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Tyndale University College & Seminary

The Importance of Hearing God in the Spiritual Formation of Chinese Christians  
of Immigrant Background

A Research Portfolio  
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by  
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## ABSTRACT

Christian spiritual formation is a process of being conformed to the image of Christ. A Christlike Christian will be a convincing witness for Christ. The focus of this portfolio is to help Chinese immigrant Christians in the Mandarin congregation of Chinese Gospel Church (CGC) to be formed like Christ. Due to their cultural background, this group of Christians faces unique challenges in their spiritual formation. This portfolio is composed of three parts: the spiritual autobiography of the researcher, a model of spiritual formation for immigrant Chinese Christians and a participatory action research project focused on hearing God through *lectio divina*. There is one major theme running through this portfolio: hearing God, which played key roles in my spiritual formation and was viewed as a crucial factor in the model of spiritual formation designed to help immigrant Chinese Christians to overcome spiritual formation hurdles. Belonging to a small group also plays an important role in the spiritual growth of immigrant Christians. For example, small group can be a good setting for people to hear God. The research project, which was carried out in eight consecutive weeks, involved eight participants doing *lectio divina* on biblical texts, individually and in a small group setting. Most participants expressed their experience of hearing God by doing *lectio divina*, and some vowed to change their behaviour. In addition, they all expressed desire to practice *lectio divina* regularly, an indication that hearing God has the potential to help Chinese immigrant Christians to overcome obstacles to their spiritual development.

In summary, this portfolio shows that hearing God and belonging to a small group are helpful in overcoming the hurdles to the spiritual formation of immigrant Chinese Christians, enabling them to grow more Christlike.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AGC	Associated Gospel Churches
CCIC	Chinese Christian Incorporation of Canada
CGC	Chinese Gospel Church
CGCT	Chinese Gospel Church of Toronto
ESL	English as Second Language
NIV	New International Version
TOEFL	Test of English as a Foreign Language
TWR	Trans World Radio
UFO	Unidentified Flying Object
ULF	Unfailing Love Fellowship

## **CHAPTER 1**

### **INTRODUCTION**

As a pastor of a Mandarin congregation, my desire is to help my congregants who are immigrants from China to have a transformed life of love, joy, and peace so that their lives will convincingly witness for Christ. This desire prompted me to start my study of Doctor of Ministry at Tyndale in 2014. After three years of study, I have come to the conclusion that hearing God and the modeling of mature Christians not only have played vital roles in my own spiritual formation but may also be helpful in the spiritual formation of Chinese immigrant Christians in CGC.

#### **Summary of the Three Parts of This Portfolio**

In order to explore how to help my congregants to be formed like Christ, I looked back at my own spiritual formation. Since I am also an immigrant from China, my experience in spiritual formation could be of help in their spiritual formation.

There are two factors which have played important roles in shaping my spiritual growth: hearing God and the modeling of mature Christians. First, in my life, God has spoken to me via various means such as dreams, other Christians, promptings of the Spirit and the Holy Bible. Sometimes, God has confirmed the same message via different means. One example is God's calling me to be a full-

time pastor. Without hearing from God, it would have been impossible for me to quit my professional job and become a full-time pastor because my personal plan was to have a successful profession and serve God as a lay Christian. After hearing God, I knew that it was His will that I serve Him as a full time pastor. Although I was reluctant at the beginning, my heart was changed gradually to do His will.

Contemporary and historic models have also exerted significant influence on my spiritual growth. In the first four years of my Christian life, my wife and I were blessed to attend a weekly home Bible study in a couple's home. This couple (Joyce and David) not only taught us to study the Bible but, more importantly, gave us precious opportunities to feel and taste the love of God through their smiles, thoughtfulness, food, generosity, etc. Their modelling tremendously encouraged my wife and me to grow spiritually and even shaped our ministry philosophy in CGC to a great extent. After immigration to Canada, my wife and I followed their example and soon opened our rented apartment room to new immigrants from China for a home Bible study. We not only provided a place for Bible study but also provided refreshments and transportation for those who needed a ride. From a historical perspective, Dr. John Song, a great evangelist in 1930s China, is one of the models in my spiritual pursuit. His enthusiasm for evangelism and even his style of preaching the Gospel has inspired me to be enthusiastic about evangelism. Finally, I have experienced many difficulties in my life, some of which even challenged my faith. However, these trials enabled me to experience the faithfulness of God over and over again. Just

like the saying in the book of Proverbs, “the crucible for silver and the furnace for gold, but the Lord tests the heart” (Proverbs 17:3), God has used difficulties and hardships to test and strengthen my faith. Difficulty is only one side of a coin. If by faith we turn the other side over, we will see the shining face of God and burst into joy.

The second part of this portfolio is a model of spiritual formation which is designed to help Chinese immigrant Christians in my congregation to grow spiritually. They are from different parts of China and all speak Mandarin although some also speak their own dialects. They have different educational backgrounds with some having received university education and some only elementary level. However, my observation is that many of them face the same three hurdles in their spiritual growth, which are pursuit of wealth, busyness and occupation with other priorities. People have different excuses for pursuing wealth as discussed in Section 5 of Chapter 3. No matter how reasonable their excuses are, the reality is that they have been unable to commit to their spiritual growth. As shown in Figure 1, pursuit of wealth, busyness and occupation with other priorities are causally related. In general, pursuit of wealth will result in busyness which often results in priority given to many things other than pursuing God.

An important factor in the spiritual development of Christians is active involvement in a small group. In a small group, members not only study the Bible together but can feel and taste the love of God through the sharing of life experiences. The love of God is not an abstract slogan or propaganda but is

actualized in the daily lives of mature believers, which is a powerful and convincing witness to Christ. In a small group, the leader plays a pivotal role in shaping the members of the group, as Chinese people naturally look to the group leader as a role model to imitate or follow.

Based on my own experience of spiritual formation and the specific challenges Chinese immigrant Christians face in their spiritual growth, in Chapter 3, I propose a three-stage model in a small group setting to promote the spiritual formation of immigrant Christians, and the content and logic of how this model might be of help is discussed. Stage One of the model is awakening; Stage Two is learning to worship; and Stage Three is practicing spiritual disciplines. These three stages are sequential and ongoing. Awakening helps people to see their own weaknesses and the greatness of God by the behaviours or witnesses of other believers in small group. In other words, awakening helps people to hear God. Some people are awakened from their unbelief and some from their little faith. Once a person is awakened, he or she will have a tendency to learn to worship. Some Chinese believers have a wrong concept of worshipping God; for example, they only view attending Sunday church service as worshipping. A small group is one of the places where people learn true worship, which includes both public and private worship, as discussed in detail in Chapter 3. The third stage of spiritual formation, practicing spiritual disciplines, is the stage in which believers take initiative in practicing spiritual disciplines or are encouraged by other members to do so in order to further their spiritual growth or closeness to God. To keep on practicing disciplines in spite of temptations, distractions and frustrations,

the support or encouragement of a small group is paramount for Chinese Christians of immigrant background.

The third part of this portfolio is my participatory research project which has explored the usefulness of *lectio divina*, one of the spiritual disciplines highlighted in the three-stage model in Chapter 3, in helping believers to hear God in the biblical text, which has been thought to be critical in a believer's spiritual formation. This research project was carried out with eight participants who underwent eight weeks of carrying out *lectio divina* on specified biblical texts. Due to the relatively short period of this project, it was difficult to see concrete life transformations; therefore, the subjective feelings of the participants were studied instead. In this project, the parameters examined are the *sacred experiences*, which are defined as subjective feelings such as closeness to God, a touched heart, and hearing God while doing *lectio divina* (detailed definition in introduction of Chapter 4).

The results have shown that all participants experienced a sacred experience while reading the Bible through *lectio divina*. Two could not hold back their tears while sharing in a small group, a reaction which they had rarely experienced in their regular Bible reading. Their expressions of emotion indicated that their hearts had been touched. Two participants expressed explicitly that *lectio divina* helped them to pray God-centered prayers. All expressed the desire to adopt *lectio divina* as one of the methods of reading the Bible, with one participant vowing to give it priority. A promising sign was observed, namely that

reading the Bible through *lectio divina* does not simply increase head knowledge but touches the heart.

### **The Key Theme: Hearing God in This Portfolio**

Hearing God is the key theme running through the three parts of this portfolio. As an immigrant from China, hearing God has been of paramount importance in my own spiritual formation. God has spoken clearly to me on many key occasions in my life. Without hearing God, my life story would be quite different. Probably, I would never have become a full-time pastor. To me, the significance of the experience of hearing God is that God is no longer seen as an abstract concept. He speaks, although invisible. He loves me, watches me and leads me. Whenever I do His will, peace and joy fill me in ways beyond words. My heart shifts gradually from loving this material world to loving Him and fearing Him. We will see in this portfolio that a small group setting provides an ideal environment for hearing God. In my own experience, God spoke powerfully to me through Joyce and David, the leaders of the first small group my wife and I attended as new believers. Through their example, I felt God telling me that His Word is the living Word which is capable of transforming people's lives. Hearing God through the modeling of mature Christians blessed me tremendously in my spiritual formation and helped me to learn to put God first in daily life.

### **The Urgency for Chinese Immigrant Christians to Hear God and Join a Small Group**

In my experience, it is easy to convert Chinese immigrants to Christianity but difficult to disciple them. After baptism, many believers fail to grow beyond

the stage of spiritual infancy. This phenomenon is not unique to CGCT; it has also been observed in other North American Chinese Churches (Tian 2015, 21). There is an urgent need to support Chinese immigrant Christians in their spiritual growth so that they will not remain as infant Christians for ever but “become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ” (Ephesians 4:13). Otherwise they will shine no light of Christ, and even worse, become a stumbling block to others who seek Christ. To support immigrant Chinese Christians in their spiritual growth, a model has been designed to guide them in overcoming three common hurdles (pursuit of wealth, busyness and occupation with other priorities). In this model, hearing God and small group participation are enlisted as effective tools in the spiritual formation of Chinese Christians. The results of this project have shown that hearing God through *lectio divina* can indeed bring about transformation in people’s lives, such as the confession of sins and the changing of prayer patterns from self-centered to God-centered. A small group can serve as a platform for new people to study the Bible and see and taste the love of God through shared experiences with other Christians. Like the Apostle Thomas, who doubted the resurrection of Jesus Christ and asked for evidence (John 20:25), many Chinese immigrant Christians doubt the Word of God despite having been baptised. Hearing God and belonging to a small group have the potential to alleviate doubt and instill in them the desire to pursue spiritual growth. Besides, as a Christian community, a small group also plays a guardian role in helping believers who claim to hear God to discern whether a message is truly from God or from other sources.

## **Definition of Hearing God through the Bible**

My experience of hearing God helps me to realize that the Bible is not just a book but the Holy Book of God which speaks. Cindy Edgett's description may help us to understand what hearing God through the Bible means: "Have you ever read the Bible and all of a sudden, a scripture seems to jump off of the page? You see or realize something new about that scripture that you didn't know before even though you've read it a hundred times...It spoke personally to your circumstances in a way that you cannot explain" In the *lectio divina* project of this paper, hearing God is defined as having a *sacred experience*, which is defined as the subjective feelings such as closeness to God, a touched heart, and hearing God while doing *lectio divina* (details are provided in Chapter 4).

All scripture passages used in this paper are from the New International Version Bible (NIV Bible 1985) unless specified.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **A LIFE FULL OF HEAVENLY BLESSINGS**

#### **MY SPIRITUAL AUTOBIOGRAPHY**

Looking back, I can see the blessings of God at every stage of my life. Not only has He shown His love to me since I became a Christian, but He also cared about me when I was an atheist. Since coming to Christ, I have been deeply grieved whenever I hear people cursing God or blaspheming against God. They insult God, who gives them physical life, provides basic needs such as air, light, and rain water for free and even sent His only beloved Son to die on the cross for their sins.

The love of God is unconditional. The Bible says, “He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous” (Matthew 5:45). Many people search for the meaning of life, but my experience has shown me that the meaning of life is to know the God who loves us. Knowing this gracious God, our life is full of hope and joy and peace. Without knowing Him, life is purposeless. I would like to share how God led me in each stage of life.

## **While I Was an Atheist, He Cared about Me**

The first 32 years of my life, I was an atheist; however, it was not a conscious choice. Like many other Chinese who grew up in socialist red China, I became an atheist because from the first grade I was taught that there was no God. In the early 1960s, I was born in atheist Communist China. At that period of time, all religions were labeled as superstitious and banned. All religious buildings were closed down or converted for other uses, and religious signs like crosses and Bibles were destroyed. If anyone claimed to be a Christian, Catholic or Buddhist, he or she would be persecuted, made to do forced labor or jailed (Gardner, 2017).

While the Chinese leader Chairman Mao was still alive, everyone—young and old, male and female—was required to learn and sing “The Internationale,” one of the most recognizable and popular songs of the socialist movement since the late 19th century, composed by a French socialist. Its second stanza firmly denies the existence of God: “There are no supreme saviours, neither God, nor Caesar, nor tribune” (Bester, 2011). This song was sung at many events. Even today, I can still sing it. At that period of time, what was ironic was that although Chinese communists denied the existence of divine beings, they called Chairman Mao a god. Another song, “The East is Red,” refers to Mao as a “great saviour.” Even in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, many Chinese still consider him to be a god.

Although I was an atheist for so many years, God still loved me and showed His favour to me. Many fortunate and miraculous events happened to me while I was an atheist, and I used to consider myself lucky. Since coming to

Christ, I attribute all of these events to God. There can be no other explanation for such experiences. I will address these occurrences in the following.

### **An Honoured Student**

Before I was born, my father was labeled as a counter-revolutionary and was persecuted by the local communist authority. A counter-revolutionary is a person who is opposed to communist rule or ideology. Ironically, my father was once a model communist cadre, or leader, in my home town. My mother told me that he had a caring heart and always gave generously to those in need. Many years prior, his inferiors had falsely accused him of killing communist soldiers, and the same accusers were seeking revenge for being denounced by my father for abusing public materials. At that time, anyone who was labeled a counter-revolutionary was persecuted or even killed, and his or her family members were ostracized. Children of counter-revolutionaries were called *pups*. In the west, pup has a positive or complimentary meaning. However, many years ago in China, the meaning of pup was totally different. If somebody was labeled a pup, he or she was considered to be a lower class citizen and was discriminated against badly.

Despite being a pup, I was treated unexpectedly well by my classmates and teachers. I was appointed a student leader and awarded every year. At that time, to be a student leader and to be awarded was a great honour. Each class had five student leader positions. Generally speaking, only those students who had a reputable background could be appointed student leaders, that is, students whose parents were village leaders or workers (at that time, workers were superior to farmers, and in the eyes of many, they were higher class). I was the only

exception, for my father was a counter-revolutionary and was forced to work as a farmer with minimal pay.

Why, then, was I treated with such honour? My family attributed it to my high marks at school. It was true that I consistently scored 100 percent for the only two subjects (math and Chinese language) taught at school from Grades 1 to 7. One teacher even nicknamed me, “model student.” But to equate honour with high marks could do little to explain my situation because pups were typically denied all opportunities. For example, my elder brother possessed all the qualifications for a teaching position, but the position was offered instead to a candidate who was deemed unqualified by many. When he had passed 24 years of age, my parents worried about my brother’s marriage prospects; after all, who would want to marry a pup? At that time, boys and girls were introduced through a matchmaker. One day, a matchmaker brought a girl of another village to him. She was satisfied with my brother’s appearance and education; however, when she and her family learned that he was a pup, they chose not to proceed with the marriage. My brother was terribly upset, and my father felt very guilty about the situation.

In Grades 8 to 10, I was treated like a hero. Many teachers encouraged students to learn from my example. Why? I did not try to impress any people, teachers or students. Actually, I was an introvert and very shy. Still, to attribute my special treatment to my high marks alone is farfetched.

Now, as a Christian, I attribute my honours to God, for “He raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the ash heap; He seats them with princes,

with the princes of their people” (Psalms 113:7-8). Probably God also used that experience to prepare me to be His servant many years later.

### **Narrow Escapes from Death**

Three times, I was very close to death, but my life was miraculously spared. These narrow escapes from death prompted me to pursue the meaning of life.

When I was three years old, I caught a very bad skin infection. My mother said that the infection covered my entire body, from the soles of my feet to the top of my head, similar to Job in the Old Testament. There was a severe scarcity of antibiotics at that time, and even if medicine had been available, my parents could not have afforded it because they had no money at all. One day, I was found to have no breath and my parents, announcing that I was dead, laid me on a pile of straw on the ground for burial. At that time, it was a common practice for people to bury their dead without informing the authorities. The day my parents planned to bury me, my maternal grandmother, who was visiting from another village, pinched my philtrum point and resuscitated me. The philtrum or medial cleft is a vertical groove in the middle area of the upper lip, extending from the nose to the upper lip. The point between the upper one third and lower two thirds of the philtrum is called the philtrum point in Chinese acupuncture. Pinching this point has proven to be effective in many emergency circumstances, but “less is known about the exact biological mechanisms how acupuncture works” (Wong and Shen 2010, 5).

I experienced another narrow escape from death when I was a boarder for two years in high school. One day, during one of my classes, I suddenly lost consciousness and fell on the ground. When my consciousness returned, I was surprised to find myself lying on my bed in the dormitory with my teacher and many classmates around me. They reported to me that when I fell on the ground, I seemed to have lost my breath. Incredibly, one of my classmates, a young man with some acupuncture experience, had needles with him at the time. He performed acupuncture on my philtrum point, and I was immediately resuscitated. The young man had once been a barefoot doctor in his village, but he had never disclosed this to anyone before the incident.

When I was dating, my girlfriend studied at a university close to her home while I studied at a medical school in the same city. Most of the weekends, her family invited me to eat lunch or dinner at their home. I was extremely grateful for the invitation because I missed my girlfriend and longed to see her. One Sunday, after lunch, I had to leave earlier than usual to return to school. When I stepped out of the seven-storey apartment building, a big flower pot dropped from the top of the building and landed right in front of me. If I had taken one step further, it would have fallen on my head and I would have been killed or, at least, seriously injured. Seeing this, my girlfriend was scared to death, but I was extremely calm. Afterward, I gave much thought as to why the pot had fallen at that moment. There had been no wind at all at the time, nor did I or my girlfriend's family have enemies in that building, so it was unlikely that

somebody had dropped it deliberately. Following this incident, I was very careful whenever I exited an apartment building.

One incident might be haphazard, but when such experiences happen again and again, one has to ask why. Three times, death was so close to me, and each time I was saved. It seemed that some superpower was looking out for me—whenever I was in danger, help was there immediately. Now I attribute my good fortune to God. There can be no other explanation.

### **Marriage**

In high school, I fell in love secretly with a girl who sat right behind me in my class. I was fascinated by her beauty and her voice. Whenever she was in my presence, I felt uneasy. I never expressed my love to her directly because I thought that I was unworthy. First, I was short at that time, probably shorter than she, and it seemed to me that a boyfriend ought to be taller than his girlfriend. Second, I was poor. That was the main reason for my very low self-esteem. Third, I did not think I was handsome because my front teeth were crooked.

After graduation from high school, I was accepted into the medical university in ShenYang, the capital city of LiaoNing Province, and I did not know what became of the girl in my class. Why did I not inquire as to her whereabouts? There were probably two reasons for my inaction. First, I was extremely disappointed about my university entrance examination marks. In China, students in the final year of high school have to take national university entrance exams, and the scores play a large factor in determining one's prospects for university. The higher the scores, the greater the chance of being accepted into the more

prestigious universities. In my high school, all the teachers and students had assumed that I would be accepted into the top universities. I had assumed likewise. However, my performance during the exam had been unexpectedly poor. Second, for reasons already mentioned, I did not see any possibility of being with this girl one day. So I made no effort to locate her.

After five years of medical school study, I was awarded a bachelor degree in stomatology, the science dealing with the mouth and its diseases. Afterward, I was accepted into graduate school, where I chose to major in oral surgery. At that time, it was a great honour to be a graduate student, for graduate programs had just started in China. One day, a male classmate from high school paid me an unexpected visit. Surprisingly, Lisha, the girl with whom I had fallen in love, accompanied him. She looked at me, and I looked at her, and suddenly it seemed that we had a lot to say to each other. I invited her to a movie and, happily, she accepted. I was surprised that I was able to find the courage to date her.

That first date marked the start of our relationship. On the weekends, we tried very hard to spend time together—either Lisha came over or I went to her home or university. And during the week, we sent letters to each other. If one did not receive a letter from the other, he or she would be quite upset. We kept all the letters from that period of time. In April 1988, I finished my graduate studies, and we got married in a ceremony of collective weddings with many other couples.

Many people who knew us were surprised that we married each other. Lisha had many pursuers and could have found a better husband, both in appearance and wealth, and many matchmakers had introduced me to other girls.

However, I was not attracted to any of them, even though they were suitable marriage candidates in many aspects.

Lisha married me unconditionally. Even her parents did not have any conditions, which was uncommon. At that time, it was customary for the bridegroom's parents to purchase many items that the bride's parents required before the wedding. However, Lisha did not ask for a ring, furniture, or money. In fact, it was many years after we had our daughter that I bought her a ring.

My conversion to Christianity has changed my view on the circumstances leading to my marriage. Before I came to know God, I believed in fate. My fortune was so good that I married the girl I loved. Since knowing Christ, I have attributed my marriage to God. It was God who brought us together. We might have forgotten each other, but God did not forget us. When the time was right, He brought us together. God is our matchmaker.

### **Out of Temptation**

Lisha and I got married in early 1988. We were an enviable couple in the eyes of many. I was an oral surgeon in the largest hospital in the northeast of China, and she was employed in the import-export petroleum company of Liaoning province. But we were not satisfied. I tried hard to find an opportunity to go to North America or Europe to further my career. In 1991, I won a World Health Organization (WHO) fellowship award through a national competition exam. Before going abroad, we were required to take four months of English training at Xian, an ancient city which was over 1,500 kilometers away.

