and God will still understand me	6. I helped someone	6. I am at peace
7. I believe the Holy Spirit is active in my life	7. I talked to someone about faith matters	
	8. I served the Church	
	9. I praised God	

P4 – I read the Bible. For Participant A’s next response, “God reminds me He is in control,” I coded this response as two B statements (B stands for beliefs): B1 – I believe God spoke to me; and B4 – I believe God is in control of my life. The next response, “quoting Scripture when I get anxious” was coded as P5 – I quoted/memorized Bible verses. Participant A’s final response on Oct 4 was “feeling fairly close to God,” which was coded as B3 – I believe God is near to me. In this way, I coded all of the participants’ responses for each of their five

completed weekly questionnaires. Table 5 then sums up the coding of how all the participants responded to their weekly questionnaire “What was your spiritual life like this past week?” into beliefs, practices, or virtue statements.

Looking at these codes, I realized that there were some overlapping statements. For example, between statements P1 – I spent time with God, and P2 – I prayed, P2 is inherent in P1. Nevertheless, I kept them as two distinct statements because other participants had mentioned a distinct P1 and P2 statement. By coding the responses in this way, I was able to have a more manageable way to list, compare, and analyze the participants’ responses by using, as close as possible, their own written words.

Table 6**Error! Reference source not found.** then represents each participant’s responses after they have been coded. Following up on my example from before, Participant A’s Oct 4 entry can now be represented by: B1, B3, B4, P1, P2, P4, and P5.

While this table gave me a measure of the different types of participants’ statements from week one to week five over the duration of the course, it was still difficult to determine how each person changed. This coded qualitative data however did yield a new idea for me: these coded statements provided a picture of each participant’s area of familiarity of their spiritual life. What one said or did not say about their spiritual life provided an opportunity to determine areas of strengths and weaknesses, as well as point to areas for potential growth. For example, participant D described his or her spiritual life using mostly belief

statements. He or she used 13 B statements and only 2 of P and V statements.

This insight might be useful for participant D when he or she comes to choosing a new spiritual discipline.

Table 6. Participants' coded response to this question "What was your spiritual life like this past week?"

Partic- ipants	Oct 4	Oct 11	Oct 18	Oct 25	Nov 9
A	B1, B3, B4, P1, P2, P4, P5	B1, B2, B6, P3	P3, P7	B1, B3, B6, P3, P5, P7, V2	B1,B4, P2, V1, V3
B	B5, B6, P3, P4, P7	P3, P6, P7, P8	B1, B7, P3, P6, P7	B7, P3, P7, P8	B3, B5, B6, P7
D	B1, B4, B5, B6	B1, B2, B6, P2	B4, B5, V2, V3	B1, B6, P2, V3, V5	B4, B5,V6
E	P2, P4, P6, P8	P8, V3, V4	B4, B5, P8, V4	P8, V4, V5	B4, P3, P7, P8, P9, V3
F	B6, P1, P2	P1, P7, V4, V5, V6	B3, P3, V3, V5, V6	B1, P7, V5	B4, B6, P1, P4, V1

In addition to describing their weekly spiritual lives, participants also provided feedback at the end of the course. Responses to questions #1, #2, and #5 from that course end questionnaire have been grouped together and included in Table 8 (Appendix G). Questions #1, #2 and #5 have been grouped together because they probed what participants thought they got out of the course. The other questions, #3, #4, #6, and #7 from the course end questionnaire are captured

in Table 9 (Appendix H). Questions #3, #4, #6, and #7 were grouped together because they solicited what participants thought about the course itself.

All the participants affirmed that the course taught them about spiritual formation and that their learning expectations about that subject were fully met; their positive responses were evidenced in question #1, Table 8 (Appendix G). All the participants were positive and hopeful about seeing the results from their CLPAT scores. They all hoped to see how they have spiritually progressed and changed from participating in the spiritual formation course, and how they can subsequently help others also achieve similar progress; as evidenced in question #2, Table 8 (Appendix G).

With respect to question #5, participants E and F clearly mentioned starting a new spiritual discipline as their spiritual formation next step. Participant B wished to “start training to be more godly,” which was his or her way of saying their intention to start a new spiritual discipline, but good intentions may not materialize into actual action or practice. For some unknown reason, participant A and D had no response at all to question #5, which was a bit troubling. Due to the small sample size of the group, if two out of five responses to question #5 are silent or negative, that could considerably take away from the outcome of the study. However, in further examining the actual feedback questionnaire handed in, I believe participant A may simply have missed answering all of the questions on the back page of the questionnaire! Therefore, there was essentially just one ‘no response’, which may again be due to oversight. However, with respect to

‘starting a new spiritual discipline as a spiritual formation next step’, this research did not convincingly show that the course was effective in helping participants take their next spiritual formation next step. It offered some help but a lot more attention needs to be focussed on teaching and even coaching that aspect of the course if that is to become more useful and impactful.

The research also gathered some useful feedback and evaluations regarding the course content and the format of the course. These responses are recorded in **Error! Reference source not found.**, which reflected what the participants thought of the course and whether they would recommend the course to others. Four out of five participants were able to recall the big ideas of each of the sessions. Four out of five participants provided constructive ideas and suggestions to improve on how the course should be taught in future offerings. Four out of five participants would heartily recommend the course to others.

I would like to add the following observational notes to the findings of the project: all the participants attended every session of the course; they were punctual, they came prepared with Bible, notebook and pen, and they all fully and actively participated in the discussions. Every participant completed all of their written assignments. One of the sessions had to be moved to another date due to an unforeseen circumstance. Yet the group had no trouble agreeing to a new date for the make-up class. They all showed up for the re-scheduled class. As a result of the above observations, throughout the course, I sensed an authentic seriousness and commitment from the whole group which led to creating a

wonderful environment for teaching and for learning. I believed everyone in the group felt safe enough to share with everyone else, even when we sometimes touched upon topics that were more private and personal.

Interpretations

First, as a result of participation in the spiritual formation course, the grand total CLPAT scores of all participants became higher as evidenced in Tables 2 and 3, and depicted in Chart 1. The increase in the grand total figures were a result of increases in all the different sections from ‘love God beliefs’ to ‘love neighbor virtues’. With the exception of only two instances, where the ‘after’ scores for a section were lower, the scores from all the other ‘after’ assessments were all consistently higher than the ‘before’ assessments. So, how can this overall increase be explained?

The simple answer is that participation in the spiritual formation course had apparently helped each participant in the study group to perceive that they have changed in thinking more like Jesus (beliefs), and acting more like Jesus (practice), and being more like Jesus (virtues). And because their responses have changed in these areas, they perceived they have changed in these areas. Having gone through the course, even one which only consisted of five sessions and lasted five weeks, had provided participants with a fresh way to understand God’s overall purpose for their lives and enabled each one to align themselves more with God’s purpose. Going forward, it would be good to compare these results with the results of this research repeated to see whether the impact of the spiritual

formation course could be reproduced. Also, it would be valuable to invite the participants to take the assessment test again one year from their initial assessment to see if the increased scores recorded after the course had been maintained. This is actually what the CLPAT recommends as the period for the assessment to be repeated.