While away from my wife, I missed her a lot. Although we talked to each other on the phone frequently, I still felt that something was missing. Near the end of the training, a female colleague got emotionally close to me. We loved to talk to each other, but thankfully our relationship went no further. At that time, it seemed in my heart that there was a voice clearly warning me to stop that relationship. Although I did not stop immediately, I realized that it was morally wrong to get any closer to her.

When the training was over and I returned home, I confessed to my wife. Originally, I had not planned to tell her what happened, for concern that she might be hurt or do something harmful to our marriage. However, I was ill at ease; I felt guilty and had no peace in her presence. One evening, I boldly confessed to her and asked for forgiveness. I remember that her only reaction was to cry silently.

The love between us was not shattered by this incident; in fact, our marital relationship became even stronger and firmer and sweeter. In 1993, when I travelled to Chicago as a visiting scholar, I was away from my wife for 10 months. There were temptations around me, but I did not fall into those traps. This was not due to my perseverance. God preserved me from those deadly temptations.

### **God's Leading Me to Know Him**

I accepted Christ following a car accident. At that time, God opened my heart to cry to Him. But God's work in my life was not limited to that moment. Long before, He had already started to work in my life. The details are addressed in the following.

## **Fear of Death**

In my childhood, I was afraid of death and things related to death. In my hometown, if anybody died, his or her family members had to wear a black armband and white scarf. In addition, a red coffin would be placed in front of their house. Even if I did not see the corpse, the mere sight of those symbols of death would fill me with a sense of fear or despair.

When I was 12, a dialogue between my elder brother and his friend, which I overheard, brought on the worst fear of death. The dialogue went something like the following: Friend: "I heard that the USA has developed a neutron bomb." Brother: "How is it?" Friend: "It is very powerful. Its waves can penetrate buildings to kill all living creatures inside." Since China and the USA were enemies at that time, the idea of the USA using a neutron bomb to attack China captivated my imagination. What if I were killed? What would happen to me after death?

In 1980, when I was accepted into medical school, one of the subjects I studied was anatomy. Walking into the dissection room for the first time and seeing many dead bodies soaked in formalin, a liquid chemical used for preserving corpses, I was terrified.

Fear of death drove me to seek the meaning of life. Did humans originate from monkeys, as evolutionists claimed? If the theory of evolution was true, why was it necessary to follow rules? Why was it necessary to have moral values? Couldn't we just live like animals?

## **Reflections on Human Origin**

When I was very small, I was quite curious about where I came from. I asked my mother, and she told me that I had been picked up from the cesspit on the street. The cesspit was a large pool filled with human feces. After fermentation for a period of time, the feces were used as fertilizer by farmers. Hearing what my mother said, I went to the cesspit frequently to see whether I could find a baby.

In university, I still had a strong interest in the origin of humanity. Although the theory of evolution taught that human beings originated from monkeys, I was not convinced that this was true. At that time, I was fascinated with the UFO (unidentified flying objects) journal. One day, I came across a speculation in that journal about our human origin. The speculation was that humans were the product of aliens and female apes. The hypothesis was that millions and millions of years ago, apes were impregnated with aliens and gave birth to human beings. I was not convinced that this theory was true, either.

## **Reflections on Justice**

Buddhism influences Chinese culture tremendously. Its doctrine of karma or retribution for sin has been accepted by many Chinese. But what happened to my family made me suspicious of its validity. My father was once a model communist leader in our hometown. My mother said that he was very selfless. For example, if he knew that somebody had a shortage of food, he would generously give whatever he had to them. He never abused his power and also did not allow

his subordinates to abuse their power. Nevertheless, he was attacked ferociously and his job was taken away.

The Four Cleanups Movement started in China in 1963, and it ended in 1966. The goal of the movement was to cleanse politics, the economy, organizations, and ideology (the four cleanups). During this movement, my father's subordinates falsely accused him of killing communist soldiers in the 1940s. They even claimed to have a few witnesses. My father was removed from his position. Soon he was labeled a counter-revolutionary and persecuted until 1977. During those years, he suffered badly. He was attacked physically and mentally. The suffering my mother experienced was even worse.

When I became older, and especially after I entered university, I began to question why good people suffered and bad people prospered. I turned to the books of Mao Zhe Dong, our great leader, but I found no answer.

In 1993, I went to Chicago as a visiting scholar. One day, I was invited to a home Bible study group. There was an American pastor there. He tried to share the good news with me, but I had no patience to listen to him. Instead, I asked him the question: why do good people suffer and bad people prosper? He did not give me an answer directly. Looking back, I think he did the right thing, for at that time, no explanation or answer would have satisfied me—my heart was too full of bitterness.

## **Miraculous Redemption through a Car Accident**

From the time of my arrival in Chicago in January 1993, many Christians invited me to either attend a Bible study or have dinner. I did accept their invitation a few times, but many times I refused. Their friendliness made me suspicious of their motives. Before going abroad, I had received political training, the purpose of which was to warn against being deceived and tempted by hostile forces who were against China. I was told that some Chinese were tempted to work for them as spies and were eventually caught by Chinese public security organizations.

Although I kept a certain distance from Christians, I was fascinated by the Bible they gave me. While in China, I had read many books, ancient and modern, including *Dream of Red Mansions* (红楼梦), *Outlaws* (水浒传), *The Journey to The West* (西游记), *Three Kingdoms* (三国演义), *How the Steel Was Tempered* (钢铁是怎样炼成的), etc. However, I found that the Bible was completely different from other books. Other books talked to my head, whereas the Bible seemed to speak to my heart, and it answered many questions which had been in my heart for a long time. Where were human beings from? “The Lord God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being” (Genesis 2:7). Why was there no justice in this world? “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). The Bible captivated my heart and, sometimes, I was moved to tears.

In December 1993, my wife and daughter arrived in Chicago, bringing to an end our painful separation. But my wife felt lonely because her English was not very strong. So I took her to an ESL (English as Second Language) class in a local Chinese church. One evening, a Cantonese man shared the Gospel with me while I waited for my wife in the church lobby. I did not quite understand what he said, but it was clear that he wanted me to believe in Jesus.

One Friday afternoon the following March, I had a car accident while driving home in West Chicago. Strangely, my car was the only vehicle driving along the street in the visible distance at the time. Many cars were parked along the street. All of a sudden, a Buick parked on my side of the road made a sudden U-turn without any signalling. My car hit the Buick on the driver side. The Buick seemed to have no damage, but my Toyota Tercel was damaged badly. I was shaken up over the accident, and I cried out to Jesus Christ, "Jesus, accept me!" I did not know why I cried out to Jesus Christ, but afterwards, the fear was gone and the peace which transcends all understanding flooded my heart.

The driver of the Buick called 911, and police cars, an ambulance and firefighter trucks soon arrived on the scene. A police officer asked me whether I needed to go to the Emergency Ward, and I refused because that night I had to take my wife and daughter to a Bible study. All of a sudden, Bible study took priority over anything else.

After this accident, I had a burning desire to be baptized, so I went to the Chinese church where my wife attended ESL class and asked the pastor about the possibility of being baptized. The pastor was thrilled over my decision but

advised me to first attend four baptismal classes. My baptism was an unforgettable event. First, my wife and I were baptized on the same day, May 1. Second, I had a miraculous experience after the baptism. The baptismal pool was on the first floor, and baptismal candidates had to take the elevator to the second floor to change their clothes after the event. On the elevator, I got stuck for 30 minutes between the first and second floors. Wearing my wet baptismal robe, I should have felt a chill, but I did not. I was filled with joy, and later on I did not catch a cold at all.

### **Life Change**

After baptism, I seemed to have changed dramatically. I will describe these changes next.

### **Fervent Involvement in Church Activities**

I willingly became involved in all church activities. First, my whole family attended the Wednesday evening prayer meeting. Although only a few Cantonese-speaking believers attended the prayer meeting, we did not allow this to discourage us. A supernatural force seemed to be drawing us to the prayer meeting, and we could not resist attending. Second, we attended the weekly Friday evening home Bible study, where the host couple set a great example of serving God sacrificially by preparing refreshments or dinner for their guests and never complaining about children running around in their home (they had no children themselves). On one occasion, a little boy knocked down their Christmas tree and some decorations were broken, but the couple handled the situation with such grace that everyone was quickly set at ease. Third, we joined a new weekly

Saturday fellowship for Mandarin-speaking people. We actively took part in the fellowship, running the program, cooking and cleaning. And finally, on Sunday, we spent the whole day at church: Sunday school, worship service, lunch, cleanup, etc.

In 1996, I enrolled in a PhD program and became extremely busy with my studies. My wife suggested that I reduce my involvement in church activities, but after seeking God's will, I decided to remain active. And God lavished His rich blessings on me: I obtained high marks for all my compulsory courses.

In July 1994, after my studies in Chicago had ended, we returned to China. Once in my hometown, I could not wait to search for churches to attend for worship service. Surprisingly, there was a small church very close to my home. I had lived in the town for a few years, but I had never noticed the existence of that church. The first Sunday morning, I got up early and attended the service. It was packed, and there were no vacant seats. Many people had to listen to the preaching outside the building. After the service, I distributed some Christian journals that I had brought with me from Chicago. I was moved to see how thirsty the people were for spiritual materials. Immediately after I handed out the last of the journals, the senior pastor of that church, probably over 80 years old, approached to criticize me for distributing materials without his permission and told me that I was not welcome in that church. I was embarrassed, and he did not allow me any opportunity to explain. The next Sunday, I went to a service at a nearby Catholic church. The priest of that church recognized me as a stranger and

told me that I was not welcome there. I was dismayed over these two incidents, but I did not argue or resist.

### **Distaste for Ungodly Things**

Most people lie and never take it seriously. Some people lie to benefit themselves, and others lie for other motives. For instance, if a patient is diagnosed with cancer, he or she may not be told the truth for fear that it might scare the patient to death. After I became a Christian, I could not tolerate telling lies anymore. This did not mean that I was perfect, however. I still had many weaknesses.

In early 1996, we received a letter from my wife's company in China, asking to confirm whether we planned to go back to China or remain permanently in the USA. If we planned to stay in the USA, we would forfeit our right to our company-allotted apartment. At that time, it was difficult to get a company-allotted apartment because China was a very populous country. Once people were allotted an apartment, they kept it until death.

Because it was our plan to remain in the USA if possible, I decided to inform the company of our intention. But my mother-in-law, who was with us at that time, was very upset; she worried that we would lose the apartment immediately if we told the truth. Her suggestion was to tell the company that once we finished our study, we would return for sure. However, I considered that to be a lie. I had no plan to return, and I did not want to lie. In the end, we lost the apartment. If we had kept it for two more years, it could have become ours to own for a fee, as the Chinese government had implemented a new policy to turn

allotted apartments into private ownership. If I still had that apartment today, I would be a millionaire, for the housing prices in major Chinese cities have surged to unprecedented heights.

In my understanding, this experience was a great blessing to my spirituality because I came to realize that sometimes I have to make some sacrifices for the sake of faith. It would be impossible for me to love the world more than Christ and yet become Christlike.

### **Witnessing for Christ**

After I became a Christian, I loved to share with friends and colleagues how God had changed me. Many were not interested in my story. But an associated professor in the same department showed interest, and sometime later, he told me that he took his family to attend a nearby Chinese Church. As well, a PhD student, a Caucasian woman, told me that her sister was also a Christian. Others did not care at all.

Although the response was not exciting, I was not discouraged and still tried to grasp every possible opportunity to witness for Christ. David and Mary (pseudonyms) had been my roommates before my wife joined me in Chicago. David was a PhD student, and Mary had just finished her Master degree. Mary gave birth to a beautiful baby girl, and they rented a house very close to my place. All of a sudden, David was found to have nasopharyngeal cancer and had to receive radiotherapy. The couple was saddened by this news. When we heard of this, we did what we could to help them. The most important thing I did was to share the good news with them. Although they did not accept Christ immediately,

the gospel touched their hearts. Soon after, we got our immigration visa from Canada, as we had applied for permanent residency months before, and we had to say goodbye to them. Later, I heard that they had started to attend a local Chinese church.

In 1995, my brother visited the Detroit Auto Company with some colleagues. To see them, I drove for six hours with my wife and daughter from Chicago to Detroit. I told my brother that I had come to Christ and gave a Bible to him. He refused to take the Bible at first. After some persuasion, he eventually accepted it and later passed it on to a co-worker who wanted one.

Witnessing for Christ helps me to realize how much God loves me. I come across many people who refuse to hear the Gospel and even laugh at me. Initially, I lose my temper with them, but eventually I realize that I used to do the same or even worse. Nevertheless, God loved me so much that He sent his servants to share Christ again and again until I received His salvation.

### **Immigration to Canada**

Immigration to Canada was never one of my dreams. I have to admit that it was the will of God for my family to move to Canada. While in China, my plan had been to immigrate to the USA or return to China. I had had no other intentions. Many who landed on USA soil at that time never thought of leaving. And I had heard that if one wanted to stay, one could always find a way. If I had not become a Christian, I might have tried one of the ways which had proven to be successful for others. However, my Christian conscience rejected any questionable counsel. For example, some friends advised us to have a second

baby so that we could apply for asylum for violation of China's one-child policy. It seemed like a good idea, but it did not sound right for me, a born again Christian.

One day, a friend advised us to apply for immigration to Canada. He told us that he and his wife had already been approved to immigrate to Canada, but they were trying to get an American green card. If they were granted a green card, they would stay in the USA; otherwise they would go to Canada. Later, we found out that many Chinese had done exactly the same thing. My wife and I decided to give Canadian immigration a try, but we did not want to apply through a lawyer as others did. We simply filled in the application form ourselves and submitted it. Incredibly, four months later, we received a letter from a Canadian immigration officer notifying us of the health examination. Two or three months later, we received an official immigration paper, meaning our application for Canadian immigration had been approved.

At that time, my neighbour told me that they were planning to visit Canada on December 26, as their application for Canadian immigration had been approved some time earlier, and they had to do their landing as required by the Canadian immigration office. My wife and I looked at this as a God-given opportunity because we also had to do our landing in Canada first, and we did not want to drive there by ourselves through ice and snow. After we shared our intention to travel with them, they were glad for the company, for they too had not wanted to travel alone.

On December 26, 1996, we left Chicago in the early morning, and after a two-hour drive, we crossed the USA-Canada border to Windsor. After another two hours of driving, we arrived in London, Ontario, where we stayed overnight in a hotel. The next day, we drove east to Chinatown in Toronto. It was difficult to find a parking spot, so when we saw a Chinese church, we did not hesitate to park there. Interestingly, that church became my spiritual home after we settled down in Toronto, and I became a pastor of the same church many years later. Is it a coincidence?

My visa allowed me to stay in the USA until the end of February, 1997, so my family moved to Toronto on February 28 of the same year. I rented a U-Haul moving truck, and it was my first time driving a big truck for such a long distance. We followed the same route as our previous trip. A friend in Toronto rented an apartment for us close to East Chinatown, and we stayed there for half a year.

Looking back, we have every reason to believe that God directed us to Canada. First, immigration to Canada had never been in our plan. I had never done any research on Canada. The only thing I knew was that Norman Bethune had helped China to fight Japanese invaders using his surgical scalpel. Second, it was so easy for us to get the immigration paper—we had not needed to hire a lawyer as our friends had, and it cost us only \$3,000. Finally, the process had been quick and timely. The Canadian immigration office did not require that we attend an interview; we were only required to undergo a health examination. The immigration paper was sent to us two months before our USA visa expired.

## **Settling Down in Toronto**

Settling down in Toronto, an unfamiliar place, was a considerable challenge for us because we had to start from ground zero in many ways, such as finding a spiritual home (church), job hunting and education.

### **Finding a Spiritual Home**

The first Sunday in Toronto, we did not attend a church service. Since we had arrived just two days prior, on the Friday evening, we had no time to find a Chinese church. We regretted not being able to worship the Lord that Sunday. Attending church on Sunday was an important part of our life, and we had never missed a church service since coming to Christ.

During the next few days, I contacted a few churches and, thankfully, the pastor of the CGCT where we had parked during our first visit to Toronto, paid us a visit immediately. When he showed up in our apartment, we were so excited. Without any hesitation, we joined that church. At that time, we had not yet bought a car, so we had to take public transportation to church. For a family of three, the cost of public transportation was not cheap in Toronto; nevertheless, this did not deter us from attending church activities.

### **My Wife's University Enrollment**

While in Chicago, my wife Lisha had been disappointed because her immigration status had prevented her from enrolling in university studies. When we settled down in Toronto, to fulfill her dream, I went to Ryerson University to apply on her behalf for admission to an accounting diploma program. I selected

this program because the TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) was not a prerequisite for enrollment. Lisha's English was still not very strong—she could not understand the teachers very well, nor did she understand the instructions for the assignments. Yet, to the surprise of her teachers, she always got high marks. Her class was scheduled in the evening, and her attendance was perfect, no matter how bad the weather. Even in the last trimester of her pregnancy, she insisted on going to school. And she graduated. Thank God for giving her the perseverance to commit to her studies.

### **Job Hunting**

I got my first job offer in an unusual way. After submitting a resume to Mount Sinai Hospital, I heard no response for a week, so I phoned the professor to whom I had sent the resume. Her secretary spoke with me for some time, but I insisted on speaking to the professor. The professor spoke to me for a few minutes and then, without an interview and without even telling me how much she would pay me, told me to come to work the next day. I worked there for two weeks, then I quit because the professor required all employees in her lab to be available for work seven days a week and, as a Christian, I did not feel right about working on Sunday, the Lord's Day.

Miraculously, I received a phone call from St Michael's Hospital immediately after quitting my job at Mount Sinai Hospital. I had not submitted my resume, but it had been forwarded to them somehow. After the interview, I was offered a better position with higher pay. I worked there for 10 years before I resigned for full-time ministry in 2007. The lesson I learned from this experience

was that if we take our faith seriously and we are willing to sacrifice for the Lord, we will experience His miraculous provision, just as the psalmist says: “The lions may grow weak and hungry, but those who seek the Lord lack no good thing” (Psalms 34:10).

### **Dedication to God**

God called me to serve Him in the early days of my coming to Christ while I was in Chicago. First, God called me through dreams. I had dreams of preaching the gospel to a large Chinese audience. Second, church people encouraged me to go to seminary school. Although I showed enthusiasm in serving God, I never intended to become a pastor, and I did not want to hear such advice. At that time, I viewed pastors as incompetent individuals who were poorly suited for any other profession; besides, I worried about how my friends and colleagues back in China would perceive me. I had come abroad to accomplish great deeds like finding a cure for cancer. If they heard that I had become a pastor, they might consider me to be a failure or think that I had lost my mind. In any case, I was strongly against the idea.

Nevertheless, the will of God will not be deterred due to our ignorance. At the end of June of 1999, while attending the second overseas Chinese Christian Discipleship training camp sponsored by the Chinese Christian Incorporation of Canada (CCIC), I dedicated myself to God. When the speaker asked those who wanted to dedicate themselves to God to raise their hand, I could not resist doing so. I clearly remember going to the front of the auditorium with my wife, and both of us knelt and cried loudly. It was not my decision—I felt that I had been

compelled by the Spirit to raise my hand and go to the front. My family attended this training camp for five consecutive years after this experience.

My second dedication to God was during a Sunday worship service in 2000, when the speaker shared a story which touched my heart. A man who had received a clear calling from God could not give up the business he loved. One day at the age of 50, he was diagnosed with late stage cancer. On his hospital bed, he regretted that it was too late for him to serve God. Hearing this story, I made a promise to God that I would serve Him in full-time ministry before the age of 45. Amazingly, my full-time ministry started precisely at that age. What a coincidence!

In God's dictionary, the word "coincidence" does not exist. God has plans for all of His creation. He speaks to us through many ways and means to let us know His plans for our lives. We have only two choices: submit to Him or resist Him. I am grateful, for He gives me grace to do His will for my life.

### **Seminary Study**

Commencing my studies at Tyndale Seminary was not easy due to my wife's lack of consent, tuition issues and the strict English language policy of the admissions department. Despite these challenges, however, God led me to experience His faithfulness.

### **My Wife's Consent**

The first time I dedicated myself to God in June of 1999, my wife went forward with me. Many days later, when I shared with her about possible

seminary study, she was against it and insisted that I go to dental school. Her philosophy was that a dentist would serve God better. We could not see eye to eye at all. Once, I lost my temper and threatened to divorce her. Our church pastors heard about this conflict and helped us to reconcile.

It was right at that time that God's Word came to me twice: "Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers" (1 Peter 3:7).

My wife's resistance to my going to seminary study prompted me to question her salvation. Once, I challenged her openly, and she fought back furiously. God's Word, however, brought me heavenly peace and assured me that my wife was truly born again in Jesus Christ. After that experience, I never raised the topic of seminary study with my wife again, for I sensed that it was not yet God's timing.

In early 2000, my wife initiated a discussion with me about seminary study. She suggested that I study on a part-time basis at Tyndale Seminary because of the financial needs of our family. At that time, I was the only breadwinner in the family. It was obvious that God had moved her to consent to my seminary study. I was excited and grateful over her change of heart.

### **Tuition Struggle**

My next challenge was how to pay the tuition. Tuition at Tyndale Seminary was very high because the institution did not receive government

funding. To finish a Master of Divinity, the tuition plus the cost of books would total nearly \$30,000. At that time, my wife was still unemployed, and my salary was not high. Besides, we had a mortgage to pay. One day, my colleague told me that his investment in the stock market had doubled within one month. I was captivated by this news. Maybe God wanted me to make money this way to pay for tuition. So, I put \$6,000 into a tech stock. As soon as I did so, my thoughts were consumed by the stock. I checked it every day. I began to realize that my actions were not pleasing to God, but my argument was that I was not doing it out of greed but for the seminary tuition, so I did not stop. After half a year, the funds sank to half of my original investment. One day, my wife pushed me to sell the stock and I looked at it as God talking to me. After selling the stock, I got back less than half of the money I had invested, but peace returned to me.

The tuition payment remained an issue. Where would the funds come from? I did not like the idea of asking the church or brothers and sisters for help. As far as I knew, our church had never supported a seminary student before.

One day, in prayer, I promised God that if he gave my wife a job, I would apply to seminary school right away. Miraculously, within one week, she was offered a temporary three-month position in the accounting department of a big company. My wife had never sent her resume to this company. She was recommended by a lady who had come to our home Bible study once. My wife's first day in the company was January 1, 2001. After three months, the department asked her to stay. She has now been there over 17 years. Our God answers prayers.

## **Acceptance into Seminary Study**

To apply for the seminary study, I was asked to take the TOEFL, which was a requirement for foreign students from non-English speaking countries to study in North American universities. I did not want to take the test because many years prior, I had taken it twice and gotten high scores. I showed the test results to Tyndale admission officials, but they insisted that I take the test, as TOEFL scores were valid for only two years. One day, I asked God for confirmation again. If He had truly called me to serve Him, He could have the seminary change their mind. Two weeks later, the seminary told me that they had changed their mind over the TOEFL requirement, but they still had to test my English ability. To do so, they gave me a few paragraphs of English text and instructed me to answer some comprehension questions within a fixed period of time.

I have to make it clear that I did not mean to challenge the seminary school admission policy. By that time, I had been in North America over seven years, and I had taken the TOEFL twice, with good results. Furthermore, I had been accepted into a PhD program for one year while I was in Chicago.

On August 8, 2003, I was officially accepted into the program of the Master of Divinity/Pastoral and Chinese Ministry at Tyndale University Seminary.

## **Hardship and Joy in Study**

There were many hardships in seminary study. However, there was joy also. Looking back now, those hardships were also good for my spiritual growth.

## **Hardship**

For a full-time student, it might not be quite so difficult to complete the M. Div. program, but for me, it was a significant challenge. I was a part-time student, and most of my classes were scheduled in the evening. After a day of work, I was exhausted, so I could not help but doze for at least a few minutes in the evening class. I felt quite embarrassed, but I could not do anything to overcome the dozing.

Completing the assignments was also quite a challenge. I did not have difficulty in listening and speaking, but writing gave me a hard time. First, I could not find enough time to write. I had to work during weekdays; and on weekends, I was still involved in different ministries. I considered quitting the ministries while I was in seminary school, but the pastor encouraged me to trust God and stay on. So, the only time available to write was a few weekday evenings each week. I admired those students who could study late into the night but, unfortunately, if I did not sleep before eleven thirty, I would feel awful and unable to focus at all.

My writing was quite slow because I was not good at writing even in Chinese. To submit an assignment on time, I had to get up early in the morning and work on it. Whenever I did so, my wife also got up to show her support. So half of the credit for my success should be given to her.

## **Joy**

In spite of many hardships, I also experienced the abundant grace of God. Without His grace, I could not imagine how I would finish the program. His grace filled me with joy.

When I took the Greek language course, the teacher tested us every class. Once, I forgot to prepare for the test. At that time, I was very busy because my father-in-law was sick and I had to take him to see doctors frequently. When I got to class, I was dismayed to realize that I had not prepared for the test, which entailed the translation of 20 Greek words into English. Since I arrived 15 minutes before the class, I seized the moment to memorize the words. Incredibly, I received a perfect score. I considered this to be due to the grace of God.

In November of 2003, when I was working on an assigned paper which was due the next day, my father-in-law came down with an acute hernia. I could see that he was in great pain, so I set aside my work and took him to the Emergency Ward immediately. The surgery was done right away, and at 1:00a.m., the doctor told my wife and me that my father-in-law would have to stay in the hospital for a few days to recover, but we could go home if we wished. Once I got home, I worked diligently on my assignment until 6:00 a.m. and managed to submit the assignment on time. My score on that paper was 100. This was the only full mark I received during the entire program. It was like a dream for me. I did not think that my writing was good enough to deserve a perfect score. If not for the grace of God, it could not have happened.

When I finished two thirds of the courses required, I experienced a financial crisis, for I had reached the borrowing limit on my bank line of credit. Should I postpone taking the other courses? In prayer, the idea of paying with my credit card came to my mind. I did not hesitate to register for the other courses and to pay the tuition using my credit card. Miraculously, after I finished all the

required courses, not only was my credit card paid in full, but the balance on the line of credit was almost fully paid as well. I had once thought that I might have a huge debt due to tuition. When I finished my studies, I could not figure out why the debt was so small. I attribute it to the grace of God.

### **Internship**

An internship was a requirement for my seminary study. In the process of selecting the church for my internship and in the course of the internship, I learned not only ministry skills but, more importantly, experienced God.

### **Internship Options**

In early 2006, I had a strong inclination to finish my internship not in my own church but at other churches. I reasoned that I knew my own church, the congregants and the programs so well that if I completed my internship there, I would not experience any challenges, nor would I learn anything new. Other churches would give me an opportunity to learn new things for sure. After sharing my thoughts with a pastor, he recommended me to a few pastors of different churches. After contacting them and attending their church services, I sensed that they were not the right fit for me. I prayed very hard over where to do my internship. One day, my pastor suggested that I go to our mother church downtown. The church I was attending was a daughter church of the CGCT. I had never thought about going downtown to CGCT. Downtown was too crowded, and the traffic was always congested. A few days later, Pastor H from CGCT phoned me and asked me sincerely to do the internship. I did not know whether the two pastors had discussed the arrangement beforehand, but the pastor's call touched

my heart. After sharing with my wife what I had heard from the two pastors, she also suggested that I go downtown. I then sensed that completing my internship at the downtown church was the will of God. On June 1, 2006, I started my internship at CGCT.

My wife could not go with me during the internship at CGCT because she had to drive our children to the Scarborough English congregation. Therefore, I had to go to CGCT by myself, via public transportation. It was a long commute downtown. If I missed one bus, I had to wait half an hour for the next bus. Waiting for the bus in the summer was okay, but in the winter it was very cold. Whenever there was a board meeting, I returned home very late. However, I never complained or regretted going downtown. Actually I was joyful, which was further confirmation that God had sent me there.

### **Internship Experience**

Pastor H required me to do two things during the internship: first, to start a couple's fellowship for married couples because there were some young couples in the congregation and there was no ministry for them; second, to teach adult Sunday school.

The couple's fellowship was named Unfailing Love Fellowship (ULF). Originally, nine couples joined ULF. We met once a month at church. After the fellowship program, we had a huge potluck dinner. Eating drew us closer and created a family atmosphere because everybody opened up and barriers were removed.

All the couples in the ULF were new to me. In order to know them and also give them time to know me, I spent a lot of time visiting all of them. Since they worked in the day time, I had to visit them in the evening most of the time. Many of them were very hospitable and invited me to have dinner with them. I never refused, for the dinner table was a great place to get better acquainted with each other. Whenever possible, I would eat dinner with them, for they enjoyed the company, and this shortened our distance from each other. They were all new immigrants from mainland China and faced a lot of challenges: job hunting, their children's education, marital conflicts and many more. I could not solve any of their problems. However, listening to them attentively and praying with them helped them to know the love of God and encouraged them to move forward courageously.

By the grace of God, soon the ULF leaders voluntarily joined me to do the visitation. The effect was unimaginable: the ULF grew bigger and bigger. A year later, some of the ULF members suggested having home Bible studies in addition to the regular once-a-month ULF church get-together. Three couples willingly opened their residences for Bible study. By the grace of God, not only ULF members attended, but unchurched neighbours were also invited to attend the Bible studies. Many people accepted Christ as their Savior. It was a tremendous outreach opportunity.

As for the Sunday school, the first half of the year I was assigned to teach the gospel class. After a few weeks of observing Pastor H teaching, I took over the class. I had had some experience teaching the gospel class in the daughter

church at the Scarborough site, where there had been two teachers (Brother H and I) and only two or three seekers. We all used to sit around a table. But downtown, the class was held in the sanctuary because there was no other room available. The seekers sat in the pews, and the teacher stood at the front. There was no interaction between the teacher and seekers. The delivery style was teacher-centered, and seekers just sat listening. Preaching the gospel for over an hour was exhausting because I had to preach loudly, for the room was big. My first call for decision-making surprised me because over half of the 20 seekers raised their hands, giving me a sense of success. Gradually, I came to understand that not all of them raised their hands sincerely. Some did not believe. They were illegal immigrants and needed proof to show that they were Christians so that they could apply for religious refugee status. Once they were granted the refugee status, few of them returned to church. By the grace of God, I was not discouraged but continued to preach the gospel to them. My understanding was that we were all sinners, and we did not have the right to judge and condemn them. The only thing we could do was to love them and share the gospel of Jesus Christ with them. If they needed guidance or support, we had to help them in a way that was appropriate.

After the gospel class, I was assigned to teach a biblical class. The first book of the Bible I taught was James. As required, I had to print out the outline of my teaching content and give it to Pastor H. Since then, it has become my habit to print out everything that I preach or teach. I look at it as a blessing from God for the printout helps me to preach or teach clearly.

## **Quitting the Job**

It was amazing how God led me to start full-time ministry. At the end of 2006, a thought kept hovering in my mind that I should leave my job and start full-time study. I asked my colleagues in the lab about EI (employment insurance) benefits, and they told me that if I quit my job, I would not be allowed to apply for the EI benefits. In Canada, the fact was that one had to be fired or laid off to qualify to apply for EI. Nevertheless, the thought of quitting was always there. On January 1, 2007, a clear voice in my heart told me, “You have to quit your job this year.” I knew for sure that it was the voice of the Holy Spirit. I was very excited about this and shared with my wife immediately. I expected her to express concerns about the potential financial crisis which would result from my quitting, but her response confirmed that it was indeed the voice of the Holy Spirit: “Go ahead and quit your job.” Her reply was very encouraging. So, my mind was set that I would leave my job in 2007.

On May 24, 2007, the chairman and another elder of our church had a lunch meeting with me. They asked about the possibility of my becoming the pastor of the Mandarin congregation where I was interning. I was not surprised because Pastor H had suggested this a few times already, and I had not responded. I told the chairman that I had not yet finished my M. Div. studies. It was very encouraging that he said that I could continue to finish my study while pastoring the congregation. My wife and I considered that it was the will of God to be a pastor in the downtown church. Therefore, I accepted the invitation to be a pastor

downtown without even asking about the salary and other benefits. The church requested that I start the full-time ministry on October 1, 2007.

After this, I shared my decision to resign with my boss, and he suggested the possibility of working part-time in the lab and part-time in the church. Of course, I declined his offer. In the 10 years that I worked there, we had gotten along very well, and the project I was working on had resulted in many publications and one million dollars of government funding. Over half of the publications had been published in prestigious journals such as *Blood*, *Journal of Clinical Investigation* and *Nature Medicine*. For researchers, publications are everything. Without publications, there is no funding. It is a cruel business.

Hearing how God had called me to be a full-time pastor and seeing that I was determined to resign, my boss was upset and asked if I could be relied upon to help out in an emergency. Although he was not a Christian, he gave me two books as souvenirs. One was *The Creator and the Cosmos* by Hugh Ross and another *The Spiritual Brain: a Neuroscientist's Case for the Existence of the Soul* by Mario Beauregard and Denyse O'Leary. He was very thoughtful, which could be seen from the two books he gave me.

The dean of the Department of Haematology and Transfusion, a Jew, sent me an email in which he congratulated me concerning my calling to be a pastor and wished me success. He might not even have known what a calling was, but his words encouraged me, as I believed they were not necessarily from him but from God. God can use anybody to speak to His people. My final day in the lab was September 30, 2007.

## **Full-time Ministry in Downtown Church**

I had never expected to be a pastor in the CGC, either downtown in the mother church or in the new church plant in the north end of the city, for many reasons which I elaborated in the previous section. However, God usually does not consult with people. My first full-time ministry started at CGCT, which was unexpected. Yet, the timing was perfect: it was October 1, 2007, the day after I left my position at St Michael's Hospital. My experience enabled me to have a deeper understanding of a few popular verses in the Book of Proverbs: "In his heart a man plans his course, but the Lord determines his steps" (Proverbs 16:9); "many are the plans in a man's heart, but it is the Lord's purpose that prevails" (Proverbs 19:21); "a man's steps are directed by the Lord. How then can anyone understand his own way?" (Proverbs 20:24).

### **An Unexpected Beginning**

Right after I took up the pastor's position in the downtown church, I was faced with unexpected challenges. All of a sudden, Pastor H's health suffered, and he had to take sick leave for a month. After that, he immediately took a three-month sabbatical leave. I had to take charge of everything, including the Sunday afternoon service, Wednesday evening service, all the fellowships and home Bible study groups, Sunday school classes, etc. Many congregants worried about whether I could handle the heavy load. Thankfully, two pastors of other congregations offered assistance if required in an emergency, for example in the case of the death of any congregants, for I had no experience conducting funerals.

I was very grateful that, during this time, I experienced “the peace of God, which transcends all understanding” (Philippians 4:7). Although I was greatly stretched, I did not feel any pressure or anxiety at all. My regular schedule during those 4 months of pastoring alone found me leaving the church on Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday and Saturday evenings between 9:00 p.m. and 10:00 p.m., depending on the ministry, and arriving home as late as 11:00 p.m. Following the Sunday afternoon service ending at 5:30 p.m., I usually arrived home around 7:00 p.m. Due to the late returns to my home, I was able to eat dinner with my family only three times or less a week.

During that time, some unpleasant incidents occurred. Although God had a purpose in allowing these things to happen, they were still unpleasant at the time. Once, my Sunday school topic was “Love your Enemy.” There was a heated debate over this topic in the class. I was delighted because I loved to see the students get actively involved in the class. It was my style. The thing that stunned me was that in front of everybody, a student pointed her finger at me and shouted, “You are just a new pastor! You are not like Pastor so and so. He is very knowledgeable. I tell you, nobody can love their enemy except Jesus.” From her tone, it was very obvious that her intention was to humiliate me. I did not know why she behaved in that manner, for we had never had a personal conflict before. I was speechless and did not know how to respond. I remember that I looked at her with a flushing face and did not utter a single word. Incredibly, though, I had no negative feelings toward her. Two days later, before the Tuesday evening fellowship, she came to me and apologized for what she had done. She said that

she had not slept that night and sensed that God wanted her to apologize to me. And the next day, before the Wednesday evening service, her husband apologized again to both me and my wife for her behaviour.

That incident did not distance me from them. I continued to talk to them, and I visited them. She continued to attend my Sunday school class, ask questions, and express her opinions once in a while. A few years later, for some reason, they left our church to attend a nearby English church.

Another unpleasant event was that a female Mormon believer came to test me for a long time. She attended our church service on Sunday, and on weekdays she visited me regularly. I was not against congregants visiting me; the problem was that she tended to drop in unexpectedly. If nobody else was in the church, it was awkward for me to talk to her alone in my office. Besides, she insisted on discussing personal things which made me uncomfortable psychologically, and each visit cost me at least one hour. I could do nothing except pray to God. After Pastor H finished his sabbatical leave, she no longer came to visit me, although she continued to attend our service. I shared the gospel with her, but she did not receive it. One good thing was that she received the Bible I gave her and she gave me a Book of Mormon.

That winter, it snowed a lot. It seemed as if it snowed every day. One Wednesday, heavy snow started from early afternoon and became heavier and heavier. Around 4:00 p.m., the speaker scheduled for the evening service called to suggest that the service be cancelled, as he could not make it to the church. Despite the news, I was very calm. I faced two choices: the first was to call as

many congregants as possible and cancel the service; the second was to prepare a simple sermon to deliver myself. Thanks to God, I prepared a sermon within two hours for the evening service. Although the snow was extremely heavy, over 30 people still attended the service. Driving home that night was a challenge for me. The highway was not yet cleared, and snow was still falling. I saw many cars stuck in the snow or in ditches. I drove slowly all the way. When I got home, it was close to midnight.

While Pastor H was on sabbatical leave, there were also some positive things which happened to our congregation. At the October 2007 board meeting, we made an unprecedented decision to hold a Christmas celebration: to celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ in the Chinatown Centre by presenting a drama, a choir and a children's performance. At the same time, we kept the traditional practice of preaching the gospel in neighbouring apartment buildings. I was very excited about taking the gospel out of the church building into the Chinatown Centre, where many shops with idols were located. The potential to spiritually impact the community was significant.

The congregants were actively involved. I worked out a drama script, purely by the grace of God, for I did not have any experience writing scripts. The theme of the script was how the gospel brought a new immigrant couple out of their desperation. It was especially relevant to the new immigrants in the community who experienced all kinds of challenges: difficulty finding a job due to their lack of local work experience, marital problems, parenting problems, etc. We wanted our audience to know that God was able to help them overcome these

issues. Along with another couple, my wife and I volunteered to play the roles in the drama. We rehearsed at least three times.

On the big day, many spectators gathered to watch, and after all the programs, I preached a short message on the birth of Jesus. A few people responded to my calling. Although the audio was not the best quality, everybody involved was joyful. We returned to the church and enjoyed a big dinner together. Afterwards, there were spontaneous performances with the congregants either singing praise songs or giving testimonies.

Every year before Christmas, we held this dinner after caroling in the nearby apartment buildings. The offering received was always short of the expenses, and we had to try other ways to find the money to cover the deficit. But the 2007 Christmas dinner was an exception. We had a surplus of over \$200. God is gracious!

### **A Book of Evangelism**

On Christmas Eve of 2009, I drove to Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario, to pick up my daughter and bring her home. Usually, I drove to Kingston with my wife, but this time I had to travel by myself because she was not available. Since there were few cars on Highway 401 that day and the weather was sunny, which was rare in that season, I expected that I would arrive earlier. As I drove, suddenly there was a voice in my heart saying, "You have to write a book." And I was also told the title of the book, *Unseen World*. I was so sure that it was the voice of the Holy Spirit, but I was not sure that the word "unseen" was a real word because it was unfamiliar to me. When I got home, I consulted the

dictionary and found out that the word did exist. Another day, I came across the word in a newspaper, erasing any doubt.

God wonderfully provided me with all the materials for the book, and I finished writing it within nine months. It was all by the grace of God that I finished this project while working as a busy pastor.

Originally, I dreamed of having the book published in China, for the market was huge over there. I contacted a lady who knew a few publishers in China. She was really excited over the book and promised me that she would contact publishers in China. Unfortunately, the reply from the publishers was negative, simply because the book was about religion. I looked at it as God's will not to have it published in China.

One day, CCIC (Chinese Christian Inc. of Canada), a parachurch organization, came to my mind. CCIC had been publishing materials for many years already. They not only published spiritual books of the Christian faith, but they were actively involved in ministries to build up Christians of Chinese background and to spread the gospel via many different avenues. The organization was well known to Chinese background Christians in Canada. I contacted CCIC and got a very encouraging reply. They considered the book a good resource for evangelism, for it provided answers for atheists' struggles, particularly whether it is true that humans have a soul. My book gave a convincing answer from different angles to prove the existence of the soul.

I prayed for the funding of the publication for a while, and I sensed that God wanted me to pay for the cost out of my own pocket. I had a little struggle, for \$4,000 was a lot of money for me, and I had to use my line of credit to pay for it. I shared with my wife and surprisingly she had no objection to using our own money to pay for it. I do not know how many readers were converted or developed an interest in Christianity after reading the book, but I know for sure that some Christians were encouraged in their faith.

### **Ordination by Associated Gospel Church of Canada**

Many Chinese pastors desire to be ordained as a Reverend, not for the title, but for the affirmation of the calling, equipping, beliefs, and maturity of becoming the pastor of a church. Normally, at CGC, the pastor is recommended by the board of the congregation to the membership meeting for approval of ordination; then, the board submits the approval to the church council. If the church council has no objection to the ordination, the denomination headquarter (AGC: Associated Gospel Churches) is contacted to initiate the process of ordination.

In my case, the process was rather unusual. Firstly, it was not the congregational board that took the initiative in ordaining me. A few members strongly recommended that I be ordained in our congregational membership meeting in April 2010. I had given no thought to my ordination because I had been in ministry for only a little over two years. Furthermore, the topic was not on the agenda of the meeting. For these reasons, I was caught off guard. In the end, the membership unanimously recommended me to the board for ordination.

When AGC interviewed me, I found myself in an awkward position because I could not accept one of their doctrines unconditionally. AGC does not support female pastors or elders in the church. My stand was that if God called a female to be a pastor or elder, no one had a right to object. In the times of the Judges, God did call Deborah, a prophetess, to be a judge. And in China, there were more female pastors than male pastors. The interview lasted over one hour and a half, and the atmosphere was tense. At the end of the interview, I was asked to step out of the room so that a final decision could be made on whether to ordain me. One of the church elders, along with the senior English pastor who used to serve at the AGC headquarter, insisted on staying and having a say in the final decision.

It took another two hours to reach the final decision to ordain me, with the condition that I read one of two books. One was *Biblical Foundations for Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*; the other was *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*, both of which had been edited by John Piper and Wayne Grudem. I chose the thickest book to read. It took three months to finish it, and I was not required to write a book report. Although I was fascinated with the book, my position on ordaining female pastors did not budge: I still maintained that if God called a female to be a pastor, no one had a right to object. After ordination, I was very thankful to the Lord for sending our elder and pastor to defend my ordination. Otherwise, I would not have been ordained at that time.

On July 22, 2011, I was ordained. Although it was Friday evening, many brothers and sisters attended the ceremony to witness the joyful yet solemn event. God showed me His favour again by moving Brother Yan, who worked at OMNI News TV station, to videotape the ceremony from beginning to the end.