God's purpose is to change us to become more like Jesus. When we accept this purpose and know how to align and re-align ourselves so that we can more fully cooperate with Him, this kind of submission and obedience will surely make a difference in the way we think, act, and see ourselves. The change process is subtle and may not be discernible in the moment, but over time, it will become more evident. For example, participant D described his or her spiritual life using almost all belief statements. When asked question #2 "What do you hope the assessment tool will indicate about your spiritual life after participating in the course?" Participant D responded: "to see if my Christian life is balanced in loving God and loving neighbor, and where I need improvements." Perhaps, in some intuitive way, participant D had already sensed that his or her Christian life needed a better balance in terms of beliefs and practice. Participant B had 14 practice statements and no virtue statements. Participant F had 8 virtue statements, the most V statements among his or her peers. These observations do not mean one person's spiritual life is better than another's spiritual life. But they did serve to reveal the unbalanced aspects of faith which the participants don't normally see. I believe that it is after we have come to see more clearly the condition of our

present spiritual lives that we might then be more ready to take responsibility for our part in the spiritual formation process, which is formation through the spiritual disciplines.

Another contributing factor to the changes experienced by the participants may be that the course wasn't designed to provide just cerebral content. It was my observation that how the course was taught and experienced was also important to the outcome. It was small group teaching in a very relational way, a lot of the material was experiential through lectio and visio divina, the interactions were personal, and there was ample time given for reflection, commitment and prayer. More importantly, although it was a concentrated course, yet it still carved out a concentrated period of several weeks where the Holy Spirit was able to drive home those spiritual principles of formation and transformation covered in the course.

Yet another factor may be the participants themselves. On one hand, the participants who agreed to take part in this pilot project were all motivated and serious students, servant leaders who sincerely desired to become more like Jesus. On the other hand, it was also quite possible that the participants themselves, being leaders of the congregation had a bias towards expressing a positive outcome from participation in the course. I do wonder whether taking a different group through the course might produce a different result. But for this pilot group of leaders, participation in the spiritual formation course certainly did have a positive impact as evidenced by the higher CLPAT scores. It may be the combined

effect of course content, course format, and quality of participants which resulted in the increase in CLPAT scores.

With respect to the CLPAT scores, I observed that generally, ‘belief’ scores tend to be higher than ‘virtue’ scores. We can for the most part understand why that was: it is easier to say we believe in something than to say we already ‘are’ what we believe. And as well, generally ‘love God’ scores tend to be higher than ‘love neighbor’ scores because once again, it is a lot easier to say we “love God” whom we do not see than to actually “love neighbor” whom we do see and have to live with! (1 John 4:20). This is a useful observation which should be included as a teaching point in the course in the future.

Table 7 below isolates the ‘love God – virtue’ and ‘love neighbor virtue’ scores of all the participants before and after taking the course.

Table 7. Comparing ‘before’ and ‘after’ CLPAT Virtue scores for ‘Love God’ and ‘Love Neighbor’ categories

Partici- pant	Love God- Virtue	Love God- Virtue	Differ- ence	Love Neighbor- Virtue	Love Neighbor- Virtue	Differ- ence
	Before	After		Before	After	
A	79	75	- 4	78	83	+5
B	64	81	+17	71	76	+5
D	83	89	+6	78	89	+11
E	92	97	+5	93	100	+7
F	88	83	-5	81	85	+4
Total	406	425	+19	401	433	+32

The scores show that after the course, participants believed that they actually were more loving of God and of neighbor. The participants’ ‘love

neighbor virtue' scores increased more than the 'love God virtue' scores. The increase in 'love God – virtue' score was +19. The increase in 'love Neighbor – virtue' score was +32. The scores after participation in the spiritual formation course did result in a positive difference in how participants' assessed themselves, even in the more difficult 'virtue – who we are' category. Although this may be because going through the spiritual formation course gave the participants greater clarity of God's purpose for their lives, there is no certain way of knowing exactly why they assessed themselves more positively after the course. In two cases, participants' 'love God – virtue' score actually decreased after participation in the course. Perhaps this was because going through the course also helped these two participants to become more aware of their shortcomings, but again, there is no definitive way to determine exactly why they assessed themselves lower after the course.

The qualitative data gathered from the participants' spiritual lives revealed just how active and involved this group of leaders already were in ministry and in tending to their faith:

- all the participants were already attending church on Sundays; they all had some understanding and habitual discipline of maintaining their spiritual life;
- generally, the participants' spiritual life included personal faith practices such as praying, reading the Bible, and reflecting on what God is saying to them;

- generally, all the participants indicated that they experienced God's presence, God's blessings, and God's guidance;
- generally, the participants' spirituality was also outwardly expressed through acts of service to family, friends and church; in other words, faith was not just a private or inward experience;
- the participants were all active in praying for others, willing to share their faith with others, and involved in serving or thinking about the needs of other people.

You might wonder how, despite their hectic lives, these leaders still found time to attend a 5-week course on spiritual formation. You might also ask why, despite appearing to be already mature and productive believers, these leaders still desired to attend a course on spiritual formation. Perhaps it was because the participants' spiritual lives had become routine and stagnant and the spiritual formation course served to remind them again of their reason for being faithful. Perhaps it was because they wanted to gain even greater clarity and understanding about how God wants to shape and transform their lives and ministry. And perhaps it was because they wanted to support their pastor as he carried out his Doctor of Ministry assignment. For these and other reasons, these busy leaders attended the spiritual formation course and remarked afterwards that the basic course on spiritual formation was welcomed, relevant, and positively impactful for them.

The descriptive qualitative data gathered could not definitively explain how participants' spiritual lives were actually changed as they went through the spiritual formation course. The weekly questionnaires did not yield trackable changes as I had thought they would. If there were actual changes in attitudes about faith and ministry, changes in thoughts about God's Word, changes in convictions about God's will or work, these changes were not discernible to me. As a result, I should also be cautious about reading too much into the quantitative data. All I have are participants' positive scores, responses, and observations that the spiritual formation course was beneficial for supporting and nurturing their spiritual lives.

Outcomes

In carrying out this research project, I did successfully offer a specifically designed course and taught a new curriculum on spiritual formation. As the researcher, I learnt how to carry out a properly designed action research project, even though I did not succeed in meeting the methodological criteria with this particular project. I recruited participants properly and was also able to formally document the findings. From the responses given in the sessions and in the questionnaires, I ascertained that participants received specific biblical teaching and knowledge about what it means to say 'yes' to Jesus. Participants learnt that God desires all who believe in Him to become more like Jesus. Participants were specifically taught the biblical model of spiritual formation, how to cooperate with God to change and to be transformed. Participants who completed the course

were also able to identify where they are spiritually speaking, and were able to articulate their next spiritual formation next step. Two out of the five participants were able to specifically identify what spiritual formation next step they would like to put into action in their lives while one other participant, indicated his or her intention to do the same, which was to implement a spiritual discipline as their next step. This is how I believe spiritual formation instruction and understanding becomes connected to helping the participants grow deeper in their relationship with God. The spiritual formation course provided participants with practical ways to take their faith next steps.

The research showed that the basic spiritual formation course was likely effective in making a positive difference in the understanding of the participants. The 'after' CLPAT scores were higher, which meant that the participants assessed themselves as thinking more like Jesus, acting more like Jesus, and being more like Jesus than if they had not participated in the course. Other possible contributing factors to the higher CLPAT scores might have been the participants themselves and how motivated they were to see positive results from their involvement in the study.

All of the participants confirmed that the spiritual formation course met their expectations of learning about the God and human partnership and process by which God changes us to become more like Jesus. Four out of five participants were able to recall the major teaching points of each of the sessions of the course.

All the participants said ‘yes’ to recommending the course to others who desire to grow their faith. This may be because they enjoyed participating in the course or because they had personally benefitted from the course. Most of the participants provided constructive feedback which meant that they had suggestions to make the course better and which likely indicated their continued support for this pilot project moving forward. The following were participants’ suggestions on how to make the course more effective in the future and I have listed them here:

- the use role playing would make the course more experiential;
- give participants opportunity to compare God’s way and the world’s way of spiritual formation and transformation; this would make the course more personal and relevant;
- the use of music and videos as a way to accommodate other learning styles; the present course could be more visual and engaging;
- the use of break out groups (because our group was already small, this wasn’t an issue, but if the group was larger, we’d definitely need this);
- the use of the ‘words of encouragement’ exercise, affirmation of one individual at a time by the group (this would definitely help a larger group become more intimate);
- to provide more handouts of the content (a student handbook is planned for future course offering);

- to assign homework that would be reviewed in the following session (a student handbook would certainly help in helping participants review and reinforce the material);
- to add to the course end questionnaire this question: “Using your understanding of the spiritual formation process, identify and explain where you presently are spiritually;” this was an objective of the researched that was missed because the original questionnaires failed to address this topic;
- to consider teaching the course to groups of people who are already formed as small groups; this is certainly a way to foster and increase participants’ sense of comfort and safety;
- to formally invite these elders who have completed the course to help me teach the next course.
- A general theme emerging from these suggestions for improving the course is that participants would like to have more active and creative methods of learning the spiritual formation content. Another would be that more time be given and spent on the whole process of identifying and adopting a new spiritual discipline. I will definitely seek the help and input of these former participants before venturing to offer the next spiritual formation course.

Conclusions and Implications

My conviction from the start was that there existed a gap of knowledge and understanding about spiritual formation that could be seen in my life and also in the lives of the people of my congregation. I came to this conviction from my prior interactions and knowledge of the congregation, and particularly after I had shared my spiritual autobiography with them at a church retreat. This gap of knowledge and understanding was to be met through the offering of a basic course on spiritual formation. The participants of the research project indeed had this shortcoming and the objective of the research project did address a relevant need. And after going through the spiritual formation course, these mature spiritual leaders did gain some new understanding and knowledge of spiritual formation and with which they could apply to their own lives.

The project showed that completing a course on spiritual formation did make a difference in the lives of the participants. The group of leaders who were led through the course did gain some knowledge and understanding which helped them score higher on the *Christian Life Profile Assessment Tool*. But more important than higher scores, it was my desire that the overview of how God shapes and transforms believers to become more like Jesus would truly begin to make a lasting difference in both their lives and ministry.

This research outcomes were: the spiritual formation curriculum was capable of producing higher *Christian Life Profile Assessment* scores; it had equipped this group of leaders from Celebration Church to become more knowledgeable in their faith, and which may lead them to be more confident in

their relationship with God, more effective in their ability as spiritual leaders to serve others, and more able to consistently and intentionally follow Jesus. These were the intangible outcomes. The tangible outcomes are: several leaders had indicated what next steps they intend to take to continue growing in their faith, they have expressed their gratitude for the course, they have offered suggestions for improving the course when it is to be taught again, and they have said they would be willing to recommend the course to others.

This research project has re-affirmed my calling as a pastor. It has validated my conviction that I am following the right instinct, that offering a basic course in spiritual formation would be beneficial to many of my parishioners. It has given me new confidence that the course material I have written has something to offer to the local church and perhaps even to the wider church. It has given me a glimpse of new areas of ministry that God might be calling me to in the near future. It has equipped me with the knowledge and experience of proposing, leading, and writing up an action research project that other ministry practitioners might also be able to follow and use.

While the results from this initial project are encouraging, it remains to be seen whether the basic course on spiritual formation would be effective for securing the faith of our church's ministry to the young adults. We will need to study the situation carefully and work with the young adults to determine what might be the best way to provide spiritual formation teaching to the next

generation. I will likely need the continued support and wisdom of the elders who have completed the course to do this.

Finally, it is my hope that I might be able to share the findings of this project with other pastors who are also desiring to be more effective in discipling. Sharing the findings of this research project might encourage them to give a higher priority to providing spiritual formation instruction as a part of their own discipleship curriculum and program. God willing, it would be my joy to share this written curriculum on spiritual formation and to see them use the resource in their own context.

Implications

This research project was successful in leading a group of leaders through a spiritual formation course but it was less successful on helping the participants apply one spiritual formation next step into their lives. Practically speaking, there simply wasn't enough time to properly devote to teaching about spiritual disciplines and guiding each participant to select and implement a new discipline into their life. This topic alone would have taken up one or more whole sessions by itself at the very least. This must be considered when the course is next offered. On the whole, while the length of the course over five weeks was adequate in covering the basic spiritual formation principles, it would be good to state it once again that gaining information does not equate to transformation. Spiritual formation is a life long process, of which the spiritual formation course is but an overview and introduction.

In session 3 of the course when teaching on ‘formation through the spiritual disciplines’, I used Adele Calhoun’s *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook* (Calhoun 2005) to introduce participants to the many spiritual disciplines that were available. The *Handbook* would again be an excellent resource to work through in the new revamped course.

In addition, I suspected there is also a need and benefit for participants to have regular on-going accountability and support from each other, perhaps once every two months, in order to truly realize the commitments that were made during the course. The nature of spiritual formation is a continued life-long process which is best carried on through regular accountability and support rather than an isolated 5-week course. This too should be considered for the next offering of the course.

The course was also inadequate in this way: although the CLPAT scores of the participants were higher after completing the five week course, it remains to be seen whether the impact it had on the participants will last beyond the duration of the course. A case could be made that the higher scores more accurately reflected the participants’ keenness and excitement after just finishing the course than was their actual spiritual reality. The author of the assessment tool does recommend that a subsequent assessment be made one year after, which would provide a more realistic time frame to track any actual lasting spiritual life changes. That being said, Frazee was informed that I intended to use the assessment tool right after the five week course and he didn’t object at all to this

specific usage. Be that as it may, the participants of the course may actually welcome taking the CLPAT again one year later as compared to just five weeks later. Taking the CLPAT one year later could easily be arranged especially if there are on-going accountability and support meetings.

I had set out to provide a pastoral solution to a need which arose, first in my own spiritual life, and then observed in the life of the congregation. I have taught a pilot spiritual formation course which seemed to be able to address this need. In doing so, I have learnt not only that my spiritual formation is a life-long process but also that of the church. I will endeavor to use what I have gained from this research project to lead others into that spiritual formation process.

CONCLUSION

Lessons Learned in the Doctor of Ministry Program

I am still being transformed!

The objectives of the Doctor of Ministry program are clearly stated as:

Objective 1 - To advance understanding of the nature, purposes, and practice of ministry through the scholarly study of spirituality;

Objective 2 - To encourage continued personal growth in spiritual maturity;

Objective 3 - To enhance leadership and ministerial competencies in analysis, planning, implementation and theological reflection.

I believe I have fulfilled these objectives and even more importantly to me, in the process I have experienced being transformed.

I have completed the three required projects: written my spiritual autobiography, studied and presented a model of spiritual formation that identified with my own spiritual development, and carried out an action research project which applied that spiritual formation model to some aspect of my current ministry.