I truly believe that everything has its own timing, just as the Bible says in Chapter 3 of Ecclesiastes. I have never held any negative feelings toward those who interviewed me; in fact, I have always considered them to be men of principle.

#### **A TV Interview by Omni News**

A few days after my ordination, Brother Yan asked whether I would like to be interviewed on a TV program on the OMNI News channel, which provides multi-language programming. At that time, Omni News was planning to interview two religious professionals among Chinese immigrants, one from the Christian faith and one from Buddhism. Their purpose was to show that immigrants from China were employed in many different sectors, including religion. I viewed the interview as a God-given opportunity, and I cherished the privilege very much, for I considered it an excellent opportunity to witness for Jesus Christ, my Lord and Saviour.

I was interviewed twice, although this was not the interviewer's original plan. The second interview was purely God's will. During the first interview, I was a little nervous and did not answer the interviewer's questions very well. I had expected to talk about why I became a Christian, why I became a pastor, what

my position entailed, etc. But the interviewer asked other questions that I was not prepared to answer. It was a disappointing experience.

A month later, I was invited to a second interview, for the recording of the first interview had been damaged badly. When I heard this, I was overjoyed. I had dreamed of the opportunity to redo the interview and never expected that it would come true. But God is omnipotent. Praise Him for ever and ever more!

Miraculously, during the second interview, the interviewer asked all the questions I expected. This time, I remained calm and responded the best I could. It seemed that all the basic tenets of the Christian faith were touched including sin, the judgement of God, the love of God, the redemption of Jesus Christ, the cross, and the resurrection. Although I was not given the opportunity to elaborate on these points, they were all addressed to some extent.

After the interview aired, a few people called and gave very positive feedback. I did not know how many people viewed the interview nor how many lives were touched. What gave me comfort and peace was that I had taken the opportunity to give a testimony of how God had forgiven my sin and given me a new life through His Son Jesus Christ. I also received a DVD copy of the aired interview.

### **Major Ministries**

While in the downtown church, my focus was on Chinese visiting scholars, married couples, home Bible study groups and evangelism within the seniors' residences in the community. With the blessings of the Lord, all those ministries

flourished. Many people came to Christ, and their lives experienced transformation.

The Timothy Fellowship was started to target Chinese visiting scholars and young professionals. We met every Saturday evening. Dinner was served before the Bible study. At the start, there were only five to eight members, and none attended regularly. Once, only four people came. Thank God for the leader and coordinator of the Timothy Fellowship, Brother H, who was highly committed and caring. Gradually, the Timothy Fellowship attracted many. New friends kept on coming and joining. The members eventually exceeded 40, and not only was the food not enough, but we also ran out of chairs.

Thanks to God, we had the opportunity to cooperate with Brother Tony, a missionary, to reach out to multiethnic international scholars. Through him, many Chinese scholars came to us. Tony and I became good friends, and we met regularly and prayed for each other. He was a very dedicated brother in Christ. He hosted a group at his house every Tuesday with dinner, and he also started a Bible study at the homes of other brothers on Monday evenings. He was an oncology scientist as well as a talented cook who always prepared an appetizing meal for those who attended the Timothy Fellowship.

We also started the Fellowship's Wednesday evening prayer meeting at church. Once, Sister Jennifer, who never attended the prayer meeting, came and asked us to pray for her grandfather's salvation. Her relatives were all Christians except her maternal grandfather in Shanghai, China. I forget how we prayed. I do not recall whether we knelt or stood. However, I clearly remember when Jennifer

called and told me excitedly that her grandfather came to Christ the next day. He was over 90 and was dying, for he had late stage cancer. None of his relatives had dared to share the gospel with him. But that day after we prayed for him, he told everybody that he had accepted Christ himself. It was not a coincidence. God answered our prayer. Since then, Jennifer never missed a prayer meeting.

God did awesome things in the Timothy Fellowship; people got baptized and grew spiritually. But there were also challenges. Once, I taught on the biblical principle of marriage, particularly being “Do not be yoked together with unbelievers” (2 Corinthians 6:14). I made it absolutely clear that it was not biblical for a Christian to marry a non-believer. A sister who was single and had just come to Christ stood up and rebuked me sharply, saying that some things were easier said than done. Another time, our Bible study topic was forgiveness. According to biblical teachings, we are to unconditionally forgive those who hurt us. One of the brothers could not accept the notion of unconditional forgiveness. He stormed out, slamming the door violently. Although we were challenged, we did not give in and continued to “correctly handle the word of truth” (2 Titus 2:15).

As mentioned earlier, the Unfailing Love Fellowship (ULF) was for married couples, who usually experienced the greatest challenges: generation gap and marital issues, unemployment, etc. I was very grateful that God gave me a few committed couples. We worked together to care for those in need and experienced the power of God. Brother Z was an excellent example of God’s transforming power. He was a heavy smoker who frequently took smoking breaks

during Bible study. We advised him to quit smoking, but it seemed too difficult for him to give up the habit. We put this on our petition list to God and, one day, I was told that Brother Z had been admitted to the Emergency Ward due to acute pneumonia. In spite of a high fever, he still craved a cigarette. But when he finally got one in his mouth, he felt nauseated. Since that time, he never touched a cigarette again.

Sister F's story is another example of God's miracle-working power. Her family immigrated to Toronto around 2005. Her husband returned to China for his business, while Sister F and their son Tony, nine years old, remained in Toronto by themselves. One night, the fire alarm in their apartment building was activated and Tony was terrified. He was unable to sleep well after that traumatic experience. When Sister F shared this with us, we went to her apartment and prayed for Tony. He soon overcame his fear and returned to normal.

I experienced another answered prayer in the ULF. On a Friday evening, Sister Q called to tell me that her father was missing. He had left early in the morning and had not yet returned. Her husband had checked all the potential places he might have visited and called all his friends but still could not locate him. When I arrived, I honestly did not know what to do. In my heart, I prayed to God for help. I felt that God wanted me to go out and search for him. Before leaving, I prayed, "God, please let me see him when I exit the elevator." I did not know why I prayed that way, but when the elevator stopped at ground level and the door opened, her father was standing in front of the elevator.

The evangelism of seniors was even more exciting. There was government housing for seniors close to our church, and one senior sister lived in the building. I asked her for information about the Mandarin-speaking residents, then two of us as a team visited and shared the gospel with them. Within two years, eight seniors came to Christ, one expressed interest and continued to attend church and the seeker's class, and one refused to come to church. They started their own Bible reading group in their building. Every Tuesday afternoon, they met, read the Bible without any interpretation and then prayed together. Sometimes, they had dinner together.

Lady M, another senior, came to Christ in an unexpected way. One day, she called to ask whether I could fix her phone. I did not know anything about fixing phones, and I did not know anybody who could help her. However, I sensed strongly that I should go and have a look. I asked another senior sister to accompany me. When I got there, I found that it was a network phone. I checked all the wires and could not find any problems. However, when I picked up the phone, it worked again. It was a miracle! Following that incident, Lady M came to church regularly and soon accepted Christ. Whenever she gave her testimony, she always talked about this incident.

My experience in this senior's residence inspired me to visit another seniors' residence where there were more Mandarin-speaking residents. Over 20 seniors attended the first gathering. However, it was too far away from the church and I could not find someone to assist me. After three meetings, I had to quit.

## **Transfer to Scarborough Site**

After a five-year ministry in the Mandarin congregation, both the church elders and I sensed that God was calling me to be transferred to the Scarborough site. Although it was painful to say goodbye to the familiar congregants, I had to follow the calling of God.

### **Signs and Confirmation of Transfer**

I was transferred from downtown to Scarborough on October 14, 2012. A year prior to the move, many signs indicated that it was time to transfer due to ongoing issues in the Scarborough church. On numerous occasions, it was suggested to me to consider a transfer—some members of the Scarborough church even phoned to complain about the situation there. As concerned as I was about the situation at that location, I could do nothing except petition God. One day, a pastor spoke to me about the possibility of transferring to Scarborough, and I told him my conditions for moving north. I knew that the fulfillment of all my conditions would confirm that the transfer was the will of God. All the conditions were fulfilled within half a year, including a replacement to take over my position downtown. The Mandarin congregation downtown held three services at different times, and many church members viewed these gatherings as serving three distinct congregations. Since there were only two Mandarin pastors for the three services and the burden was heavy, the church council had been searching for a third pastor for over two years. Although many expressed an interest in the position, no suitable candidate had been found. If I had to go, it would be necessary to find at least one more pastor.

In early March of 2012, God brought us a pastoral candidate. He was around 60. Although many were concerned with his age, we all agreed to move ahead with him after the first interview. Two additional interviews went well, and there was consensus that he was the right candidate for the position.

In my heart, I was reluctant to be transferred to the Scarborough church because I knew that it would be a stressful and chaotic experience. I remembered the Lord's words: "No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment. If he does, the new piece will pull away from the old, making the tear worse. And no one pours new wine into old wineskins. If he does, the wine will burst the skins, and both the wine and the wineskins will be ruined. No, he pours new wine into new wineskins" (Mark 2:21-22). However, since my conditions had all been met, I had to keep my word.

### **Transfer to Scarborough**

On October 14, I was officially transferred to Scarborough. There, I faced significant challenges from congregants and leaders of the church. I had never experienced such challenges during my earlier years in ministry at Scarborough.

Once there, I intensified my visitation efforts. First, I visited all the board members and fellowship leaders; second, I visited many congregants. I chose to make visitation one of my priorities because I intended to familiarize myself with the church leaders and congregants. During these visits, many grievances were expressed concerning the church ministries. Generally, congregants who question church ministries make church leaders feel uncomfortable. However, my view is that while some criticisms may be unreasonable, it is God who allows people to

voice their concerns. Therefore, leaders should not turn a deaf ear to those who raise concerns; rather, they should respect their opinions.

I shared what I had heard with the church leaders, but my suggestions on how to handle the congregants' concerns were disregarded. This was extremely frustrating, and I considered quitting. I kept asking God why He had sent me there. I felt as if I had lost my joy. One day, the church caretaker said to me, "Pastor Song, I don't hear you singing anymore." Downtown, I had been called the "singing pastor" because I loved to sing hymns when I was alone in the church. The Bible says, "In all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28). While meditating on the Word of God, I came to realize that God wanted me to solve my own problems rather than others' problems. God opened my eyes so that I could see my serious shortcomings: arrogance and distraction. Christ is the head of His Church; therefore, only Christ can solve its problems. How arrogant I was to think that I could solve the church's problems! What was worse was that my intense focus on finding my own solutions had distracted me from fixing my eyes on Christ.

I was grateful that God exposed my problems. I was humbled before Him and asked for direction. The Lord moved one congregant to tell me to focus on doing the things I could. What surprised me was that I now had the skills and experience to effectively lead a range of ministries: prayer, preaching, teaching, fellowship, evangelization, and visitation. Although I was still weak, the Lord strengthened me with His abundant provision of grace.

## **Counting God's Blessings in the Ministry**

Although my experience pastoring downtown was quite the opposite to my experience in Scarborough, I have to say that God richly blessed me and my wife at both locations.

### **Downtown Blessings**

When I started downtown, I had no pastoral experience. In Canada, the greatest barrier hindering a new immigrant from finding a job is a lack of local work experience. If you have no Canadian experience, it is very difficult to secure employment. Many immigrants find it necessary to volunteer to gain experience. Likewise, many churches regard a pastor's experience highly. Experience is important because it can save time. I did not have pastoring experience when I started my ministry downtown. Yet, when unexpected circumstances forced me to pastor two congregations singlehandedly for the first few months, the sky did not fall down. Actually, the size of the congregation grew, and a new outreach program was created. How did I manage to do that? The answer is that God showed favour to me, a pastor with no experience.

### ***Heavenly Peace***

I did not panic when Pastor H had to take a sabbatical leave, despite the fact that the church would be very busy during the Christmas season with outreach, celebration events and evangelical meetings. God was gracious and gave me heavenly peace. I did not lose my appetite, nor did I lose any sleep, even though many responsibilities rested on my shoulders.

### ***Humbleness***

A sister challenged my teaching in Sunday school. My reaction surprised even me. I did not try to defend myself, nor did I say a word. What led me to react in that manner? I thought about Moses. When his brother Aaron and sister Miriam talked against him because of his Cushite wife, Moses did not defend himself. The Bible describes Moses as a humble man, “more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth” (Numbers 12:3). I am not comparing myself with Moses; what I mean to say is that it was God’s blessing that I responded as I did. God used this incident to teach me humility.

### ***Unity of Coworkers***

Another blessing was the unity of my coworkers. Christmas outreach at the Chinatown Centre was a brand new endeavour. We had to work out the play script and rehearse many times in advance. For example, my involvement in an onstage play required that I memorize the script and rehearse it over and over again with my partners. It was very time consuming. The audio set up was also a big job. Many parts of the equipment had to be transported to the Chinatown Centre from the church. And after the outreach was over, the equipment had to be returned to church. Additionally, a big dinner for around 100 people was held the same day at the church. God is gracious! He provided more than enough manpower. We worked all for the glory of God. What was more encouraging was that two people from the audience raised their hands to accept Christ as their Lord and Savior. It was a joyful occasion.

## **Scarborough Blessings**

It seemed that God held me in His arms and closely guided me as I served Him downtown, but my experience in Scarborough was quite the opposite. I felt that God set me in the storm on “the lake of Galilee.” I tried to calm the storm by my own effort, but the boat kept sinking. Finally, Jesus rebuked the wind, and the storm was calmed. God used the situation in Scarborough to discipline me.

## ***Perseverance***

The Bible says, “Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything” (James 1:4). Perseverance is critical for the servant of God. In Scarborough, I felt as if I was swimming against the tide. The idea of resigning and seeking a pastoral position at another church appealed to me from time to time. But the Word of God encouraged me to persevere. The biblical verse which grabbed my heart the most was, “But my righteous one will live by faith. And I take no pleasure in the one who shrinks back” (Hebrews 10:38). So, although I am still not perfect in perseverance, I no longer consider quitting unless I have the assurance from God to do so.

## ***Hope in Christ***

The Bible says that Job is an example of perseverance. Why did he not give up? His own words explain the reason: “Though he slay me, yet will I hope in him; I will surely defend my ways to his face” (Job 13:15). Hope in Christ is the foundation of perseverance. The psalmists encouraged the people of God to “put hope in him (Lord)”. We put hope in the Lord “for with the Lord is unfailing love and with him is full redemption” (Psalms 130:7). God is gracious. My

frustration forced me to put my hope in Christ. He is the head of the Church, and He sits enthroned as King forever.

Hope in Christ is a blessing from God, yet we are accustomed to putting hope in people or things rather than trusting in God. Many times, “hope in Christ” is just empty words. Only after experiencing the frustration that hope in people gives us, can we come to realize that our hope is in Christ only. To me, this hope is a tremendous blessing. As a pastor, I must never put my hope in anybody, including myself; I must hope in Christ alone.

### ***Faithfulness to the Lord***

In Scarborough, I was disheartened for many reasons, and it seemed that the problems would last forever. Sometimes, I was despondent and lacked the energy to do anything. In such situations, God would touch my heart through the Bible: “now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful” (1 Corinthians 4:2). Faithfulness is a must for the servant of God. In the most trying situations, the Apostle Paul faced attacks and judgement not only from his enemies but also from Christians, yet he remained faithful to the Lord.

The Word of God reminded me that I had to be faithful to the Lord who had called me to be His servant, regardless of the circumstances. Therefore, I tried my best to prepare the sermon, Sunday school material and home Bible study material, to share the gospel with newcomers and to do visitation as much as possible. Early in 2015, my wife and I had a vision to start a Bible study group for sisters at our home. There were many sisters in our neighbourhood. They were all busy and did not have fellowship time with each other. Although the Bible study

time was at eight o'clock on Saturday mornings, over 10 sisters enthusiastically attended each time. After Bible study, they shared the struggles in their lives. One sister said, "This is the most helpful Bible study."

### **Reflection**

The Bible says that God, the Creator of heaven and earth, "gives all men life and breath and everything else....he determines the times set for them and the exact places where they should live....For in him we live and move and have our being..." (Acts 17:25-28). God was in my life even when I was an atheist. When my life was in danger, He kept me safe. He made me honoured in an unthinkable way. He established my household. All the good in my life were God's doing. Otherwise, there is no explanation at all for my good fortune.

The Bible says, "We love because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19). God loved me even when I did not believe in the existence of God. God loved me not because I had done anything to please Him, but because He is love. God's love is not just about allowing good things to happen in my life. God's love resides in His beautiful will of granting me salvation through His Son Jesus Christ.

God took the initiative in opening my spiritual eyes. He sent His messengers to preach the gospel to me. He spoke to me through His holy Bible. Although I could not understand, my heart was touched by His word mysteriously. He used a car accident to awaken my soul so that I cried out loud to Christ, "Jesus, I need you!" I did not know why I cried out to Jesus. What I knew was that my heart was changed at that moment.

God called me to be a full-time pastor. Both my wife and I said no to the calling out of our ignorance. God did not punish me for that. He patiently waited until many years later, when both my wife and I willingly said yes to the calling. He led me to finish seminary study and to become a pastor in CGCT. I have found out that God has a plan for every stage of my life. What I have to do is to wait patiently before the Lord until I know exactly what He wants me to do and then do it. Otherwise, I will experience regret.

### **Reflection on the Experience of Writing My Autobiography**

Working on my autobiography has given me the feeling of watching a film of my own life. C. S. Lewis was filled with joy when he looked back to see how God had worked in his life to convert him from atheism to Christianity (Lewis 1956, 238). When I look back on my life for as far as I could remember, I have to say that God showed me His favour at every stage of my life, even when I was not yet a Christian. It is a great blessing to my life. My experience in writing this autobiography has shown me that the following three points are essential to a meaningful autobiography.

### **Being True with Yourself**

The Chinese style of writing a biography about influential people always depicts how honourable their lives were. If somebody dares to write even slightly negatively about such people, he or she will be thought to be against them and will face criticism for sure. It seems that the Chinese are not alone in taking this approach. According to Erickson, it might be very common for people to hide some life episodes from others. Why? “They may mistrust their own perceptions,

or they may fear for their sanity or fear the mistrust of others or their condemnation or ridicule” (Erickson 1998, 113).

When I read *Saint Augustine’s Confessions*, I was astonished at his candour. He hid nothing. He disclosed all his evil deeds. In two chapters, he disclosed his shameful sexual behaviour and other immoral acts he had committed. “I intend to remind myself of my past foulness and carnal corruptions, not because I love them but so that I may love you, my God” (Chadwick 2008, 24).

Originally, I had a bitter struggle with myself over whether I should include the immoral things I had done in my autobiography. If people knew the kind of person that I used to be, would it change their perception of me? Would they want to keep their distance from me? Augustine’s example inspired me, and I decided to disclose the dishonorable things I did while away from my wife.

To be true with ourselves is crucial for an edifying autobiography, for the purpose of writing an autobiography is not only for the autobiographer’s benefit but also so that others can gain insight about the writer and learn from his or her life story of success and failure. If the autobiographer does not present the true image of himself, it is an act of deception that can mislead readers.

A Christian’s integrity requires that we be true with ourselves. Whether he was speaking to non-believers or believers, it seems that the Apostle Paul never shied away from talking about his disgraceful past of persecuting the Church of God and killing Christians. This might be why his testimony is so powerful and

why he is still mightily used by God. We have to remember that God can use our disgraceful past to show or highlight His unparalleled grace.

In China, *Confessions* is at the top of the list of famous literature. Why is the book so popular among atheists and Christians? One of the reasons might be that the true Augustine is presented within its pages.

The Bible is the best example of being true with ourselves. In the Bible, we see the true Abraham and David and many other servants of God. They are not depicted as flawless figures. We have to be true with ourselves while writing our autobiography.

### **Asking and Seeking**

Erickson depicts a map of how to write one's spiritual story. "...draw a map of your spiritual journey, naming important landmarks along the way. Do this in any way that feels appropriate to you---as a landscape with mountains and valleys, rivers and lakes, as a 'flow chart' with arrows and boxes, as a series of pictures or images, as a blueprint" (Erickson 1998, 11).

Rather than sorting out the "mountains and valleys, rivers and lakes" in my life, my approach to writing this autobiography has been to ask myself questions (e.g., Why did I experience that? Why was I treated in ways I did not deserve? Why did I not die in that accident?). Such questions have forced me to search for answers. And in the end, I have found that the episodes in my life are not disconnected or isolated events. They all connected to lead me to God. Like C. S. Lewis, I am also filled with joy, for I see that God showed His favour to me at

every stage of my life. God loves me not because I love Him, not because I am a good person, not because I am righteous. God loves me simply because He is the God of love, just as the Bible says: “God is love” (1 John 4:8).

Originally, I was at a loss and confused, for I did not know how or where to start writing my autobiography. I was even worried about whether I could finish the assignment and submit it by the required time. Frankly, it took two months to make a satisfactory start. I did not want to simply list my experiences from the beginning of my memory for the sake of the assignment. If I had approached the assignment that way, for sure I would have felt guilty. Thank God for showing me favour again when I did not know what to do. “Ask questions and seek answers” was my approach to writing my autobiography. It may not work for others, but it helped me tremendously.

### **Drawing Closer to God**

The process of writing the autobiography has assured me that I belong to Christ. When I was an atheist, I thought that I belonged to myself and I lived for myself. Looking back on my life, I can see that if God had not shown His favour to me, I would have departed this life a long time ago. Death tried again and again to remove me from the world of the living, but God brought me back with His mighty hand again and again. He not only saved my physical life but also redeemed my soul through the blood of His Son Jesus Christ. Looking back on the way I came to know Christ, I have to say that it was God who took the initiative. If He had not intervened in my life, I would never have awakened from spiritual death.