The writing of the spiritual autobiography enabled me to see how God has been with me and transforming me all my life. It enabled me to see how God has used my life, both good and bad experiences, to shape me into who I am today,

someone whom He continues to call and utilize in His kingdom and to fulfill His Great Commission. It enabled me to see how all the different parts of my life were used by God to bring about my spiritual formation and transformation: Christian upbringing, conversion experience, divine interventions, faith re-commitment, mission involvement, Christian community, divine call, enrollment in seminary, encouragement from mentors, ministry confirmation and opportunities, and even my marriage. It enabled me to trace the development of my life vision and purpose from the beginning of my ministry until today.

In particular, the following three discoveries about spiritual formation have been especially impactful to me:

First, our goal in becoming a disciple of Jesus is to become more like Jesus. In becoming more like Jesus, we are aligning ourselves with the end goal of the Gospel, that God desires ‘to make all things new’. Formerly, the end goal of my own discipleship and my disciple-making ministry had been mostly about becoming successful in winning others to Christ and about growing the church. I believe now that transformed lives were the true catalysts in New Testament church growth and it was not just about charismatic preaching and creative programming.

Second, the discovery that there is a biblical model of spiritual formation that could inform our personal spiritual growth as disciples of Jesus. I am persuaded that this model can be taught to the congregation and can help us all desire to become more faithful disciples. This is how we ultimately and

effectively point and lead more people to Jesus and to do our part in fulfilling the Great Commission. For me, the understanding that God intends for all believers to be actively engaged in fulfilling the Great Commission has not changed. What has changed for me is the realization that the secular world would be more effectively pointed to Jesus when they have witnessed and experienced credible and authentic transformed lives.

Third, that within my Christian sub-culture (Canadian Asian, evangelical, second-generation Presbyterian) within Christendom, we have neglected to practice the breadth of spiritual disciplines. We need to re-introduce and re-claim these spiritual practices at the same time as we prioritize spiritual formation instruction. In doing this, I can envision each believer, at any given time, intentionally practicing some form of spiritual discipline in order to see some specific area of their life transform to becoming more like Christ. When believers engage in spiritual disciplines, we are intentionally doing our part to cooperate with the Holy Spirit to not only change us, but also to use us as change agents in the world.

The writing of the manual to teach spiritual formation helped me gain a cohesive theological framework from which to explain God's plan for our lives and our necessary cooperation with Him in order to become more like Jesus. It gave me clearer insights into the Scriptures' teaching about spiritual formation and transformation. It grew in me a practical definition of the biblical spiritual formation process. And it helped me place spiritual formation within the context

of the larger faith community as oppose to it being just a personal self-improvement exercise.

The completion of the action research project enabled me to test and to confirm that providing a basic spiritual formation course does make a lasting difference in the lives of believers who have not had spiritual formation instruction. The findings caused me to feel even more strongly than I did before that churches need to prioritize this need to address the believers' knowledge and understanding gap about spiritual formation. It provided me with concrete ideas for on-going and future ministry plans to bolster spiritual formation training for my own congregation and even in the wider faith community.

Although I did see some very encouraging positive benefits from teaching the spiritual formation course in the research project, there were also some glaring limitations which were exposed.

First, I chose to convey the spiritual formation basics using a teaching model, by teaching a five sessions in five weeks course. This was not ideal. My original proposal was to offer the course either through a three day retreat or at the very least, a six weeks course. That would have provided more time for personal reflection, journaling, life coaching, specific instructions on new spiritual practices and time for experimentation. However, since I had chosen to work with the Session elders of the church, the majority of whom are very busy working people, I had to settle on this abridged version of the course for practical reasons. The obvious disadvantage was that only lesser amount of material could be

covered in the hour and a half each week. But the greater drawback was unintentionally turning spiritual formation instruction into yet another primarily cerebral, thinking exercise. In contrast, Jesus had spent the better part of three years living with and modelling spiritual formation with his disciples! Be that as it may, I still believed the five week course was a beneficial starting point as I could still continue to journey with these Session elder participants as their pastor even after the completion of the pilot project.

Second, I cannot emphasize enough how spiritual formation and transformation must be a life-long process, best represented by the marathon race rather than by a hundred meter sprint. The learning about spiritual disciplines alone and acquiring the skills to practice any new discipline requires much time, encouragement, coaching, patience, and grace. In my own experience through the DMin. program, the practice of new spiritual disciplines like the writing of my spiritual autobiography and following a personal rule of life took well over a year to complete, and now will take the rest of my life to integrate into my life. And if we are honest with ourselves, much of our spiritual progress is often accompanied by much regression as well. In the marathon of becoming more like Jesus, we often find ourselves at a stand still, retreating or even trying to leave the race altogether. Those are the times when we need other runners to come alongside us to help us stay the course and to help us rehab in the case of injury due to sin, in order to finish the race.

Third, although I have presented spiritual formation as being an equal partnership between God and individual believers, in reality, the partnership is still mostly God's sovereign power and grace working in our lives. At the core of every fallen human being, there is in us a free will to conform to Christ or to remain deformed in sin. Even when we choose Christ, we oftentimes choose with selfish or impure motives. Consequently, in order for us to authentically change to become like Jesus, it is imperative for God the Holy Spirit to operate in us before, during and continually after we decide to change to become like Him. God will never violate our free will and impose the image of Christ onto us. But short of trespassing our free will, how we manage to move from deformation to reformation through spiritual formation can only be made possible through the great mercy and grace of God Himself. I confess that no model or illustration of the spiritual formation process can even begin to adequately capture this profound theological concept: that although God lovingly created us with free will, God's love does not abandon us entirely to do as we sinfully please but instead He is ever inviting us back into a love relationship with Him. And to that end, if we accept His invitation—sinful and deformed though we are, God is willing and able to form and transform us into the likeness of His Son.

For Asian, second generation Presbyterians such as myself, who are inclined towards a brand of faith that is primarily about thinking right leading to works righteousness and driven to pursue success in church growth ministry, the spiritual formation process and partnership described above is a potent antidote.

In terms of my own personal spiritual growth and maturity, I can attest to some new developments in my attitudes, beliefs and practices. I believe I am now more open and compliant with the Holy Spirit's leading of me towards spiritual change. I believe I am more prepared to cooperate with God in large part because I can now clearly understand what is my part and the Lord's part in the spiritual formation process. I have gained an even greater appreciation for the wisdom and guidance of the Scriptures for believers who want to live for God. I am still amazed and humbled by the patience and grace of God who knows how slow I am to change yet never gives up on me. In terms of spiritual practices, I have a greater appreciation for spiritual disciplines; an appreciation for why they are necessary and an understanding of how to add new disciplines to address growth areas in my life. In particular, I find myself regularly doing self-examinations by applying the spiritual formation model to my life. I am also particularly fond of these two new disciplines: living with a rule of life and practicing keeping the Sabbath regularly.

As a direct result of the DMin program, I have developed in my ministry in the following ways. I have reviewed my present ministry context, philosophy and practice through the lens of spiritual formation. It has confirmed for me that Celebration Church is the congregation in which God has graciously called me to be in and to serve. It has provided me with the ability to offer and provide spiritual guidance to church members. It has invigorated my preaching to consistently address and emphasize spiritual formation themes; I realize now that

I must teach on how Jesus lived, not just on what Jesus taught. It has given me impetus to expand spiritual formation instruction for everyone in the congregation in the coming months. And the new spiritual disciplines that I have learnt and practiced have allowed me to teach those particular spiritual disciplines to the church.

In summary, the mentorship of the professors, the learning opportunities of the courses and assignments of the Doctor of Ministry program have played a significant part in my recent spiritual growth and in my appreciation for my faith journey following after Jesus. And in ministry, I feel that I've gained a new beginning to refocus my disciple-making mission in light of the Great Commission. I believe I have fulfilled the objectives of the DMin program and have gained a renewed vision to help myself and others become more like Jesus.

APPENDIXES

Appendix A: Research Project Information Letter and Consent Form

Information and Consent Letter for Action Research Project
By Rev. Alan Goh

Dear servant leader,

As the pastor of Celebration Presbyterian Church I invite you to participate in a research project which I will be conducting at our church to fulfill my studies as a Doctor of Ministry student at Tyndale Seminary. I will be the facilitator of the project, as well as a fellow participant in it. All those who choose to be involved will have the opportunity to contribute to the outcome of this project and the future goals of this research.

The research project, titled *Leading a group of leaders from Celebration Presbyterian Church, Markham through a spiritual formation course and helping them apply one spiritual formation next step into their lives*, will take place during the fall of 2017. The spiritual formation course will take place on five consecutive Wednesday evenings, October 4th to November 1st, from 7:30 to 9 p.m. at Celebration Centre. The purpose of this course is to provide participants with the basic biblical teaching and understanding of Christian spiritual formation. Participants will also learn how God forms and transforms us into Christ's likeness. As well, participants will be encouraged to apply this knowledge into their lives by selecting one spiritual formation next step. Will you consider making a faith investment towards your own spiritual growth and at the same time volunteering for this worthwhile project?

What's involved? Participants will complete a Christian Life Profile Assessment Tool prior to and after completing the course. This 'before and after' assessment will provide you with invaluable feedback about how you are doing in your relationship with God. In addition, you will be asked to fill in a short questionnaire prior to each of the weekly sessions. The in-class time will consist of a presentation, participation in large group and small group discussions and personal reflection times. The data gathered will be in the form of the assessment

tools, the questionnaires, the notes taken during the group discussions, and the observations that I will make throughout the five weeks of the course.

What are the risks and benefits of choosing to be part of this research? One foreseeable risk may be the awkwardness or embarrassment which may come from sharing some personal information about your life and faith. However, let me clearly state that all sharing of sensitive information is strictly voluntary as no one will be required to say or do anything they do not wish to do. All participants in the course will also have signed a consent form agreeing to keep all personal information confidential.

Anticipated benefits for those who participate include spiritual learning and growing, both in knowledge and in understanding of how to apply that knowledge. It is my hope that all of you will indeed become more like Christ. It is also my hope that some of you will consider teaching what you have learnt to others in our congregation. It is also anticipated that as a result of going through the spiritual formation course together, we may grow closer together in community and in our serving ministry.

All data collected by the assessment tools, the questionnaires, the note-taking during the group discussions, and the observations made of participants during the sessions will be anonymous, i.e. no names will be mentioned in the project. Moreover, all participants will be reminded of their promise to keep confidential anything personal that is revealed in the sessions. All data will be stored in a locked file cabinet in my office or stored on my password protected laptop. The eventual completed research project will be placed in the Tyndale library as part of my Doctor of Ministry portfolio.

Again, let me be clear that 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.

I acknowledge that I am in a dual role throughout this research project, both as your pastor and as a 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 interest and the interest of the congregation. Ultimately, I believe that the interests of the church and of this research are the same: to help all of us at Celebration Church become more like Jesus!

If you have any questions, feel free to contact me, Rev. Alan Goh, either via my church phone (647-237-1304), email (agoh@celebrationpc.com) or simply in

person. You 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 reb@tyndale.ca. You are also welcome to contact my research supervisor, Dr. Mark Chapman, Associate Professor of Research Methods, Tyndale Seminary, via email (mchapman@tyndale.ca) or office phone (416-226-6620, Ext. 2208).

Thank you for considering participation in this research project. Grace and peace be with you,

Rev. Alan Goh

Action Research Project Consent Form

Leading a group of leaders from Celebration Presbyterian Church, Markham through a spiritual formation course and helping them apply one spiritual formation next step into their lives.

Name (please print):

1. I have read and understood the attached Information and Consent Letter for Action Research Project.
2. I understand that I will be engaging in a research project which may benefit my spiritual development and contribute towards the goals of the research. I agree to participate in completing the Christian Life Profile assessment tools, the questionnaires, attend all the sessions of the spiritual formation course, participate in large and small group discussions, and be the subject of observational notes that will be taken at each week's session for the duration of the course.
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 confidentiality of data and personal information. I understand that complete anonymity may not be possible due to size of the group participating in the project. Furthermore, by signing this consent form, I agree to keep strictly confidential any personal information that may be disclosed by the other participants in the course.
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 am aware that I may direct any future questions to Rev. Alan Goh, either via church phone (647-237-1304), email (agoh@celebrationpc.com) or simply in person. 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 reb@tyndale.ca. I am also welcome to contact the project's research supervisor, Dr. Mark Chapman, Associate Professor of Research Methods, Tyndale Seminary, via email (mchapman@tyndale.ca) or office phone (416-226-6620, Ext. 2208).

I have read the above statements and I freely consent to abide by all the obligations of the research and to participate in this spiritual formation course at Celebration Centre: YES ___ NO ___

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix B:
Permission Letter to and Response
from Randy Frazee for the Use of
The Christian Life Profile Assessment Tool

August 23, 2017

Dear Rev. Frazee,

I am a Doctor of Ministry student at Tyndale University and Seminary, Toronto, Canada. I am planning an action research project this fall, *“Leading a group of leaders from Celebration Presbyterian Church, Markham through a spiritual formation course and helping them apply one spiritual formation next step into their lives.”* I would like to use your “Christian Life Profile Assessment Tool” as one of the methods to collect data on the 6-10 participants who will take part in the research project. I have two requests:

- 1) The assessment literature recommends using the tool and then again one year later to see if there have been any spiritual life changes. My question is: Would it be appropriate to use the tool in a before and after comparison after 5 weeks instead of one year? Does this usage skew the results of the assessment in anyway? Would you permit me to use the assessment in this way for my research?
- 2) I have come across an earlier version (version 2000) of the assessment tool at <https://chalkermen.files.wordpress.com/2015/01/christian-life-profile.pdf>. Is this version also a legitimate assessment tool? If it is, may I use it without charge? It is my intention to administer the assessment to the project participants ‘before and after’ completing a basic spiritual formation course. It would be a great help to me if I could keep all costs for the research project down to a minimum. Would you let me know if I could be permitted to make use of version 2000 without charge?

If you have any questions about my action research project, please feel free to contact me, Rev. Alan Goh, either via my church phone (647-237-1304) or

email (agoh@celebrationpc.com). You may also direct any questions or concerns of this study to the Chair of the Tyndale Research Ethics Board at Tyndale Seminary at reb@tyndale.ca. You are also welcome to contact my research supervisor, Dr. Mark Chapman, Associate Professor of Research Methods, Tyndale Seminary, via email (mchapman@tyndale.ca) or office phone (416-226-6620, Ext. 2208).

Thank you for considering my requests.

Serving Christ together,

Rev. Alan Goh

Email response from Randy Frazee 8/24/2017:

Pastor,

You certainly have my permission to use this tool for your research. Love to see the results when you are done.