The Bible says, “He died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again” (2 Corinthians 5:15). The Apostle Paul’s philosophy of life was to live for Christ because he knew that he no longer belonged to himself but to his Savior, Jesus Christ. My prayer to God is that I will live for Him, which is not easy to do in an environment which is hostile to Christianity. But this is my desire in my innermost being, to live for God.

Writing my autobiography has made it clearer to me that I am called by God to continue serving Him with my whole life as a pastor. Being assured of this is very important for me, for there are many challenges in being a pastor. Challenges from non-believers are endurable because they are blind spiritually; challenges from congregants are understandable for they are sheep or spiritual infants; however, challenges from church leaders are disheartening and raise many questions in my mind. I have thought about running away from God. I have thought about serving God in other ways like in parachurch ministries. I have thought about finding a new church to pastor or planting a new church.

Working on this autobiography has not only assured me that I am called to be God’s servant but has also allowed me to meditate on the meaning of being a servant of God. According to the Bible, the original meaning of *servant* is *slave*. It is well known that a slave’s responsibility is to do whatever the master requires and to please the master. My working environment has still not changed, and I am praying for God to show me whether He wants me to stay or go. If I do not hear from God, I will interpret that as God wanting me to stay.

## **Conclusion**

This is the first time working on my autobiography. Although it has not been an easy undertaking, the process has been a tremendous blessing because it helps me to know the work of God in my life even before I became a Christian. If possible, I will encourage the congregants in my church to write their autobiography so that they will remember who they used to be and see the gracious work of God in their life.

According to my autobiography, hearing God and discerning the will of God are critically important. Without hearing God and careful discernment of the will of God, I probably would move against the direction God desires for me. Hearing God and discerning the will of God are not only important for my own spiritual formation but could be also important for those who desire to grow spiritually. In addition, according to my own experience, joining with others helps discernment tremendously.

### **The Link to the Spiritual Formation Model**

Hearing God has played a decisive role in my spiritual formation. Without hearing God, probably I would never have become a full-time pastor; without hearing God, the internship in the downtown CGCT would not have happened; and without hearing God, I would not have agreed to be transferred to the Scarborough CGC. Besides, hearing God is vital for me to prepare sermons in addition to regular exegesis of the biblical text. Hearing God is important for Christians to grow spiritually. To make sure that what we hear is from God, discernment is required. Discernment is not one's own business. A faith

community such as small group is necessary in the process of discernment. Therefore, hearing God and belonging to a small group are emphasized in my spiritual formation model for Chinese Christians of immigrant background.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **A MODEL OF SPIRITUAL FORMATION FOR IMMIGRANT CHINESE EVANGELICAL CHRISTIANS**

More and more Chinese immigrants have converted to Christianity in Canada. The crucial next step is to provide the needed support to enable them to grow spiritually. Based on my personal observation of the difficulties Chinese immigrant Christians face in their spiritual growth, I have developed a model intended to help my congregants and, if possible, immigrant Christians beyond my congregation, to overcome these difficulties and grow mature spiritually.

#### **The Urgency for Spiritual Formation**

Over my 10 years of pastoring Chinese immigrant Christians at CGCT, I have observed that there are at least five categories of Christians: i) lost Christians, who call themselves Christians but seldom attend the church worship service or any other church activities; ii) Sunday Christians, who attend church services regularly and dutifully but never or rarely get involved in any other activity; iii) social club Christians, who look at church as a social club to meet friends and get any help they may need; iv) knowledge Christians, who have biblical knowledge but little or no corresponding life change or transformation; v) dedicated Christians, who are thirsty for the Word of God and experience life transformation, evidenced by their enthusiasm for serving God both at church and

beyond. These five categories can be roughly reduced to two classes: Christlike and nonchristlike (superficial). It is sad to say that some Christians in CGCT are superficial according to my observation.

Many Chinese Christian workers in North America have a similar observation. Tian indicates a troubling phenomenon among Chinese churches, “It is easy to convert a Chinese but it is hard to have him or her to grow spiritually” (Tian 2015, 21). Qin calls it a crisis (Qin 2015, 55). That a baby never grows up is not only a crisis but a disaster for his or her parents, grandparents and even the society. A baby Christian cannot fulfill the Great Commandment and Great Commission, and even worse, he or she might be a stumbling block for others to accept Christ as their Lord and Savior.

Christians are called to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world. We see from the Book of Acts how influential Christians were when they lived out the life of being salt and light. Even those who practiced sorcery came to Christ, burned their scrolls publicly and renounced their past way of life. Stephen, the first martyr of the Christian Church, did not curse those who stoned him but instead cried out, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them” (Acts 7:60). Saul (Apostle Paul) and others around probably were shaken by Stephen’s life testimony to a great extent.

To have a physically healthy body, tissues and cells must grow in the way the Creator designed them to grow, otherwise problems will occur.

Growth without form or structure is what happens with cancer—millions of cells that have escaped the normal forces regulating cell growth expand

and divide, producing more tissues, but more corruption. Eventually a growth is discovered. But because it has not been formed according to the body's design, it represents sickness rather than health (Lawrenz 2000, 16).

In the same way, Christians must be formed in the likeness of Christ so that they will function as salt and light and be a blessing to the world around.

It is encouraging to see many evangelical leaders and pastors come to realize the importance of spiritual formation for Christians, an idea which has been long neglected, especially in CGCT. Many Canadian evangelical seminaries, such as Tyndale Seminary and Regent College, are now offering courses and degree programs such as a DMin on spiritual formation. Although courses and programs do not guarantee spiritual formation, it is evident that the process of spiritual formation is now being valued.

### **A Definition of Spiritual Formation**

Pettit highlights three aspects of spiritual formation: first, “a particular person is being changed (formed) at the core of the person's being (spirit);” second, the “individual believer is able to influence and interact with others in a more Christlike manner;” and third, formation is a “process” (Pettit 2008, 19). These three aspects can be simplified using three key words: formed, influence and process. Willard uses different terms to define spiritual formation as the following:

The process by which the human spirit or will is given a definite “form” or character. It is a process that happens to everyone. The most despicable as well as the most admirable of persons have had a spiritual formation. Terrorists as well as saints are the outcome of spiritual formation. Their spirits or hearts have been formed (Willard 2002, 19).

In this definition, the emphasis is on the inner world (spirits or hearts) of the human self. The Proverb tells us the importance of the heart, “Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life” (Proverbs 4:23). The Pharisees’ problem was that they mistakenly thought that they had pure hearts because of their good behavior. Jesus condemned them by calling them “white-washed tombs” (Matthew 23:27).

Lawrenz emphasizes the importance of both inner and outer life when defining spiritual formation: “spiritual formation is the progressive patterning of a person’s inner and outer life according to the image of Christ through intentional means of spiritual growth” (Lawrenz 2000, 15). Greenman and Kalantzis further provide a comprehensive and theologically oriented definition of spiritual formation: “our continuous response to the reality of God’s grace shapes us into the likeness of Jesus Christ, through the work of the Holy Spirit, in the community of faith, for the sake of the world” (Greenman and Kalantzis 2010, 24). A similar definition, by Robert Mulholland, states that spiritual formation is “a process of being conformed to the image of Christ for the sake of others” (Mulholland 1993, 15). What is striking about these two definitions is that, in each, the purpose of spiritual formation is to shape Christians into the likeness of Christ, not only for the benefit of themselves but for the benefit of others and for the world. Whereas Buddhists often pursue spirituality because they desire to have good fortune for themselves in the next life (Veenker, 1999), Christians strive to be spiritually formed so that they can shine in the darkness to lead others to Christ.

The concept of Christlikeness is one common element in all the definitions above. The Apostle Paul urges believers to “[clothe themselves] with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature” (Romans 13:14). C.S. Lewis echoes Paul’s exhortation to clothe oneself with the Lord Jesus Christ, writing that “every Christian is to become a little Christ. The whole purpose of becoming a Christian is simply nothing else” (Lewis 1977, 50).

Another common element is process. Spiritual formation is not an instantaneous event but a process. Apostle Paul’s words make this point very clear, “Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:13-14). Justification happens at one specific moment in our life, but sanctification (spiritual formation) is lifelong.

### **Models of Christian Spiritual Formation**

Two models of Christian spiritual formation have helped me to design a model which is intended to help Chinese immigrant Christians to begin the process of spiritual formation. One is Ignatius’ model (one of the classical models) and Mulholland’s model (one of the modern day models).

#### **The Four Weeks of Ignatius**

Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556) was the founder of the Jesuits, or Society of Jesus, which became one of the most influential agents of the Catholic Counter-Reformation of the sixteenth century (Mandelker and Powers 1999, 170).

*The Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius of Loyola*, a manual of disciplines that teaches the life of the Spirit to others and calls Christian disciples to reflect continuously on the life, death and resurrection of Christ, has been considered one of the most important documents in the history of Christian spirituality (King 2004, 145).

### **Features of Ignatius' spirituality highlighted by evangelical Christians**

At least two features of Ignatius' spirituality are held dear by evangelical Christians. One feature is the emphasis on dealing with sin. "The entire first week of the Spiritual Exercises is given over to reflection on sin and evil in our world and in ourselves" (Fleming 2008, 26). What is even more special about this call to reflection is Ignatius' suggestion that it be done in the presence of Jesus on the Cross.

Ignatius asks us to imaginatively come into the presence of Jesus on the Cross. We are to consider what Christ did in response to sin. Then we ask ourselves three questions: what have I done for Christ? What am I doing for Christ? What ought I to do for Christ? This is the all-important context within which we view sin. The suffering and death of Jesus is God's response to sin. The "face" of sin is reflected in the suffering face of the crucified Christ. We contemplate the terrible fact of sin, and the shameful reality of our own sin, in the blinding light of God's Love, crucified on a cross. Ignatius once again raises the insistent question that resonates throughout Ignatian-influenced spirituality: How am I to respond? (Fleming 2008, 27)

Through reflection in the presence of Jesus on the Cross, Ignatius states that we not only come to know the cruel facts of our sin, but our emotions are touched so that we feel pain and even grieve and shed tears for our sins (St. Ignatius of Loyola 2016, 25). Hence, hearing from God elicits emotions and feelings. As Gordon T. Smith puts it, "Emotions and feeling were for Ignatius key indicators

of the work of God in our lives, for by attending to emotional dispositions we are giving attention to the media of God's influence in our lives" (Smith 2003, 39). Fleming gives emotions and feelings credit for life transformation (spiritual formation), "The result is a closer relationship with Jesus and a renewed ability to give and to receive love, and, even better, to receive a forgiving love and to be enabled to offer forgiveness to others" (Fleming 2008, 29), which should be the pursuit of all Christians.

Reflection on sin appeals to Evangelicals because it highlights believers' complete helplessness and points believers to Christ the Redeemer (Galli, 2017). In my experience, Chinese immigrant Christians who are serious in reflecting on sin have a closer relationship with Christ.

Another feature of Ignatius's spirituality is the exaltation of Jesus Christ, which are also the beliefs of Chinese immigrant Christians in CGCT. In each part of the *Spiritual Exercises*, Jesus is the focus.

Intimacy with Jesus is the central grace of the Spiritual Exercises. The journey begins in the first week as we confront the damage done by sin and learn of God's plan to repair it. In the second week Christ invites us to work alongside him in his work to redeem the world. The third week brings us face to face with Jesus' continuing presence in the world especially in the Eucharist, "the greatest mark of his love." Finally, in the fourth and concluding week, we experience the risen Jesus who rejoices to share with us the boundless intimacy of his resurrected life (Fleming 2008, 105).

What is of particular significance for Chinese immigrant Christians is that Ignatius promotes "Meditation on Two Standards" as a means of dealing with the temptations of riches, honour and pride. In this meditation, two standards are two

banners or flags: the banner of Lucifer and the banner of Christ (Dawson, 2011). In Chinese culture, people are encouraged or taught to pursue riches, honour and pride so that their family name is glorified and their status in the society will be higher in the eye of others as expressed in this Chinese saying 出人头地. In order to grow Christ-centered, Chinese immigrants Christians have to fight deep-rooted mindsets on riches, honour and pride. David Fleming's elaboration on "meditation on two standards" demonstrates its potential usefulness to help Chinese immigrant Christians to discard the old baggage (pursuing riches, honour and pride) and become Christ-centred.

In this meditation Ignatius is using the imagery of standards---the battle flags that symbolize the identity of an army. One flag flies in front of the forces of Lucifer, whom Ignatius identifies as "the mortal enemy of our human nature." The other standard flies in front of the camp where Christ is leader...The problem with Lucifer's program is that riches, honor, and pride subtly lead us away from this truth. These values delude us about the true nature of things. They focus our attention on ourselves rather than God...The values of Jesus lead us back to the fundamental truth. The value of poverty reminds us that we have nothing in ourselves but only as a gift from God (Fleming 2008, 72-75).

### **Ignatius' way of discernment: consolation and desolation**

It is helpful as people grow in maturity, that they learn to discern daily what is right or wrong, genuine or false, moral or immoral, good or bad, legal or illegal and on and on regardless of their race, nationality, gender and religion. For Christians, discerning the will of God is of paramount importance. Without understanding the will (and voice) of God, we cannot "fulfill our individual calling and shared mission" (Nouwen et al. 2013, 4). And what is even worse is that we probably do the work of the Devil in the name of God. Such examples are

not lacking in the Bible. One example is Peter's rebuking of Jesus over His prediction of death at Jerusalem.

From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life. Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. "Never, Lord!" he said. "This shall never happen to you!" Jesus turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men" (Matthew 16:21-23).

One of the well-recognized contributions of Ignatius' spirituality was his way of discerning God's will by detecting consolation and desolation, which focus on "the interior world of our own thoughts and motives" (Barton 2012, 58). Based on Ignatius' definition, Barton provides a concise one: "Consolation is the interior movement of the heart that gives us a deep sense of life-giving connection with God, others and our authentic self...Desolation is the loss of a sense of God's presence: indeed, we feel out of touch with God, with others and with our authentic self" (Barton 2012, 58).

Ignatius stressed the importance of paying attention to the emotional affect (inner movement) (Silf 1998, 110) but he "was not so concerned with the surface manifestation of a feeling or emotion but would encourage you to explore what is beneath that feeling to determine if it is from the good spirits or the bad" (Warner 2010, 112). An analogy of a patient's symptoms and disease can help us to understand. A medical doctor asks for the patient's symptoms in order to come down to a diagnosis. Likewise, studying emotions and feelings, Ignatius intended to help us to find out our relationship with God: are we in spiritual consolation or desolation.

Cautions have to be taken especially in dealing with consolation because the Devil may “appear disguised as ‘an angel of light’” (Warner 2010, 150). Ignatius discovered in his own experience that “the evil spirit not only uses desolation but also makes use of consolation for his own purposes” (Warner 2010, 151). Therefore, he provided two sets of rules for discernment of spirits in terms of dealing with desolation and consolation. The rules for discernment Week One are for new Christians and those immature (Warner 2010, 112-115) and the rules for discernment Week Two are for more mature Christians (Warner 2010, 150-154). The key question to discern whether or not one is in consolation or desolation is: is the person moving towards God or away from God? One can feel happy and excited about lots of money and fame but moving away from God – one can feel sad or anxious yet be moved by either emotion to reach out to God in prayer.

Out of these rules, two points are more practical or helpful for Chinese immigrant Christians. First, do not take consolation at face value, for feeling good does not guarantee consolation; second, desolation is not always bad. According to Ignatius, sometimes God allows us to experience desolation for our spiritual good.

God wishes to try us, to see how much we are worth, and how much we will advance in His service and praise when left without the generous reward of consolations and signal favors... God wishes to give us a true knowledge and understanding of ourselves, so that we may have an intimate perception of the fact that it is not within our power to acquire and attain great devotion, intense love, tears, or any other spiritual consolation; but that all this is the gift and grace of God our Lord (St. Ignatius of Loyola 2016, 55).

Silt lists many signs which help to discern whether our emotions are consolation 'emotions' (Silt, 2007). The summary of these signs is that if we are directed beyond ourselves to others and God or energized, we are then assured that our emotions are truly the ones that lead us closer to God.

### **Mulholland's Model**

Mulholland's "Road Map" model is a modern day spiritual formation model. His down-to-earth approach to spiritual formation and use of simplified language make his model popular among Christians of different denominations. Although there is a gap of a few centuries between the two, Mulholland's "Road Map" model has at least three commonalities with Ignatius' model.

### **Spiritual Formation is a Process**

Both models emphasize that spiritual formation is a process. Ignatius did not use the word journey or process in his model, but "four weeks" in itself is an intensified process of spiritual exercises. Mulholland makes this point very clear in his definition of spiritual formation as "*a process* of being conformed to the image of Christ for the sake of others" (Mulholland 1993, 15). Postmodern culture is in "deeply ingrained instant-gratification mode" (Mulholland 1993, 23). This culture infiltrates Christians' attitudes unconsciously and many Christians "expect spiritual formation to happen instantaneously rather than through the steady progress of a process" (Mulholland 1993, 23). By emphasizing that spiritual formation is a process, Mulholland counters instant-gratification culture and awakens Christians from falsehood.

## **Spiritual Formation Needs Faith Community**

Ignatius did not design the Spiritual Exercises for a retreatant to journey through alone. A spiritual director or listener is required to accompany the retreatant (Warner 2010, 41). In Mulholland's model, the faith community plays a pivotal role, too. He uses biological terms to elaborate on the importance of a faith community.

Our personal spiritual disciplines, rather than separating us from the other cells in the body, become a means of binding us together in love and support as we seek each other's growth into wholeness. Meanwhile, the corporate disciplines of the body supply the supporting nurture of life for each of the individual cell (Mulholland 1993, 156–157).

### ***Lectio Divina*---Spiritual Reading**

*Lectio divina*, a sacred reading method, is adopted in journaling and prayer in Ignatius' model (Warner 2010, 36). Mulholland considers reading by *lectio divina* as “one of the most vital in our growth toward wholeness in the image of Christ for others” (Mulholland 1993, 115).

There are many differences between these two models. One striking difference is that Mulholland refuses the one-size-fits-all approach to spiritual formation. He introduces Jungian psychology to the process of spiritual formation and argues that everyone has to determine his or her strength (natural preference) and weakness. He proposes that we determine the opposite of our preference and nurture it, for “if I do not nurture my less preferred side, that will cause problems with my whole spiritual pilgrimage” (Mulholland 1993, 65).

What I appreciate from these two models are Ignatius' way of discernment (consolation and desolation) and Mulholland's corporate spirituality. The former

focuses on one retreatant's inner movement that arises as he or she journeys through the Exercises (Warner 2010, 110) ; on the contrary, the latter emphasizes the importance of interconnectedness of believers in faith community (Mulholland 1993, 145). In my understanding, Mulholland corporate spirituality emphasizes all believers' inner movement rather than one individual's in Ignatius' spirituality when applied in discernment. The former and the latter are not in conflict but commentary to each other, which is one major reason why I have executed lectio project in small group.

### **A Detailed Look at Chinese Immigrant Christians in CGCT**

Since the model is intended to help Chinese immigrant Christians in my congregation, it is necessary to know the congregants deeply. Otherwise, the model will not be effective in enabling them to overcome the specific difficulties that they face.

#### **Cultural Context**

Almost all congregants are first generation immigrants from mainland China. Having grown up in Chinese culture, they are likely to have cultural attachments of Confucianism, Buddhism, atheism, communism and so on. Understanding these Chinese cultural attachments enables us to provide the proper support to immigrant Christians so that they feel loved and respected. In the following, face and guanxi will be highlighted.

## **The Chinese Concept of “Face” (脸)**

“Face” is very important for the Chinese. One of its meanings is “prestige that is accumulated by means of personal effort or clever maneuvering” (Hu 2009, 45). Some immigrants feel that they have no “face” if they do not have a decent job or their children do not enter a prestigious school. When talking to them, a pastor has to have this “face” issue in mind and ask the right questions so that they will not lose “face.” Sometimes, people accept Christ as their Savior not of their own will but for the sake of those Christians who love them because they do not want them to lose “face.”

## **Guanxi (关系)**

Guanxi means relationship in English. However, its meaning is far beyond relationship. “Etymologically, guan (关) in Chinese means gate, and xi (系) means special connections among people who passed through the guan(gate). People going through the guan can enjoy ‘one of us’ relationship, but people outside the guan are excluded” (Gao,etc. 2010,266). The word guanxi itself tells us the importance of the concept in people’s lives. Chinese are accustomed to building up guanxi. Once a person has a certain network of guanxi, he or she has a sense of hope and safety.

As far as I know, many Christians have not been freed from the concept of guanxi. They love to attend the small groups in which they have guanxi. I don’t intend to criticize this phenomenon. My point is that the small group provides an

ideal environment in which to build up guanxi with others, particularly for newcomers who need to build up guanxi with Christ the Lord.

### **Cultural Shock**

Winkelman describes cultural shock as a multifaceted experience resulting from numerous stressors brought on by contact with a different culture (Winkelman 1994, 121). For Chinese immigrant in Canada, the cultural shock includes language, guanxi, job, Canadian experience, etc. If cultural shock is not dealt with properly, psychological crises or social dysfunctions may occur (Winkelman 1994, 121). As a Mandarin pastor, I have observed that many new immigrants are plagued with depression. Bhugra and Ayonrinde's review of many studies on depression in migrants concludes that the experiences of migration do contribute to the genesis and perpetuation of depression (Bhugra and Ayonrinde 2004, 17).

Cultural shock is unavoidable. Christian workers should take advantage of cultural shock to share Christ's love with new immigrants. In my experience, sharing the Gospel with new immigrants is much easier than with immigrants who have settled down. New immigrants' hearts are open to God while in cultural shock but those who have settled down have their hearts closed to God.

### **Evangelical Christians**

Evangelical Christians are defined as Christians who have the four qualities that are the special marks of the evangelical faith, "*Conversionism* the belief that lives need to be changed, *activism* the expression of the gospel in effort,

*biblicism* a particular regard for the bible, and what may be called *crucicentrism* a stress on the sacrifice of Christ on the cross” (Bebbington 1988, 16). From this definition, we can see what the pillars of evangelicalism are. I consider these pillars as the strengths of evangelicalism. Along with these strengths, there are corresponding weaknesses too. To know both strengths and weaknesses well is imperative in designing this model which will help Chinese immigrant Christians in CGCT to be formed like Christ rather than a typical evangelical.

### **Strengths**

CGCT emphasizes four items which match the four qualities emphasized in Bebbington’s definition of evangelicalism: the “born again” experience, evangelism, bible reading and the cross. I call them strengths, for they are the core biblical teachings of Jesus Christ.

#### “Born Again”

Like Bebbington, we also see the importance of conversion and we would describe it as being *born again*. Billy Graham defines “born again” Christians as people who have repented of their sins, turned to Christ for their salvation through the work of the Holy Spirit, and as a result have become part of God’s family forever (Graham, 2005). Evangelicals emphasize the *born-again* experience. Although it may be offensive to many people, being born again is absolutely biblical, for Jesus says, “I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again” (John 3:3). Nicodemus, a Jewish religious teacher, could not grasp the concept of being born again and sought clarity from Jesus: “How can a man be born when he is old? Surely he cannot enter a second time into his

mother's womb to be born" (John 3:4). The concept of being born again is beyond human understanding, for it is the work of God. Being born again is not only a concept found in the New Testament; it is also revealed in the Old Testament. Through the prophet Ezekiel, God states, "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws" (Ezekiel 36:26-27).

One who is born again is a new creation. The Apostle Paul says in his second letter to Corinthian Christians, "therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come" (2 Corinthians 5:17). The new creation has a personal relationship of "you are in me and I am in you" (John 14:20) with Jesus Christ.

Once an individual experiences being born again, his or her view of Jesus Christ is transformed. The most outstanding example would be the conversion of the Apostle Paul. Hubbard writes, "Paul's conversion on the Damascus road involved a complete reversal of his prior judgments concerning Jesus. Paul was compelled not only to abandon his mission against the fledgling Jesus movement (Galatians 1:15-17), but to admit that his previous perception of Christ was woefully inadequate (1 Corinthians 15:9-11)" (Hubbard 2002, 159). Although we do not have Paul's born again experience, one thing we share in common with him is that there is a marked difference in our lives before and after being born again.

Being born again is vital in the process of being formed like Christ. Therefore, in this model we will help people to meet God, experience God, and be transformed like Christ.

### Evangelism

Evangelism is defined as teaching (heralding, proclaiming, preaching) the gospel (the message from God that leads us to salvation) with the aim (hope, desire, goal) to persuade (convince, convert) (Stiles, 2014). According to the Great Commission, Christians must evangelize: “Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matthew 28:19-20).

The Apostle Paul wrote in his first letter to the Corinthian Christians, “yet when I preach the gospel, I cannot boast, for I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel” (1 Corinthians 9:16). In the early period of my spiritual life, I struggled with this verse, in particular the latter part. Why did Paul use the challenging words “woe to me?” After illumination by the Holy Spirit, I came to understand why Paul used these words: Jesus Christ sends us out to preach His gospel and we, as His followers, have no choice but to obey by preaching the gospel and rescuing lost souls. Otherwise, we can expect to be labeled as wicked and lazy servants in the sight of our Lord Jesus Christ after His second coming.

In CGCT, some Christians are enthusiastic about doing evangelism. They seek opportunities to share with non-believers their testimony of encountering Christ, give out gospel tracts or directly preach the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. They even consider their visits to China as a short-term mission trips. This is how they express the activism mentioned in Babington's definition of evangelicalism.

### Bible Reading

From Bebbington's definition of evangelicalism, it can be seen that reading the Holy Bible is of paramount importance for evangelicals. According to Grayston, there are three main reasons for Bible reading: transformation, relationship and information. He writes:

The word of God has creative power to bring about moral change. It does so by bringing about conviction and self-understanding... In the act of reading we move beyond the text to encounter the author of the text—postmodern hermeneutics notwithstanding... While building up a body of doctrine is not the sole, or perhaps even the main, reason for reading the Bible, it remains true that individual Christians need to have an understanding of what they believe. Living in a world of conflicting ideas, it is important that in our dialogue with people of other faiths and ideologies we can give a reasoned description of and defense for our convictions (Grayston 2002, 104-105).

In CGCT, much effort has been made to encourage congregants to read the Bible. Some pastors invite congregants to sign a Bible reading covenant with church to promise that they will finish reading the whole Bible once in a period of time. Some fellowship groups hold regular biblical knowledge contests with the intention to motivate people to read the Bible. Rewards are even used as incentives to encourage people to read the Bible. Some methods of encouraging people to participate in Bible reading may sound strange or unacceptable to other

denominations or faiths. However, the congregants of CGCT know the good intention of their pastors: to know God and His will for us by reading the Bible.

### Cross

Crucicentrism is one of the four qualities in Bebbington's definition of evangelicalism. In CGCT, crucifixion lies at the center of our beliefs. There are physical crosses hung on the wall both inside and outside the church buildings. More importantly, crucifixion is preached on the pulpit and in the gospel message we share with others. We believe that the gospel without crucifixion is not gospel or false gospel.

### **Weaknesses**

The weaknesses most commonly shared by evangelicals are the following: lack of spiritual disciplines, results-oriented leadership, and a judgmental attitude.

### Lack of Spiritual Disciplines

Spiritual disciplines are patterns of thought and behaviour that draw us away from an improper focus on ourselves and the world to a proper focus on God and His Word (Eyre 1992, 9). Whitney simply describes spiritual disciplines as a means to promoting spiritual growth (Whitney 1991, 17). In my experience, some Chinese immigrant Christians tend to have negative views on spiritual disciplines, and many consider such disciplines to be for the monks and mystics of the past. A Christian friend, for instance, was baffled by my interest in the disciplines of meditation and pilgrimage because many Chinese Christians equate such activities with Buddhist practices. Little writes that a "lack of understanding

of and instruction in the spiritual disciplines has for far too long constituted one of the primary weaknesses of most contemporary evangelical and modernist approaches to discipleship” (Little 2015, 93).

Due to a lack of spiritual disciplines, evangelicals may become shallow in their spirituality. Even though their heads may be filled with biblical knowledge and right doctrines, many evangelicals experience frustration when dealing with ingrained sin. Foster elaborates:

We rely on our willpower and determination. Whatever may be the issue for us—anger, fear, bitterness, gluttony, pride, lust, substance abuse—we determine never to do it again; we pray against it, fight against it, set our will against it. But the struggle is all in vain, and we find ourselves once again morally bankrupt or, worse yet, so proud of our external righteousness that “whitened sepulchers” is a mild description of our condition (Foster 1978, 4–5).

### Results-oriented Leadership

Greg Pritchard identifies evangelicals’ leadership style as entrepreneurial and results-oriented:

Both Evangelical leaders and donors are focused on evangelism and counting conversions, baptisms and church plants as the primary means they use to evaluate what they do and where they give. Evangelical strategic and philanthropic thinking is dominated by thinking about numbers and measurable outcomes (Pritchard, 2015).

Thinking about measurable outcomes is not wrong, but its danger is that other priorities like worship, discipleship, good Bible teaching, small groups, etc. are not given enough attention, so that “we create weak and immature churches” (Pritchard, 2015). This phenomenon can be observed in CGCT. Every year, many people are converted to Christianity and baptized, but some of them fail to grow spiritually or never return to church.

## Judgmental Attitude

“Many Americans consider evangelical Christians judgmental, intolerant, and moralistic in a bad sense, even though every right-thinking person does acknowledge the necessity of a personal framework of morals” (Olson 2008, 43). Although the majority of evangelicals are not judgmental in any sense, they are forced to share the label. As an evangelical, I am uncomfortable with and sorrowful over this label. Kern, however, has the courage to admit that some evangelicals are, at times, very much like the Pharisees:

The average Pharisee was no more hardhearted, unloving, or hypocritical than the average churchgoing North American members of both groups felt strongly about their beliefs. Both were intensely concerned about pleasing God. Both could become so caught up in the details of their religious life that they could forget or ignore that real presence of God in their midst (Kern 1995, 18).

Similar to the Pharisees in biblical times, some evangelical Christians may feel superior to others in matters of righteousness, doctrine and even in worship style. I have heard some pastors label Catholics as heretics because “they worship idols.” If we seek to understand the purpose behind their religious emblems, we may change our view.

Jesus Christ did not intend for His followers to be judgmental; rather, they are called to be salt and light to help lost souls to see Christ:

You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men. You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven (Matthew 5:13-16).

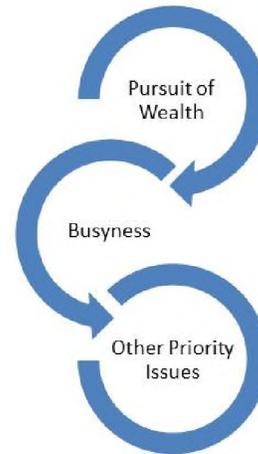
## **Hurdles for Chinese Immigrant Evangelicals in Canada**

Canada is a country of immigrants. Technically, all Canadians are immigrants except for indigenous peoples. Statistics Canada classifies immigrants into different generations: *first generation immigrants* refers to those born outside of Canada; *second generation immigrants* include individuals born in Canada with at least one parent born outside of Canada; *third generation immigrants* refers to those born in Canada with both parents also born in Canada (Statistics Canada 2016). There are major differences among the generations in terms of values and culture. A study by Monica Boyd illustrates these differences:

To date, we know that newly arrived immigrants generally do less well, with respect to economic indicators such as home ownership, employment and earnings, compared with the Canadian born or groups with longer duration in Canada. In contrast, difficulties associated with newcomer status are not expected to occur for their Canadian-born offspring since the latter are educated in Canada, are fluent in English and/or French and are likely to have greater familiarity with workplace practices and customs (Boyd 2008, 20).

My observation is that first generation Chinese immigrant Christians face at least three major hurdles in their spiritual growth: *pursuit of wealth*, *busyness*, and *other priority issues*. These three hurdles are causally related; pursuit of wealth results in busyness, and busyness results in priority issues, which can be demonstrated graphically in Figure 1. Knowing the hurdles they face helps us to understand their challenges, but more importantly, this awareness enables us to provide the assistance they need to overcome the barriers to their spiritual growth.

**Figure 1. Diagram of The Three Hurdles**



**Pursuit of Wealth**

Confucius has a famous saying: “Gentlemen pursue ideals in their lives; small people pursue wealth” (Fang, 2012). However, it appears that modern day Chinese go against this traditional teaching, preferring to be small people rather than gentlemen. The French market research company Ipsos in 2013 conducted a global survey with more than 16,000 adults in 20 countries and found that Chinese respondents topped the list in measuring success by their possessions, coming in at more than double the global average (Feng, 2013).

Many Chinese immigrants Christians in CGCT have a similar attitude toward wealth, and they have many reasonable arguments. A furniture factory owner told me that he had no time for devotion because he had to keep his factory open seven days a week so that his employees could earn a living wage to support

their families. Another Christian said that he had to work hard to make enough money to pay for his son's medical school tuition. No matter how reasonable their excuses, the reality is that they could not commit themselves to the basic requirements for Christians: Bible reading, prayer, worship service, etc.

### **Busyness**

A lady once attended the Christmas Evangelical Meeting at the Chinese Gospel Church and made a decision to accept Christ as her Saviour. The next week, a follow-up call was made to invite her to a church service and other activities such as fellowship and Bible study. She replied, "I really wish I could go to church but I cannot find time at all. On the weekend, I have to drive my kids to dancing lessons, skating programs, piano lessons, swimming clubs, science clubs and English classes." When asked about the possibility of scheduling these activities on weekdays, she explained that she was too busy with her work to find the time.

Many times, I have heard my congregants say that they were displeased with the busyness of their lives but they felt as though they had no choice in the matter. Since they often do not speak fluent English and lack local experience, they may struggle to find suitable employment. To make ends meet, they frequently work long hours to bring home enough money. Some have paid a heavy price for their busyness: marriage crisis, parenting issues and health problems.

Tan considers busyness as the great enemy of our souls. "He will do his best to keep us from God's rest...Consequently, we often clutch at people, things,

and activities that keep us engaged in the cycle of a hurried and harried life” (Tan 2000, 25). Many immigrant Christians in CGCT complain that busyness robs them of quality time with parents, children and God.

### **Priority Issues**

Everybody has a list of priorities in life. For non-believers, God is likely not on the list since they do not believe in Him. However, it is alarming to find that many Chinese immigrant Christians do not place God on their list of priorities either. Their priorities are their jobs, children, health and even entertainment but not God. In my experience, some of Chinese immigrant Christians in CGCT do not place God at the top of their list of priorities. On a few occasions, congregants have told me that they would not be available for church service and other church duties for a certain period of time. Once, a mother told me that she had to take her daughter to a birthday party the coming Sunday and asked me to find a replacement for her church service assignment. Only a minority of congregants have God at the top of their list. They are God-conscious Christians, and nothing can prevent them from worshiping the Lord. By the priorities in their lives, it can be seen that they are Christlike.

### **Marathon Spiritual Formation through Small Group**

The small group is a faith community which can help immigrant Christians to overcome their hurdles and grow spiritually because “the small group is an appropriate vessel for people to experience the necessary depth of intimacy required for transformation” (Frazee 2001, 21).

### **Small Group: A Community**

An infant cannot grow up alone; he or she needs parental care and support. China's one-child policy has revealed some negative impacts of being an only child: firstly, the child is lonely; secondly, the child is overly spoiled; thirdly, the child does not understand the value of sharing with others. Upon realizing the problem with the policy, the Chinese government issued a new policy allowing each couple to have two children (Russell, 2015).

Similarly, a new Christian convert should not grow up alone. Following conversion, he or she is not immediately a mature Christian but rather a "baby in Christ." In order to become spiritually mature, the new Christian needs a spiritual home with spiritual parents and siblings. Jesus' spiritual home for his twelve disciples was in the form of a small group. "They were in his small group together. They lived together. They shared pain together. They had conflicts with one another. They shared ministry together. They imitated Jesus together. They experienced the incarnate shalom of God as human, accessible and vulnerable" (Icenogle 1994, 123).

Howard defines a small group as a collection of approximately five to twenty people who meet regularly for some expression of care. He writes:

Small groups provide a vehicle for greater attention to the needs of individuals within the group without resorting to a one-on-one relationship. From the house churches of antiquity, to collections of monks in 'sketes', to the collegia pietas of the Lutheran Pietists, to the bands and class meetings of Methodism and beyond, small groups have frequently served as a mechanism of mutual care within the Christian church (Howard 2008, 345).

Mulholland observes that the freedom of self-disclosure is a great advantage of community in spiritual formation:

I no longer have to fear you. I can welcome your insights into my incompleteness, because you can be a means of God's grace to awaken me to the blind spots in my life and my relationship with God. I can receive the gifts of your temperament preference and openly share mine with you. I can disclose to you the growing edges of my spiritual pilgrimage, the tender places of my brokenness and the hard places of my bondage, and receive God's healing, liberating grace through you... I do not have to protect myself against you. I can also commit myself to you in your brokenness and bondage and allow God to work through me in God's way, not my manipulative one (Mulholland 1993, 154-155).

Having served as a pastor among Chinese immigrants for over eight years, I have found that small groups, if guided by biblical truths and the love of Christ, are edifying and attractive to both believers and non-believers alike. I have noticed that most people do not want to miss small group gatherings despite the busyness of day-to-day life. Besides, as a Christian community, small groups can help people who claim to hear God's voice to discern if what they hear is indeed from God or from other sources (Standish 2014, 201).

### **Small Group Leaders**

A small group must have certain requirements. One requirement Comiskey emphasizes for a successful small group is leadership training: "members of a team will never reach full potential unless they are allowed to grow to the point of leading others" (Comiskey 2000, 39). In CGCT, there is a deficit in small group leadership training. The price for this deficit is that many members fail to grow spiritually or, even worse, they quit the group.

Comiskey claims that the principal job of the small group leader is to train the next leader rather than to fill the house with guests (Comiskey 2000, 41). George encourages the leaders to view themselves as a leader maker and the group as a leader-making laboratory (George 1997, 45). Therefore, to help immigrant Christians to surmount their hurdles, we have to assist them, unconsciously and consciously, to take up the leader's responsibilities. "Unconsciously" means the implicit influence of the leader's exemplary life on the members or leaders-to-be (role modeling). "Consciously" means that leaders intentionally encourage the members to shoulder responsibilities in the group by using their God-giving spiritual gifts.

### **Unconsciously**

Leaders are a living role model to those around (Comiskey 2000, 95). The leading couple of my first small group influenced me and my wife tremendously while we were in Chicago. Their sacrificial love of God and people was so contagious that we were motivated to overcome all the hurdles in front of us to pursue Christ.

One most touching act of love is a leader's caring heart. New immigrants experience many challenges such as unemployment, marital problems, generational conflicts and physical health problems. Years ago, a new immigrant couple in my small group experienced a financial crisis. The husband was employed in a research lab, and his wife was a full-time housewife. They had two young children, ages seven and one. The husband lost his job when there was no more funding for his research. With this loss, the family fell into a serious crisis,

as they had little savings. As the small group leader, I, along with my wife, visited them, petitioned before God for them and gave them monetary support. A few weeks later, our church pastor assisted the husband to secure interim employment.

A caring heart can be expressed in many forms. Sometimes, it is simply by offering a listening ear; for example, when a husband and wife quarrel, it may be unwise for the pastor to add his input when neither spouse has a listening spirit. There are times when I just watch and listen while a couple quarrels. When the fight is over and they are exhausted, I hold their hands to pray. Amazingly, many couples become emotional and ask for forgiveness after my prayer. They are not only reconciled but start to learn the art of listening. Karl Augustus Menninger, a famous American psychiatrist, has a famous saying: “Listening is a magnetic and strange thing, a creative force. The friends who listen to us are the ones we move toward. When we are listened to, it creates us, makes us unfold and expand” (Parker, 2011). Listening provides a foundation of trust necessary for producing stronger interpersonal relationships because it expresses unselfish love and concern (Poole 2003, 147). A leader who wants to be a leader maker must master the art of listening.

Comiskey states, “People are watching our lives. They want to make sure that our action corresponds with our words before receiving the gospel message. They want to make sure that the leader they are going to follow is credible and honest” (Comiskey 2000, 51). The godly character of a small group leader will influence immigrant Chinese Christians to overcome the hurdles to their pursuit of Christ.

## **Consciously**

*Consciously making leaders* means to intentionally help people to grow and become a leader. Comiskey suggests the need to develop a mentoring system to aid in the process of making leaders (Comiskey 2000, 89-99). Of the various types of mentoring he lists, the most urgent need of CGCT is disciple training. In CGCT, evangelism is actively done in many ways and there are many converts every year. However, we have not done enough to help the new converts to become disciples; as a result, many drop out of church.

Comiskey defines a discipling mentor as a mature follower of Christ helping an immature Christian to grow in Christian habits (Comiskey 2000, 91). Small group leader has to intentionally match a new Christian convert to a mature Christian for disciple making. In my own experience, the mentee feels valued once he or she is matched with a mentor and is motivated to pursue God among the many choices of daily life.

## **Three Stages of a Small Group**

Like all of humanity, evangelical Christians have weaknesses. In addition, the Chinese immigrant Christian faces some tough weaknesses or hurdles in life. To be formed spiritually and to become more like Christ, Chinese evangelical Christians of immigrant background must overcome personal weaknesses and surmount the hurdles in their lives. Given the distinctiveness of Chinese culture and atheistic education under communist rule, it may seem questionable to mechanically apply the classical models of spiritual formation to Chinese immigrant Christians. Therefore, I suggest that the following model, which is an

integration of classical models, evangelical practices and Chinese cultural factors, is well suited to foster the effective spiritual formation of Chinese Christians of immigrant background.

### ***Stage One: Awakening***

It is wonderful news that an increasing number of Chinese immigrants are converting to Christianity in Canada. However, many of them are not clear about their new-found faith. These Chinese Christians go to church when they are in trouble or when they have free time in their busy schedules. There are others who may never return to church if they experience troubles in their lives. One lady in my church turned away from her faith when she lost her job. No matter how hard the church tried to reach out to her, she refused to return. A significant reason for her decision to leave was the impression that many Chinese Christians look to Jesus as another Buddha who will bless them materially.

To be formed spiritually, it is very important for new Christians to experience or encounter God and fear Him. The Apostle Peter had this experience. As a result of the extraordinary fishing miracle recorded in Luke 5:4-9, Peter was awakened to a life-transforming view of both Jesus and himself.

A small group can foster an excellent environment for the awakening of Chinese immigrants. Firstly, God's transforming power revealed in group members' lives can point others to Jesus. A lady (Susan) who had been baptized into the Jehovah Witness cult attended a small group at my church. She told me that she did not believe that Jesus was the Son of God. However, she was touched by the example of the small group leader, Mary, who struggled with her health

and supported an adult child with autism. Although there appeared to be nothing pleasant about her life, Mary always showed up with joy. In 2015, Susan was diagnosed with lymphoma and received chemotherapy. She often pondered what Jesus had done in Mary's life to cause her to experience such joy in spite of her hardships. By the end of 2015, Susan confessed that Jesus was the Son of God and accepted Him as her Lord and Saviour. Now, she is an active member of our church, participating in Sunday service, Sunday school, fellowship and a family small group.

Secondly, agape love forces people to think about who Jesus is.