**Appendix C:
Participants' Weekly Questionnaire**

Participant _____

Date _____

“What was your spiritual life like this past week?”

Instruction: Some people describe their spiritual life in terms of personal spiritual practices. For example, time spent in prayer or efforts taken reading, studying and reflecting on the Scriptures. Some people think about their spiritual life in terms of sensing God's presence, how close or distant God was to them, or whether they had heard God's voice leading them in a particular direction. Other people express their spiritual life through their church activities: participation in church worship, fellowship, and ministries. People may also think in terms of their obligations to God, or areas of their life needing forgiveness and repentance. Really, there are as many different ways to answer this question as there are people! So, simply answer this question using terms that are most familiar and

- Session 5 – Formation Through Transformation

4. If you could change something about this course, what would you change?
5. As a result of participating in this course, what ‘next step’ (if any) will you consider putting into action in your life?
6. Would you recommend this course to others? Why or why not?
7. Any other comments about the course content, teaching method, course impact, research project, etc.?

**Appendix E:
Approved Application to Research Ethics Board
and Supplemental Document**

Title – Leading a group of leaders from Celebration Presbyterian Church, Markham through a spiritual formation course and helping them apply one spiritual formation next step into their lives.

A. Purpose and Rational of Proposed Research – This project will examine the necessity of receiving a basic course in spiritual formation for every Christian desiring to grow in their faith. Sometimes, believers may not be fully informed about what they have agreed to when they said ‘yes’ to Jesus. They may not know that at the heart of becoming a Christian is a requirement to become more like Christ. And even if they did, they may not have been taught how to make changes in their lives to become more Christ-like. They may not be aware of the spiritual process through which every believer becomes formed and transformed. The truth is that the Bible clearly reveals a model of spiritual formation that should be basic understanding for every Christian. So this project will provide a basic 5-week course in spiritual formation for a group of church members.

The project will offer the course initially to the leaders of the congregation because securing their support and cooperation would be vital for future offerings of the course to the rest of the congregation. Participants will complete a spiritual life assessment tool prior to the course and again at the completion of the course as a way of receiving valuable feedback about their own faith. In addition to the in-class presentation, weekly surveys and small group discussions, participants will have opportunities to explore the Scriptures and their faith questions in a learning environment which encourages them to move from knowledge to application. It is hoped that upon completion of the course, participants will understand where they are in their spiritual development and will know the appropriate spiritual formation next steps to take to progress in their faith.

B. Questionnaire #1 – mail back – this questionnaire will be the Christian Life Profile Assessment Tool; **Questionnaire #2** – in person – these questionnaires will be completed at the beginning of every in-class session and only consists of one question: “What was your spiritual life like this past week?”; **Questionnaire #3** – in person – this questionnaire will be completed at the end of the 5-week course and only consist of one question: In light of your participation in this spiritual formation course, what ‘next step’, if any, will you apply (or have you applied) into your life? **Ethnographic observations** – observations made by project researcher after each of the 5 in-class sessions; **Unobtrusive observations** – observations made by project researcher after each of the 5 in-class sessions.

Participants invited to take part in the project are the leaders with whom I have a close working relationship and over whom I have ministry supervision. They are selected to participate, before others in the congregation, because their support and cooperation would be vital later on when this spiritual formation course will be introduced to the entire congregation. The leaders themselves also wish to grow in their faith and

in their ability to become better leaders to serve the congregation, and they also desire to lead by example.

- D. 1.** Known benefit to the participant – the participant will learn or be reminded of essential biblical teaching on spiritual formation; the participant will gain an understanding of the spiritual formation process and where they are in their faith development; the participant may deepen in relationship with others in the group who are also desiring to grow in their faith; the participant will receive encouragement and support to help them take their next step in their spiritual formation.
- D. 2.** Known benefit to the church – the church will benefit from their leaders having received more biblical study and spiritual formation training; the church will benefit from having the spiritual formation course possibly being modified into a more effective course and suitable content.
- E. 2.** Participants will be induced to disclose information of an intimate or otherwise sensitive nature – During the in-class presentations and small group discussions, personal reflective questions will be given to participants. Participants may have information of a sensitive nature to share, but everyone will have freedom to share their response or not to share their response. There will be a reminder prior to each session that personal information disclosed by participants in the course must be kept confidential. The project will collect participants' responses without identifying any names.

There are institutional/formal power relationships present between researcher and participants (e.g. student/teacher, employer/employee, counsellor/client, ministers/congregant member). Two of the persons invited to participate are church staff: one is a volunteer Pastor of Adult Christian Education; the other is a half-time Pastor of Youth and Outreach Ministries. As I have ministry supervision over these two staff, the project will need to state and reassure them at the outset, as well as to reassure them publicly in the presence of other church leaders, that their participation or non-participation in the project will not affect in any way their role, responsibilities or employment status. In the Presbyterian system of church governance, the teaching elders (pastoral staff) and the ruling elders (elders) have equal standing in terms of power and authority. Any member of Session might appeal to a higher court should there be a need to address any unjust treatment or improper behavior. Moreover, it is my intention to be transparent with the objectives of the research project. It is my hope that through their voluntary participation, they too might have ownership of the project and its results. This openness might lessen their concern of my having any 'power over' them with respect to the research project. The other potential participants are volunteer church leaders. They already have the freedom to choose whether or not to be involved in a church activity, and their participation or non-participation in the project will not affect their leadership status or responsibilities in

any way. Finally, the research project will be conducted in a manner which will maintain the anonymity of participants and the confidentiality of their responses.

- G.1. Anonymity of participants – There will be no names mentioned in the project report.
- G.2. Confidentiality of data – The identity of each participant completing the assessment tool will be coded. A third party will assign a secret number to each participant. The result will be that the researcher will not be able to identify which questionnaire belongs to which participant. The weekly questionnaires will not require the respondents to supply their names. They will simply be grouped according to the particular time in which they were collected. Any data collected via observations will be recorded without the use of names. Responses will simply be coded participant A, B,C, etc. Observations made during the sessions will make no mention of names. Again, participants will simply be coded participant A, B, C, etc.

Appendix F: Annotated Selected Bibliography

Boa, Kenneth. 2001. *Conformed to His Image: Biblical and Practical Approaches to Spiritual Formation*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

Boa approached spiritual formation by describing and elucidating the twelve facets Christian spirituality. His thorough analysis serves as a caution to me that there are no short-cuts to spiritual formation, even when spiritual formation is to be presented by means of a basic short course.

Calhoun, Adele Ahlberg. 2005. *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices That Transform Us*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

I have found Calhoun's revised and expanded edition of her handbook the most versatile among the books that introduce spiritual disciplines. In particular, by listing spiritual disciplines according to the seeker's desire, she has made these spiritual practices accessible to more people. Since the spiritual formation model course prescribes the use of disciplines for our formation, this resource is quite indispensable. The variety of disciplines featured in this handbook also mean that people are likely to find something that will speak to their need and desire.

Carson, Kent and Mike Lueken. 2011. *Renovation of the Church: What Happens When a Seeker Church Discovers Spiritual Formation*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

Pastors Carson and Luekens' story of how they inadvertently discovered spiritual formation and how they went about making revolutionary changes to prioritize

spiritual formation in their mega congregation was inspirational for me. As I envision introducing a basic short course on spiritual formation to the evangelical population, I draw from the courage of these two pastors. I also seek to learn from the lessons they encountered when ushering change into their church.