Unconditional love is not spoken of in the Chinese culture. Chinese Communism teaches that love is conditional, which can be seen in the famous quote of Feng Lei, the well-known communist hero: "The way you treat your comrades should be as warm as spring... The way you treat your enemies should be as cruel as winter" (Rogers, 2012). According to these teachings, one is to be very cautious if a stranger shows love because they likely have ulterior motives. As a visiting scholar and non-believer in Chicago, I was uncomfortable with displays of Christian love. A Christian couple, Mike and Grace, often invited a group of Chinese scholars, including myself, to their home for dinner. I was suspicious of their intention and wondered why they were so hospitable. Were they using the dinner as a bait to take advantage of us somehow? Eventually, I learned that they simply desired to express the agape love of Christ to us, and I was awed by the concept of Christ's unconditional love. Two years later, my in-laws visited my

family in Chicago and immediately accepted Christ as their Saviour when they experienced the unconditional love of Christians.

In a small group, people feel the love of God through activities such as Bible study, sharing meals and visiting, and they are awakened to pursue God. A couple who had marital problems and planned to file for divorce were invited to my home for a two-day retreat, along with my wife and two other families in my Bible study group. As the retreat came to an end, the husband and wife confessed their sins to God and to each other and were reconciled. Now, the husband is one of the leaders of a mega-church.

Awakening is a two-sided experience involving an encounter with the living God and with our true self (Mulholland 1993, 80). Awakening is the work of God. He uses small groups to awaken non-believers and also believers at different stages of spiritual pursuit. Awakening demands a response, as Mulholland writes:

Our response may be immediate, or it may come after much wrestling and recurrence. Some people are aroused into the early stages of wakefulness and then quickly subside into sleep... They will be roused up again and lie back down again, and that pattern can continue until finally they come to the point of awakening: they step across the threshold of the open door into a new relationship with God (Mulholland 1993, 82).

Many Chinese Christians have this experience. As a pastor, I am frustrated when I see Christians step away from pursuing spirituality. There is an urgency to help them learn to worship God.

### ***Stage Two: Learning To Worship God***

After studying the Scripture, Whitney comes down to a definition of worship as “focusing on and responding to God” (Whitney 1991, 87). “The more truly we worship God, the more we become like Him” (Whitney 1991, 95). Without worshiping God, we will not become Christlike.

There are two forms of worship: public worship (corporate worship) and private worship (Whitney 1991, 92). Public worship is worship in the physical presence of other believers and private worship is private devotional life. Both are important. “There are some graces and blessings that God gives only in the ‘meeting together’ with other believers...there are experiences with God that He gives only in our private worship...How is it possible to worship God publicly once each week when we do not worship Him privately throughout the week?” (Whitney 1991, 92-93).

#### ***Public Worship***

In my experience, Chinese immigrant Christians learn public worship before private devotion. If they do not develop the habit of attending church services, it is almost impossible for them to do private devotion.

Many Chinese people hold utilitarian views of religion, which can be seen from the Chinese idiom, “平时不烧香，临时抱佛脚,” the English translation of which is, “Never burning incense when all is well, but clasping Buddha’s feet in an emergency” (Sun 2011, 1210). Many Chinese immigrant Christians carry this utilitarian view toward their new-found Christian beliefs. They do not view Christ

as Lord but rather view Him as a genie who can help to solve their problems. As a result, they have no time for worship except in times of trouble.

Therefore, in CGCT, small groups make tireless efforts to motivate their members to attend public worship services by encouraging them and even providing a ride for those who lack transportation. I have witnessed how some brothers and sisters love to offer rides because they had once appreciated a pickup service when they were without a vehicle themselves. A couple shared with me last year how they were touched by those Christians who gave them rides to church and to grocery stores. A few years ago, they moved to another city and the husband became a deacon of a local Chinese Church. In the small group context, newcomers or visitors observe our small group praying, Bible study and singing songs and learn to worship.

In addition to providing practical help, small groups also pray for their members' attendance at worship services because evil forces use all their means to prevent people from worshiping God. Once, I met a Chinese woman who had immigrated to Canada and was interning in the Montessori school located in my church building. I invited her to come to Sunday service. Weeks later, she told me that she had been unable to come as she had been sick for the previous three weekends. She informed me that her church attendance had offended Buddha, for she was a Buddhist. The manifestation of evil forces is frequently experienced among Chinese immigrant seekers. Therefore, Christians must petition on their behalf.

### *Private Worship*

Many Chinese immigrant Christians know the importance of private worship. However, for people who work and have young children, daily private devotion is quite a challenge due to a lack of time. One father shared with me that he had to drop his two children at school each morning and pick them up each afternoon. Besides, his job was very demanding. What was even worse, sometimes his senior parents and in-laws had medical appointments, and he or his wife had to take them to the doctor and be an interpreter.

New immigrants have challenges which probably sound unsurmountable; however, this should not be an excuse for skipping private devotion. In CGCT, some small groups try to share fellow members' burdens with the intention of freeing them up to have quiet time before the Lord. In addition, creative private devotion methods are advocated. The most popular one is playing Bible audio CDs while driving or cooking.

### ***Stage Three: More Spiritual Disciplines***

There are many spiritual disciplines, and worship is one of them. Worship is only the beginning of our spiritual formation (Whitney 1991, 97). To grow deep, we have to practice more spiritual disciplines. Foster indicates the necessity of more spiritual disciplines for modern day Christians:

The desperate need today is not for a greater number of intelligent people, or gifted people, but for deep people. The classical disciplines of the spiritual life call us to move beyond surface living into the depths. They invite us to explore the inner caverns of the spiritual realm. They urge us to be the answer to a hollow world (Foster 1978, 1).

Since its publication in 1978, Richard Foster's book *Celebration of Discipline* has sold over one million copies, meaning that it has drawn many people's attention. However, in CGCT, little or no attention has been given to spiritual disciplines apart from worship. This may be partly due to one-sided teaching of the biblical truth stated in Romans 3:28. (i.e., "a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law.") The result of misunderstanding the purpose of spiritual disciplines is self-righteousness. Some Chinese immigrant Christians, with ingrained cultural influences, may view engaging in Christian spiritual disciplines as similar to engagement in Buddhist disciplines such as meditation and fasting (two impressive Buddhist disciplines in the eyes of Chinese people). "Most Asian spiritual traditions stress the importance of meditation in the pursuit of whatever they consider to be the ultimate perfection or final goal, whether it is called enlightenment, emancipation or total realization" (Pas and Leung 1998, 218). In addition, busyness makes it even more difficult for immigrant Chinese Christians to take on spiritual disciplines.

How can we help CGCT immigrant Christians to exercise spiritual disciplines? What should we do to arouse their interest and enthusiasm in the spiritual disciplines? First, preachers must preach the importance of engaging in spiritual disciplines. Take fasting as an example. Principles for fasting should be taught. The purpose of fasting is for people who fast "to become more absorbed in a time of spiritual activity" (Whitney 1991, 161). Fasting is practiced in both the Old and New Testaments. In addition to the regular practice of fasting, believers

are called to fast in crisis or at a critical moment. Jesus Himself practiced fasting and also taught His disciples how to fast:

When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show men they are fasting. I tell you the truth; they have received their reward in full. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to men that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you (Matthew 6:16-18).

Second, it is good to practice the disciplines first within the small group community. Although there are many resources useful for gaining knowledge on the topic of spiritual disciplines, it is difficult to commit to practicing these disciplines. As St. Theophan the Recluse states, “Procrastination is a common ailment and the chief reason for incorrigibility” (St. Theophan the Recluse 2006, 127). Some Chinese immigrant Christians are often tempted to use busyness as an excuse to justify their procrastination. Recently, I asked four Christian young couples to meditate for five minutes daily on one or two verses I sent them each day. They agreed to do so; however, the following week, they told me they had failed. Christians cannot grow by their own effort or in isolation. Community is required for growth. Thus, it is important to practice the spiritual disciplines collectively within a small group.

There are many spiritual disciplines, and each has its own value. To best meet the need of Chinese immigrant Christians in their spiritual formation, I highlight three specific disciplines for Chinese immigrant Christians: *lectio divina*, simplicity and God-centered prayer. *Lectio divina* enables Christians to do

formational reading; simplicity and God-centered prayer help them to focus on God rather than materials and self.

### *Lectio divina*

There are two ways of reading the Scriptures: informational and formational reading. In the informational approach to reading, the reader is “an information gatherer, a master or a critic” (Chan 1998, 163) and “God is given little opportunity to speak” (Grant 1995, 120). In contrast, the formational approach to reading the Scriptures allows the reader to “come to the text with an openness to hear, to receive, to respond, to be a servant of the Word rather than a master of the text” (Mulholland 1985, 57). Both approaches of reading the Scripture are helpful, but they have to be balanced.

In my experience, many Chinese immigrant Christians are taught and accustomed to the informational approach of reading the Scriptures. Many are highly educated; they are quick to scan the text, and they are able to accurately memorize biblical content. However, biblical knowledge does not automatically translate into corresponding life change. For true life transformation, one has to meet God in the text. Thus, the formational approach to reading is necessary for the transition from mere knowledge to real life change.

One formational approach to reading the Bible is *lectio divina*, literally meaning divine reading. It is “a process of formational reading that emphasizes a slow dwelling with the text” (Wilhoit and Howard 2012, 18). There are four components to *lectio divina*: *lectio*, *meditatio*, *oratio* and *contemplatio*.

Mulholland gives a detailed description of each component:

*Lectio*, the first step in the classical disciplines of spiritual reading, is simply the process of reading the text... *Meditatio* is the activity of processing what we have received in *Lectio* and flows naturally from our reading...*Oratio* is our response to God on the basis of what we have read and encountered, and flows naturally from meditation. At this point we enter into personal dialogue with God...At the close of *oratio*, *contemplatio* moves us into a posture of released waiting on God for whatever God wants to do in us, with us, through us (Mulholland 1993, 113-115).

From Mulholland's description, we can see the key words of *lectio divina*: reading, receiving, processing, responding and waiting on God. To help to understand the essence of *lectio*, Wilhoit and Howard use another word "savor" to vividly describe receiving and processing the word of God (Wilhoit and Howard 2012, 129).

In CGCT, some Chinese immigrant Christians are very sensitive to the word *meditation* because they link meditation to Buddhism and view it negatively to a certain degree and even resist its practice. The reasons for such a negative view of meditation are that they do not understand the difference between Christian and Buddhist meditation. The objects of meditation for both faiths differ, and do the purposes of meditation. Actually, different Chinese words are used to express the word *meditation*: 默想 in Christianity and 冥想 in Buddhism. More will be discussed in the *Context* section in Chapter 4.

In my experience, many Chinese evangelicals do not use such phrases as "God tells me" or "I hear God say." Rather, they often use phrases such as "I think," "my understanding is" or "my conclusion is." There is an evident difference between what "God tells me" and "my understanding is." What "God

tells me” is truth. However, “my understanding” may be wrong. It is important to believe that what “God tells me” has the power to reshape my life.

### *Simplicity*

The Bible teaches about the simple life: “If we have food and clothing, we will be content with that” (1 Timothy 6:8). A major obstacle for the spiritual formation of Chinese immigrant Christians is the desire to possess an overabundance of material things. It is perplexing to see that although they know they should be content, they are not. Therefore, they always pursue more: more money, bigger houses and fancier cars. There are two main reasons for pursuing wealth: firstly, they are worried about the future. What if they get laid off? What if they get sick? “Because we lack a divine Center, our need for security has led us into an insane attachment to things” (Foster 1978, 80). Secondly, they care too much about “losing face,” which is disgraceful in English, a very important concept for the Chinese. When one loses face, they have lost their respect in the eyes of others. Once, a sister advised me that I should not drive a rusted car to visitations. Her concern was that owning a rusted car was a poor witness for Christ or, in other words, it would cause a loss of Christ’s face.

To help believers to practice the discipline of simplicity, a church should have sound biblical teaching and small groups. Firstly, biblical teachings about simplicity must be repeatedly emphasized. Referring to the words of Jesus in Matthew 6:25-33, Foster explains that the central purpose of the discipline of simplicity is to seek the kingdom of God and His righteousness first—and then everything necessary will follow in its proper order (Foster 1978, 75). Simplicity

can be interpreted as the desire for the kingdom of God and His righteousness. If we desire God and put Him first in our life, we will not pursue material things anymore.

In this day, the prosperity gospel, which teaches that faith will guarantee good health and wealth, is popular. Some TV preachers ask for donations to their ministries with the promise that those who give will receive more blessings from God. This teaching is contrary to what the Bible teaches. We offer money to God for who He is in relation to who we are. If we donate to God in order to get more, are we not bribing the Giver?

Secondly, a small group is a good place to learn to practice simplicity. Many immigrant Christians desire to live a simple life yet fail due to temptations. They know that simplicity is the will of God, but they find that it is too hard to live simply. I have the same struggle sometimes. Within a small group, believers can encourage each other in the pursuit of simplicity. The Apostle Paul urges Thessalonian Christians to “encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing” (1 Thessalonians 5:11). Christians need encouragement to live the simple life. We do not intend to push or force people to practice simplicity. In a small group, we can help those who have a desire to live simply to do so by words, prayer and even our testimony.

Simplicity is a great blessing to our spiritual formation. Borthwick writes of some benefits of simplicity including spiritual, physical, relational, economical and global benefits. Regarding the spiritual benefits, Borthwick writes:

When I simplify my life, I sharpen the focus on my relationship with God. Slowing down strengthens my prayer life, allows me to absorb Scripture, and opens my ears to hear God's voice... Simplifying corrects our focus: we put Jesus Christ at the center of our lives and an appropriate lifestyle flows from this spiritual renewal" (Borthwick 1982, 178–180).

For Chinese immigrant Christians who desire to be like Christ, simplicity is not a choice but a necessity. It is impossible for a material lover to grow like Jesus for "you cannot serve both God and Money" (Matthew 6:24).

### *God-centered prayer*

When asked how to pray, Jesus Christ taught His disciples the Lord's Prayer, a prayer centered on the person of God the Father. In addition, Jesus' personal prayer is centered on the Father. Apostle Paul was a prayerful person and he prayed exactly the way Jesus taught His disciples on prayer (Matthew 6:9-13): God centered. Paul's prayer for the Philippians was for their purity and blamelessness in the Lord and fruit of righteousness to the glory and praise of God (Philippians 1:9-11); his prayer for the Ephesians was that they would know God better (Ephesians 1:16-23) and be rooted and established in love (Ephesians 3:14-19); his prayer for the Colossians was that they would know the will of God and live a life worthy of the Lord, pleasing him in every way (Colossians 1:9-12).

Many Chinese immigrant Christians are not accustomed to God-centered prayer. Often, they pray for personal issues including employment, health and their children. In small group prayer time, it is often heard that people say, "I am fine and I don't have any need for prayer."

There is no issue with praying for oneself. However, if prayers are always self-centered, one will never be on the path of spiritual formation. On the first day

of the Chinese New Year, many people go to the Buddhist temple to pray for protection, wealth and success. Jesus denounces these types of prayers when he teaches, “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).

Christians should learn God-centered prayer in order to be formed spiritually. It is difficult for a self-centered Christian to be formed or shaped to be more like Christ. It is a big project to be formed like Christ; one cannot passively wait to be formed. He or she has to be actively involved in this process through prayer. Foster describes the necessity of prayer for spiritual change:

Of all the Spiritual Disciplines, prayer is the most central because it ushers us into perpetual communion with the Father... Prayer is the central avenue God uses to transform us. If we are unwilling to change, we will abandon prayer as a noticeable characteristic of our lives. The closer we come to the heartbeat of God the more we see our need and the more we desire to be conformed to Christ (Foster 1978, 33).

To help Chinese immigrant Christians to learn God-centered prayer, biblical teachings on prayer must be preached repeatedly. At times, verses can be taken out of context to serve as justification for self-centered prayer. Some Christians have strong faith that God will answer their self-centered prayer. Their argument is that God promises that “whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours” (Mark 11:24). To prevent this from happening, the verses should be studied in the immediate context.

God-centered prayer is a discipline that takes much effort. To grow more like Christ, we have to learn to pray God-centered prayer. If we do not step out of the zone of self, we will not be transformed like Christ, no matter how many years we are in Christianity.

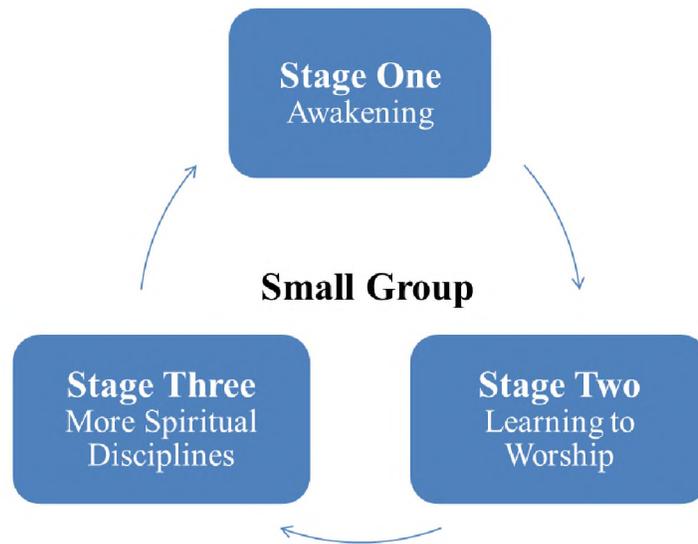
Whitney makes a great point that a child of God gradually learns to pray the way God pleases (Whitney 1991, 70). No one knows how to pray in a godly manner immediately after conversion. God-centered prayer is learnt. Whitney lists three ways to learn God-centered prayer. First, by meditating on Scripture. “After the input of a passage of Scripture, meditation allow us to take what God has said to us and think deeply on it, digest it, and then speak to God about it in meaningful prayer” (Whitney 1991, 72). In CGCT, we pray spontaneously. Although we use some biblical verses in our prayer sometimes, we do not pray by meditation on Scripture. Spontaneous prayer is not wrong, but the merit of praying by meditation on Scripture is that it helps us to learn God-centered prayer. In my research project, meditation on Scripture will be further discussed. Second, by praying with others. “There are always other believers who can teach us much by praying with them. But we pray with them to learn principles of prayer, not phrases for prayer...Praying regularly with others can be one of the most enriching adventures of your Christian life” (Whitney 1991, 77). A small group is a great place to learn to pray from others. Third, by reading about prayer. There are many books on prayer, and they are helpful resources we can use to learn to pray.

## Summary

Figure 2 illustrates the various stages of spiritual growth. Many people tend to grow spiritually from Stage One to Stage Two and, further, in Stage Three. In Stage One, people are awakened from a life experience. They then enter Stage Two, where they learn to worship God with the help of others (small group). People who have a desire to engage in more spiritual disciplines and to grow closer to God enter Stage Three. These three stages are sequential for immigrant Christians in CGCT. Although sometimes there is a spiritual downturn, which can be discerned through Ignatius' consolation and desolation, the relationship with God grows closer and closer in the long run.

This model has helped many new immigrant Christians to surmount the three hurdles. In our congregation, immigrant Christians are invited into small groups such as fellowships and home Bible study groups where they feel the authenticity of the love and the faithfulness of God from the Word of God, as well as from the testimonies of the group members. As a result, they are encouraged or emboldened to give God more time gradually. Once they have personally experienced God's love and faithfulness, most of them put God first in their agenda.

**Figure 2. The Diagram of Spiritual Growth**



**The Link to the *Lectio Divina* Project**

This model is designed for Chinese Christians of immigrant background, according to the classical models of spiritual formation and my observation of barriers to the spiritual growth of Chinese Christians of immigrant background. The third part of this portfolio focuses on *lectio divina*, one part of this model which was practiced by a group of eight participants for eight weeks to determine the potential for enabling people to hear God in the biblical texts. To surmount their hurdles, Chinese immigrant Christians need to have their hearts changed. One way to accomplish this is through hearing God, which results in a deeper relationship with God.

## CHAPTER 4

# HEARING GOD IN THE BIBLICAL TEXT THROUGH *LECTIO DIVINA*: AN APPROACH TO SPIRITUAL FORMATION FOR IMMIGRANT CHRISTIANS IN CHINESE GOSPEL CHURCH

### Introduction

God's Word is alive and powerful (Hebrews 4:12). However, my observation is that some Christians in my congregation do not experience the power of the Word of God, even though they read the Bible and attend Bible study groups regularly. In other words, they have biblical knowledge, but they cannot apply the Word of God. Although some Christians try their best to practice biblical teachings, they do so mainly out of a sense of religious obligation. For them, obeying the Word of God is a burden rather than a joy. XiaoFen Liu makes a similar observation in her church: "Many pious and faithful Christians struggle in sin, marriage, family, personal emotion and past hurt; many 'born-again' Christian leaders pray, do bible study, serve but live an unabundant life" (Liu, 2008).

The lack of life transformation has prompted some scholars to explore why biblical knowledge has little impact on one's spiritual formation. In recent

years, the Bible study methods used by evangelicals have been challenged as being informational rather than formational. The problem with the former method is that, “When approached primarily from an informational point of view, God is given little opportunity to speak” (Grant 1995, 120). Studzinski agrees that we must read the Bible in a deeper way so that we are “spiritually challenged and not just given information” (Studzinski 2009, 3). Simon Chan’s words are even more challenging: “spiritual reading [should be] done to affect the heart, not to gain information” (Chan 1998, 160).

*Lectio divina* is an ancient way of reading the Scripture used by the Church fathers. *Lectio divina* is a Latin phrase, which means “divine lesson” or “divine reading” (Wilhoit and Howard 2012, 16-17). Howard’s study shows that *lectio divina* is a discipline in the evangelical tradition:

A tracing of evangelical use of Scripture from its Reformation roots through the twentieth century (through Puritans, early Anglicans, Pietists, revivalists, Holiness supporters, Fundamentalists, and so on) suggests that a formative approach to the reading of Scripture bearing great similarity to what we call *lectio divina* today was a common, if not normal practice” (Howard 2012, 57).