Foster, Richard J. 1978. *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*. New York, NY: Harper and Row.

This classic text on spiritual disciplines by Foster has endured the test of time. His classification and ordering of spiritual practices, the “inward, outward, and corporate” disciplines still resonate with many who seek to integrate these practices into their lives. Foster’s invitation to “move beyond surface living into the depths” sets precisely the tone and motivation for those I hope a course on spiritual formation would reach.

Frazer, Randy. 2005. *The Christian Life Profile Assessment Workbook: Developing Your Personal Plan to Think, Act, and Be Like Jesus*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

This instrument was discovered after the research project was started. But it certainly dovetailed wonderfully with my hope to measure and tract spiritual formation. The genius of the assessment is its architecture, marrying Christ’s greatest commandments of ‘loving God and loving neighbor’ with thirty beliefs, practices and virtues.

Howard, Evans B. 2008. *The Brazos Introduction to Christian Spirituality*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing.

Howard’s text book on Christian Spirituality was what started me on the quest of understanding Christian spiritual formation, especially from an evangelical, Protestant Christian tradition. His definition of spiritual formation, “the intentional and semi-intentional processes by which believers become more fully conformed and united to Christ,” and specific use of the terms ‘conformation’, ‘formation’, and ‘transformation’ was foundation for developing my own understanding of the biblical model of spiritual formation (Howard, 2008, 268). I especially appreciate Howard’s integration of historical insights in the text, thus explaining for me why my own Christian upbringing had missed significant segments of how Christians had historically practiced their faith.

Jones, Tony. 2005. *The Sacred Way: Spiritual Practices for Everyday Life*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

I appreciate Jones’ approach to presenting spiritual disciplines. He has the knack of explaining some of the ancient practices using contemporary language. Since many who need a basic course on spiritual formation are new believers who are

younger in age, Jones' ability to communicate to millennials is most certainly needed and welcomed.

Mulholland Jr., M. Robert. 1985. *Shaped by the Word: The Power of Scripture in Spiritual Formation*. Nashville, TN: Upper Room Books.

The earliest of Mulholland's books on spiritual formation, before spiritual formation became popular amongst evangelicals, the author had already stated in the mid-eighties that "spiritual formation is not an option...spiritual formation is the primal reality of human existence." (25) This is where I received inspiration to develop a basic course on spiritual formation that can be taught to every Christian and provided by every church committed to disciple-making. In this book, Mulholland explained how Bible reading is formational (our responsibility is to read God's Word), and how it then becomes transformational (God's responsibility to change us).

———. 1993. *Invitation to a Journey: A Road Map for Spiritual Formation*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

Mulholland use of the 'journey' motif struck a chord with me. Spiritual formation is more than a "static possession... more than a quest for techniques, methods, and programs...instead, it is an increasingly faithful response to the One whose purpose shapes our path." (12) The interesting thing of this book is seeing how Mulholland paired up an individual's personality with spiritual formation. His insights here warned that we would be in error if we're seeking to fit every disciple into uniformity. But rather, God's transformation will still allow our individuality to shine through. This is an important point made in the course in the transformation section regarding which parts of our lives God wishes to change.

———. 2006. *The Deeper Journey: The Spirituality of Discovering your True Self*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

The section that is most relevant to the spiritual formation course is Mulholland's first chapter on "the goal" or the ultimate purpose of the Christian life. The answer given by the author is "to be like Jesus." (12) This also is the goal of why we seek spiritual formation and why the author's approach to finding the 'true self' parallels the aim of the spiritual formation course. I am particularly appreciative of the author's selection and exegesis of various Scriptures which set the foundation for a biblical model of spiritual formation.

Peterson, Eugene H. 1987. *Working the Angles: The Shape of Pastoral Integrity*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing.

I most appreciate Peterson's description of pastors as 'shopkeepers'. His insights about the consumerism that has crept into our churches and our disciple-making

supports what Pastors Carson and Lueken discovered in their church. The case put forward by my research project is a direct response against the consumeristic tide of doing church through marketing and programming.

Pettit, Paul. 2008. *Foundations of Spiritual Formation: A Community Approach to Becoming Like Christ*. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications.

I am grateful for Pettit's compilation of works by twelve different authors on the subject of spiritual formation. But the two emphases that were most relevant to developing the spiritual formation course was Pettit's own section on "God's Word, Man's Cooperation," (23) and the overall insistence that all the contributors had that spiritual formation must be carried out within the faith community. I have included this emphasis in the "Reformation" chapter of the spiritual formation course.

Wardle, Terry. (2003). *The Transforming Path: A Christ-centered Approach to Spiritual Formation*. Siloam Springs, AK: Leafwood Publishers.

The most salient quote from Wardle's book and the spiritual formation course is this: "...the life of faith should be clearly explained to every follower of Christ...the teaching that a new believer receives should include clear instruction regarding the place of difficulty, doubt, and trial in forming a person in Christ Jesus." (11) I share Wardle's passion that spiritual formation should be taught to every believer. Wardle goes one step further by illustrating spiritual formation from the life of Jesus. If Christ was spiritually formed while on earth, how much more do we all also need to be spiritually formed.

Wilhoit, James C. (2008). *Spiritual Formation as if the Church Mattered: Growing in Christ through Community*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic.

Like Pastors Carson and Lueken, Wilhoit wrote to encourage the church to do spiritual formation. His insights about creating a 'culture of formation' are especially valuable to pastors seeking to raise the awareness and priority of spiritual formation over above other more popular and attractive programs in the church.

Willard, Dallas. 2002. *Renovation of the Heart: Putting on the Character of Christ*. Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress.

**Appendix G:
Participants Responses to Weekly Questions and
Course End Questions 1, 2, 5**

Table 8. Participants Responses to Weekly Questions and Course End Questions 1, 2, 5

Questions:

Weekly Questionnaire (Oct. 4, 11, 18, 25, Nov. 9): See Appendix E

Course End Questionnaire: See Appendix F

EQ1 - What were your expectations? Were they met?

EQ2 – What do you hope the assessment tool will indicate about your spiritual life after participating in the course?

EQ5 – What next step will you consider putting into action in your life?

Questions	Participant A's Responses
Oct 4	Making an effort to pray and read Scripture each day - God reminds me He is in control - Quoting Scripture when I get anxious - Feeling fairly close to God
Oct 11	Praying more regularly with my spouse - God reminds me to be in constant conversation with Him - I hope I'm hearing God correctly - I feel like a hamster on a treadmill; life is so busy
Oct 18	Had opportunity to counsel 2 people this week - Reminded one person of her identity as child of God - Prayed for another person for healing and protection
Oct 25	God reminds me to stay close to Him - Counselling and praying for another family facing spiritual warfare - Comforted by quoting Scripture when feeling anxious and worried
N09	God reminds me that He is unchanging and in control - Continued to pray and give thanks even in this busy and difficult week - I know that I have to truly submit to God's will when feeling impatient
EQ1	To learn more about the process of spiritual formation. Yes
EQ2	That I will give more of my time, energy and resources to God and others.
EQ5	No response

Questions	Participant A's Responses
Oct 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reading Scripture daily - Praying daily for others - Have opportunities to share faith with colleagues - Sensing God's help with teaching Sunday School - Feeling helpless to help depressed people - Feeling unworthy of God's forgiveness
Oct 11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Praying daily for others and adding more people to list - Paid for food for needy stranger - Completed assignment for Session - Counselling young adults on faith
Oct 18	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Invited a colleague to church - Hearing God speak to me about being a mentor to other men - Helped a young adult get a job - Cared and prayed for 2 persons going through difficult times - Sensed Spirit's help with Sunday School preparation
Oct 25	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Praying daily for others - Talk with teens about spiritual life - Spending time to be creative in preparing for Sunday School lesson - Sensed Spirit's help with Sunday School preparation
N09	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Had opportunity to share about 'trusting God' with colleague - Felt God's help when sharing and was able to share freely about personal experiences and faith - Sensed God at work at church – at the LGBTQ discussions and in the Men's group - Want to be more loving 'outwardly'
EQ1	<p>To develop a plan to get to know God better, to achieve this, and to be able to share this with others.</p> <p>Yes</p>
EQ2	<p>To see how I have changed; to share this change with others so they too can benefit.</p>
EQ5	<p>Start training to be more godly; help others who are spiritually stagnant by building a trust relationship with them and by being their mentor and support.</p>

Questions	Participant B's Responses
Oct 04	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sensed God's leading for me - Heard and felt God calming me down when I was angry about a situation
Oct 11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Stressful week with conflict - Prayed for patience and to keep words in check - Heard God tell me to accept good with bad
Oct 18	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Feeling grateful this week - Saw others who were suffering more than my own suffering - Sensed God being with me while I was undergoing a long and tiring test
Oct 25	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Felt jealous that I couldn't go on a trip due to my health situation - But felt happiness for others who could go on trip - Continued to pray daily and to give thanks - Heard God telling me to be patient
Nov 09	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Had a week full of meetings to determine my fitness for work - Feeling at peace with whatever the outcome regarding work - Sensed God's leading. His way is always the best. Just need to trust and listen to Him more
EQ1	To better understand spiritual formation. Yes
EQ2	To see if my Christian life is balanced in loving God and loving neighbor, and where I need improvements.
EQ5	No response

Questions	Participant E's Responses
Oct 04	- Personal – Bible reading, prayer time, drive family to church - Church – led small group, Sunday worship, helped design church banner, talked with other parents of youth, talked with pastors
Oct 11	Personal – felt very thankful for family, including the blessing of a new baby in brother's family, felt blessed to care for and lead my two sons Church – felt blessed to be asked to lead Sunday worship, prepared to lead small group
Oct 18	Personal – Felt God's leading in family's lives, and in son's application to university; in the purchase of a new sewing machine Church – felt blessed to lead worship and serve in small group
Oct 25	Personal – felt blessed to have son participate in charity event to support missions; blessed to have daughter join new choir Church – attended another small group, preparing for Messy Church, felt happy to see church preparing to add staff
Nov 09	Personal – thankful for new driveway and stone patio, praised God for connection with a stranger who was also a believer, prayed for son's university choice
EQ1	To get a better understanding of the spiritual formation model. Yes – I gained a better appreciation for how God has worked in changing my life
EQ2	To identify areas of my strengths and areas needing progress.
EQ5	Review the Spiritual Disciplines and Desires, to select a discipline to improve upon.

Questions	Participant F's Responses
Oct 04	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - spent less time this week on prayer and doing devotions due to busyness of work - perhaps prayed less because week was calm and quiet with no immediate issues
Oct 11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - had more time to reflect on how fortunate we really are - had opportunity to talk with family about God's many blessings - in reflection, I realized how far I have come
Oct 18	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - enjoyed attending church prayer meeting, praying gave me a sense of peace, contentment, and spiritual fulfillment - felt God's presence during prayer time - in reflection, wondered how this sense of peace can last longer, and how to sense God's presence more often
Oct 25	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - spent time counselling a friend with marital issues, felt friend's despair and lack of joy - realized the only lasting joy is knowing Jesus; in contrast, joy through fun times and things always fade, I can see more clearly now how Christ is the only way
Nov 09	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - spent time this week reading Scriptures with spouse - felt reading Scriptures is good for relationship with spouse and for personal spiritual growth - realized that I should be doing more spiritual practices and how easy it is to miss doing them
EQ1	To have a better understanding of how to improve my spiritual life; Yes
EQ2	I hope it will show progress towards a fuller spiritual life.
EQ5	Chose a spiritual discipline and implement it.

**Appendix H:
Participants' Responses to Course End
Questions #3, #4, #6, and #7**

Table 9. Participants' responses to questions #3, #4, #6, and #7 in course end questionnaire

Q#3 – What stands out for you in the different sessions (1-5)?

Q#4 – What would you change in the course?

Q#6 – Would you recommend this course? Why? Q#7 – Any other comments?

Question	Participant A's Responses
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Question	Participant A's Responses
Q3 Oct 04	Spiritual formation is an on-going process which will not be completed until we see Jesus.
Q3 Oct 11	Spiritual formation definition; I can only turn from conformation with God's help
Q3 Oct 18	Because condemnation without Christ is real, we must have an urgency to share gospel
Q3 Oct 25	Anything we do can be a spiritual discipline
Q3 Nov 09	Only God can transform us; we have to surrender in order for God to transform us
EQ4	No response
EQ6	No response

Questions	Participant B's Responses
Q3 Oct 04	Spiritual formation is a life-time process
Q3 Oct 11	We are part of the corrupt world
Q3 Oct 18	
Q3 Oct 25	Spiritual disciplines train our spiritual actions to become second nature
Q3 Nov 09	We must change
EQ4	Use other ways (besides sharing) to engage people, i.e. Role play, compare and contrast God's and world's way, ask 'what if' questions, use music videos, break-out groups, words of encouragement, etc.
EQ6	Yes. Course may help people discover their life purpose.

Questions	Participant D's Responses
Q3 Oct 04	Sorry Alan, my memory so poor now. I really don't remember.
Q3 Oct 11	Sorry Alan, my memory so poor now. I really don't remember.
Q3 Oct 18	
Q3 Oct 25	Sorry Alan, my memory so poor now. I really don't remember.
Q3 Nov 09	Sorry Alan, my memory so poor now. I really don't remember.
EQ4	Provide more hand-outs with notes to help retain content.
EQ6	Yes. I think believers of any age or stage in their walk could benefit. Provide more handout notes.

Questions	Participant E's Responses
Q3 Oct 04	The spiritual formation model illustration
Q3 Oct 11	"do not conform to the world or to evil desires" but be conformed to Jesus"

Questions	Participant E's Responses
Q3 Oct 18	The message, the messenger, and the means of salvation
Q3 Oct 25	We need present and new spiritual disciplines to keep us in constant relationship with Jesus
Q3 Nov 09	God takes His own time in changing us
EQ4	Provide take home material; participants can do some homework that will be taken up during each session
EQ6	Yes, but content may be difficult for seekers. Better suited for believers who are already part of a church small group. The small numbers in the course led to more intimate learning, sharing, and involvement.

Questions	Participant Fs Responses
Q3 Oct 04	When I became a Christian, I did get the full story
Q3 Oct 11	n/a
Q3 Oct 18	The gospel message is much fuller than just John 3:16
Q3 Oct 25	Small, steady changes over a long time has a big impact on spiritual life
Q3 Nov 09	n/a
EQ4	Provide time and opportunity for participants to choose a spiritual discipline
EQ6	Yes. It provides a strong foundation to build your walk with God.

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