One of the merits of *lectio divina* lies in its potential to “meet God in the text” (Mulholland 1985, 55). To determine whether *lectio divina* could help Chinese immigrant Christians in my congregation to hear the Word of God, or to “meet God in the text” as Mulholland says, a participatory action research project was executed. In this project, a small group of eight participants spent eight weeks doing *lectio divina* on specified biblical texts. Due to the relatively short period of this project, it was difficult to see concrete life transformation; therefore, the

subjective feelings of the participants were studied. In this project, *sacred experience* is defined as any subjective feelings such as closeness to God, a touched heart, and hearing God while doing *lectio divina*. The word *sacred* (in Chinese: 神圣的) to Chinese immigrants is used to identify the things related with God or gods. In this project, sacred experience (in Chinese: 神圣经历) is a supernatural experience. CGCT congregants do not use expressions such as hearing God, a touched heart or closeness to God unless they have certainty about such experiences, for fear that they may be considered weird or abnormal. Hearing God (in Chinese: 听见神) is a personal experience that involves God speaking through the Bible; a touched heart (in Chinese: 心被触摸) occurs when one's inner heart is touched by God; closeness to God (in Chinese: 离神近) is one's feeling closer to God.

The results of the research project have shown that all participants experienced a sacred experience while reading the Bible through *lectio divina*. Two participants expressed explicitly that *lectio divina* inspired them to pray in a God-centered manner, focusing on God's kingdom and His righteousness (Matthew 6:33). All expressed desire to adopt *lectio divina* as one of the methods of reading the Bible, with one participant vowing to give it priority. A promising sign observed in this project is that reading the Bible through *lectio divina* has the potential to touch people's hearts.

## Context

From October, 2007 to October, 2012, I worked in the downtown Mandarin congregation of CGCT. From October, 2012, I have been working with the Scarborough Mandarin congregation of CGCT, which consists of around 200 congregants. The majority of the congregants are new immigrants from China. In my nearly 10-year ministry among new immigrants, I have observed that despite having biblical knowledge, some Christians have never experienced the transforming power of the Word of God. They are unable to apply their knowledge. For example, they know the biblical teaching about treasures in heaven (Matthew 6:19), but they keep on storing up treasures on earth anyway. Some have told me frankly that they are spiritually weak. Once, a believer challenged me openly about practicing the Word of God. Her argument was that only Jesus Christ could put the Word of God into daily practice.

To help immigrant believers to grow spiritually, much effort has been made in CGC in prayer ministry and Word ministries such as pulpit preaching, Sunday school teaching, and small group Bible studies. Additionally, incentives have been adopted to encourage congregants to read the Bible. Although these efforts have not proven to be entirely fruitless, progress is far from what was expected. For example, it is hard for many to resist telling lies and forgive those who hurt them. Since hearing from God played a vital role in the transformation of my life, it seems reasonable to assume that it might be a critical factor in the transformation of other believers' lives. This project is designed to determine whether *lectio divina* can help participants to hear God in the biblical text.

Eight people (three male, five female) joined the small group for this project. Two participants (one male and one female) did not finish the last get-together session at church for reasons not clarified to me in advance. However, their partial data were taken into account in this project. The age range of these eight participants was from 40 to 70 (three participants in the range of 40 to 50 years old, three in the range of 50 to 60 years old, and two in the range of 60 to 70 years old), and their Christian ages in Christ were all over ten years. Two participants were seminary students in the M.Div. program at the CCIC School of Theology, three were seminary students at Trans World Radio (TWR) Seminary on the air (certificate), and one finished TWR seminary study in 2016. For the privacy of the participants, pseudonyms were assigned to all of them: Kevin, Nancy, Mary, Joseph, Ruth and Naomi. Two participants, Martha and David, did not complete the entire study.

To some degree, Chinese culture influenced the participants' views of *lectio divina*. One participant considered *lectio divina* a spiritual discipline of Buddhism before the start of the project because of the meditation component. This misconception is understandable for those of us who grew up heavily influenced by Buddhism, a religion which emphasizes meditation. In our mind, the image of a Buddhist is someone who sits meditating with legs crossed and eyes closed. Given the potential for cultural influences to affect the outcome of the study, it was crucial to clear any bias against *lectio divina*. After my presentation of the theological foundation of *lectio divina*, the participant's misunderstanding was resolved.

## Theological Foundation

The Scripture says, “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16-17). The Scripture is the Word of God, which He has given to form us like Christ so that we can do the good work He intends us to do. However, as discussed previously, many Christians are very little like Christ even though they read the Scripture and have plenty of biblical knowledge.

In the section on the stages of a small group in Chapter 3, approaches to the Bible were discussed and informational reading was considered to be one of the possible reasons for the non-Christlikeness of Christians. Formational reading by *lectio divina* was recommended as a tool to aid Chinese immigrant Christians in CGC in hearing God in the biblical text and to bring about Christlike transformation.

The key of *lectio divina* is that it helps people to be open to God. Benner remarks:

It is a way of opening ourselves to God so we might be born again and again in a continuing series of conversions that together constitute this grand process of transformation. This is precisely the gift that *lectio divina* offers us. It leads us to a way of understanding and practicing prayer that is vastly different from how most of us understand and practice it, because it leads us to opening ourselves to God so God can pray in and through us (Benner 2010, 13).

For over 10 years, I have practiced meditation on the biblical text in my own way, which is somewhat like *lectio divina*, and it has helped me to hear God

in the biblical text. Although there may be some hesitation to practice *lectio divina* in evangelical circles and particularly in Chinese evangelical churches, I intend to try my best to preach this method of Bible study so that more believers can benefit from it.

### **Biblical Foundation of *Lectio Divina***

“The Latin phrase *lectio divina* simply means ‘divine reading.’ The phrase referred both to texts that were read (synonymous to *sacra pagina*) and to the practice of reading itself” (Howard 2012, 57). There are four steps involved in *lectio divina*: *lectio*, *meditation*, *oratio*, and *contemplation*, which were explained in the section on *lectio divina* in Chapter 3.

There is a solid biblical foundation for practicing *lectio divina*. First, God commands Joshua, the successor to Moses, to meditate on the Holy Word: “Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful” (Joshua 1:8). Second, the psalmist indicates that meditation on the Word is the way to prosperity (Psalms 1:2-3). Third, God’s people are encouraged to meditate not only on the Word of God but also on the work of God and God Himself: “I will meditate on all your works and consider all your mighty deeds” (Psalms 77:12); “When I remember thee upon my bed, and meditate on thee in the night watches” (Psalms 63:6[KJV]).

God wanted the Israelites to receive His words as commands and have a right attitude toward them.

These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the door-frames of your houses and on your gates (Deuteronomy 6:6-9).

God's people should be immersed in His Word. God does not want His people to simply create a spiritual environment but to meditate on His Word.

King David considered God's Word more valuable than pure gold and sweeter than honey from the honeycomb: "They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the comb" (Psalms 19:10). It is reasonable to assume that this conviction concerning God's Word resulted from meditation, a spiritual discipline that has been compared to rumination. Probably King David ruminated over the Word of God and obtained firsthand experience of the preciousness of the Word so that he had confidence to share with others about the Word of God.

In the New Testament, the best example of meditation on the Word of God is Mary, who gave birth to our Lord Jesus. When the angel Gabriel greeted her, she was greatly troubled. However, she "wondered what kind of greeting this might be" (Luke 1:29). The Greek word *wonder* means *reason*, *debate*, or *consider*. After the Lord Jesus was born, shepherds who heard the angels' announcement of His birth visited Him and went on to spread the word concerning the good news. People were amazed at what the shepherds said, but Mary responded differently: "But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart" (Luke 2:19). Although the word *meditate* is not used in this context, it is clear that this was what the author meant to express. It is obvious that

Mary did not understand what she had heard. However, she did not become discouraged but meditated on the message. Her meditation probably became such a source of strength that she was able to endure witnessing the horrible pain her son Jesus experienced as He was tortured brutally and nailed on the cross, even though she was deeply saddened as Simon prophesied, "...And a sword will pierce your own soul too" (Luke 2:35).

Another essential component of *lectio divina* is prayer. Wilhoit and Howard write that prayer is intimately connected with every moment of the devotional reading of Scripture—before, during and after—and indeed is the “house” *lectio divina* inhabits (Wilhoit and Howard 2012, 93), signifying the indispensability of prayer in *lectio divina*. The merit of prayer, within the context of *lectio divina*, lies in its concentration on the biblical text which is the focus of our meditation. Sometimes, we ask God “to guide us regarding how to obey what we hear in the text and how to follow where we are led by the text” (Wilhoit and Howard 2012, 98) and sometimes, we ask God to help us “to give voice to what we hear, what we need to speak, what is going on in the space-in-between of our relationship with God” (Wilhoit and Howard 2012, 100-101). What can be expected is that practicing *lectio divina* will help Christians to learn the prayer that Jesus Christ commands, “seek first his kingdom and his righteousness” (Matthew 6:33). For some Chinese immigrant Christians in CGCT, this is critically important because they misunderstand prayer as asking Jesus to solve their problems.

Both the Old and New Testaments emphasize the importance of prayer in understanding the Word of God. Jesus says, “Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened” (Matthew 7:7-8). Daniel prayed for understanding of the vision he had received, and God sent an angel to answer his prayer: “Now I have come to explain to you what will happen to your people in the future, for the vision concerns a time yet to come” (Daniel 10:14 ). Apostle Peter asked Jesus for the meaning of the parable of the weeds, and he received it. More than a mere Bible study technique, *lectio divina* provides or creates an environment for people to meditate on the Word of God and seek understanding.

Contemplation, the last component of *lectio divina*, is a concern for some believers as it is thought that contemplation may lead people astray. This is due to the concerns about Buddhism discussed previously in *context*. However, the center of Christian contemplation is God. Wilhoit and Howard depict contemplation as a resting in God and an enjoyment of the pleasure of His company (Wilhoit and Howard 2012, 114). Harpur writes that contemplation extends beyond the use of thought, words and reflections to a point where the contemplative reaches a stage of simple, loving attention on God (Harpur 2005, 5).

Jesus was a contemplative and the best teacher of contemplation (Waranauskas, 2017). Jesus Christ often sought silence and solitude in order to be alone with the Father God. “Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed”

(Mark 1:35). After feeding the five thousand, the crowd intended to force Jesus to be king. Facing the temptation and pressure, the Bible says that Jesus “withdrew again to a mountain by himself” (John 6:15). Contemplation on God the Father helped Jesus to focus on the Father’s will despite temptations, distractions and vicious attacks.

All in all, *lectio divina* is biblical. It has blessed many people of God in the history of the Church. Research indicates that *lectio divina*, as a particular devotional practice, has been practiced by countless evangelicals including Reformers, Puritans, Pietists, revivalists, etc.(Howard 2012, 65).

### **Spiritual Formation by the Word of God**

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

The Word of God is intended by God to transform believers’ lives, and many examples of lives changed by the Word of God are recorded in the Bible and in Church history. One of the Old Testament examples is Josiah, a king of Judah (641–609 BC), who instituted major reforms and brought spiritual revival to Judah. He purged the temple in Jerusalem by removing the instruments and emblems of the worship of Baal and "the host of heaven," introduced by Manasseh, his grandfather. He then destroyed the corrupt local sanctuaries, or High Places, from Beer-sheba in the south to Beth-el and the cities of Samaria in the north. Josiah had living pagan priests executed and even had the bones of the dead priests of Bethel exhumed from their graves and burned on their altars,

which was viewed as an extreme act of desecration. What triggered Josiah's reforms? He was motivated by the words of the Book of the Law:

When the king heard the words of the Book of the Law, he tore his robes. He gave these orders to Hilkiah the priest, Ahikam son of Shaphan, Acbor son of Micaiah, Shaphan the secretary and Asaiah the king's attendant: 'Go and inquire of the Lord for me and for the people and for all Judah about what is written in this book that has been found. Great is the Lord's anger that burns against us because our fathers have not obeyed the words of this book; they have not acted in accordance with all that is written there concerning us' (2 King 22:11-13).

In the New Testament, the Apostle John was transformed dramatically.

John and his brother James were high-spirited, impetuous Galileans, whose zeal was undisciplined and sometimes misdirected (Douglas 1973, 640). This aspect of their character is shown by their response to unfriendly Samaritan villagers (Luke 9:52-54). However, from the first epistle of the Apostle John, we see a different John, gentle and full of God's love. He had been transformed dramatically. It is reasonable to say that the word of the Lord Jesus reshaped him. After washing the disciples' feet, Jesus had said to them, "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (John 13: 34-35). This command of Jesus grasped John's heart such that he repeated it five times in the first epistle of John (1 John 3:11, 3:23, 4:7, 4:11, 4:12) and emphasized it again in the second letter (2 John 5).

In the history of the Church, many saints experienced the shaping power of the Word of God. Saint Anthony and Saint Augustine are two well-known examples of men from very different backgrounds who were transformed by God's Word into dedicated followers of Jesus Christ. After hearing the Word of

God (Matthew 19:21), Anthony forsook all the fortunes inherited from his parents and started a new life in Christ:

In response to those words, Anthony disposed of his property and gave the proceeds to the poor, reserving only a portion for the care of his sister. But later he was moved by the words of Jesus in Matthew 6:34: “do not be anxious about tomorrow.” He then disposed even of the small reserve fund that he had kept for his sister, placed her under the care of the virgins of the church and left for the desert (Gonzalez 2010, 139-140).

Before his conversion to Christianity, Augustine led an immoral life. His life change began with his reading the Word of God:

As I was saying this and weeping in the bitter agony of my heart, suddenly I heard a voice from the nearby house chanting as if it might be a boy or a girl, saying and repeating over and over again “pick up and read, pick up and read,”...so I hurried back to the place where Alypius was sitting. There I had put down the book of the apostle when I got up. I seized it, opened it and in silence read the first passage on which my eyes lit: “Not in riots and drunken parties, not in eroticism and indecencies, not in strife and rivalry, but put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh in its lusts” (Rom 13:13-14) I neither wished nor needed to read further. At once, with the last words of this sentence, it was as if a light of relief from all anxiety flooded into my heart. All the shadows of doubt were dispelled (Chadwick 2008, 152–153).

Anthony and Augustine heard the Word of God in their hearts; as a result, their lives were miraculously transformed. The intention of my research is to help Chinese immigrant Christians to hear the Word of God in a similar manner, through *lectio divina*.

### **How *Lectio Divina* Helps Us to Be Formed by the Word of God**

I have a passion for my congregants to hear God through the Bible by *lectio divina* so that they not only gain head knowledge but experience the power of the Word of God to transform their lives like Anthony and Augustine.

Reading the Scripture using *lectio divina* requires that we listen attentively for what God intends to tell us. “Listen attentively” means that we desire to hear. “Different passage of Scripture with different people at different points in time lead to different appropriate responses. When you have savored and prayed over a passage of Scripture, often you find that connections naturally arise” (Wilhoit and Howard 2012, 129).

As we hear from the text what God wishes to tell us, we are in the process of being formed spiritually. Kim Harms shares her experience while journeying through Scripture by *lectio divina*:

I can't say my first *lectio divina* experience “fixed” my sin issues. It actually made me more acutely aware of the ugliness of my sin. But I can say with absolute confidence that God met me at that coffee shop.

When we step out in obedience to grow closer to Christ, even if it's in something unnatural for us like *lectio divina*, he is faithful to show up. I don't receive jaw-dropping personal revelations every time I practice *lectio divina*. But God has honored my commitment to seek him. If we make a discipline like *lectio divina* a part of our regular routine, we open up opportunities to learn and to hear from him in ways that we otherwise would not (Harms, 2013).

As a pastor, I pray that God gives me wisdom to share with others this ancient way of Bible study, *lectio divina*, so that they, too, can hear God through the biblical text and may be formed spiritually by His Word.

### **Historical and Literature Foundation**

In modern Chinese church history, there are many people who have heard God and experienced life transformation. Two well-known examples would be Watchman Nee and John Song, the great Christian leaders God gave Chinese churches in the 20<sup>th</sup> century:

At the age of twenty one, Watchman Nee fell in love with a beautiful girl Miss Chang. However, Nee had a bitter struggle in his heart for Miss Chang was pursuing worldly things such as stylish clothes and did not love the Lord the way Nee did. After reading Psalms 73:25, “Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you.” Nee was strongly convicted by the Holy Spirit that he had to give up Miss Chang. Although it was painful to turn away from her, Nee gave his whole heart to the work of the gospel anyway. (Kinnear 1973, 52-53)

Dr. John Song was the great evangelist God gave to Chinese churches in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and God used him mightily in preaching the gospel. Many were converted and experienced the infilling of the Holy Spirit, as described in the Book of Acts. In his biography of Song, Lyall writes:

In every place there were deeply moving scenes as the Holy Spirit convicted men and women of sin. There were much reconciliation between old enemies and apologies were made publicly for wrongs done. A new spirit of love and unity came into being in place of the dissension and hostility which had been paralyzing the church life in many a congregation (Lyall 1961, 151).

Even today, many Christians are encouraged by Song’s story. Personally, I consider him as my mentor, and I have been influenced in many ways by his example.

Contemporary literature highlights the importance of hearing God in the transformation of lives or spiritual formation. For example, Leanne Payne writes that the Bible is “the most important way of knowing and hearing God” (Payne 1994, 178). Bartow further states that the Word of God is “not a dead letter” and “not reason alone” but “face to face, oral-aural situated, and suasory discourse” (Bartow 1997, 3). Nevertheless, Willard and Johnson disclose that some believers, even the most faithful adherents of the church, have difficulty hearing God

(Willard and Johnson 2012, 17). My congregation, for example, does not talk about hearing God but instead emphasizes reading the Bible over and over again and having a good command of biblical teachings. It is helpful to have rich knowledge of the Bible so that we will not be deceived by wrong teachings. However, what is worrying is that some Christians cannot apply their knowledge in daily life.

Payne ascribes this disconnect to the schism of head and heart, referring to the phenomenon as the “separation between reason and faith, that which is behind the elevation of the rational faculty and the denigration and even denial of the intuitive, feeling mind” (Payne 1995, 158). In essence, the schism of head and heart has much similarity to the two different approaches to the Scripture discussed previously: informational and formational.

God’s people must have rich biblical information so that we can teach others about the Word of God. But what is even more critical is our ability to hear the Word of God with spiritual ears and put it into daily practice through endurance, giving, and evangelism, among other disciplines, so that we will experience the power of the Word of God and be formed into the likeness of Christ. Only Christlike Christians can present Christ to non-believers for them to see and feel. The intention of this project is to help participants to hear God in the biblical text through *lectio divina*.

## The Difference between Christian and Buddhist Meditation

As mentioned above in the Content section, some Chinese Christians have concerns over meditation, which is one component of *lectio divina*. It is true that there are some similarities between Christian and Buddhist meditation, for example, in physical aspects. However, Christian meditation is fundamentally different from Buddhist meditation in essence. Table 1 shows the differences in five aspects, based on information from Scripture and a few other sources.

**Table 1. Comparison Of Meditation Between Buddhism And Christianity**

	<b>Christianity</b>	<b>Buddhism</b>
<b>Focusing Object</b>	Word or works of God	One thing
<b>Process</b>	rumination	from one thing to nothing
<b>Hearing</b>	voice of God	inner sound
<b>Mediator</b>	Indwelt with the Spirit	Not applicable
<b>Purpose</b>	to know and love God	enlightenment or self-improvement

First, the object of focus is different. Christians meditate on the Word of God (Psalms 1:2-3), the works of God (Psalms 77:12) or God (Psalms 63:6), while Buddhists concentrate on *one thing* (either a sacred name, a mystic mantra, the cosmic syllable OM, or Amen, OM Shanti, Hari OM, etc., or a form of any of these) (Satchidananda 2011, 2-4). Second, the process is different. Christians use the analogy of rumination to describe their meditation on the Word of God, “taking in Scripture by reading and memorizing it, and then bringing it back up to chew it again and again until it could be digested and fully used” (Wilhoit and Howard 2012, 79). Buddhist meditation is a process from one thing to nothing

(emptiness). “From many things, get into one thing; and that one thing will become nothing (no-thing)” (Satchidananda 2011, 3). Third, Christians seek to hear the voice of God in meditation (Virkler and Virkler 2014, 91-92). In contrast, Buddhists tend to hear inner sounds (Amaro 2012). Fourth, Christians are indwelt with the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:9) and Buddhists are not. The indwelling Spirit helps the Christian meditator to discern the voice heard, for Jesus says, “But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you” (John 14:26). Fifth, the purpose of meditation is different. Christians meditate on the Word of God in order “to know and love God, to grow in the grace and knowledge of God, and to become more like Christ” (Doherty 2014, 11), whereas Buddhists meditate for the purpose of reaching enlightenment or a complete abandonment of the conceptualizing inclinations of the mind (Chon 2011, 58-60).

Some people have concerns or fears about the source of voices that may be heard during meditation (Willard and Johnson 2012, 217). It is true that the voice we hear may not be the voice of God but rather our own voice or even that of the devil. The Proverbs of Solomon emphasize the importance of discerning: “A simple man believes anything, but a prudent man gives thought to his steps” (Proverbs 14:15). One of Ignatius’ contributions in spirituality is discernment by consolation and desolation, which is discussed in the models of spiritual formation in Chapter 3. Besides, other means of discernment are put forth by contemporary believers. Willard suggests examining the source in light of the three factors of quality, spirit and content (Willard and Johnson 2012, 227):

The quality of God's voice is more a matter of the weight or impact an impression makes on our consciousness...Our innermost being seems to say *Yes, this is true and right*...We also sense inwardly the immediate power of God's voice...The voice of God speaking in our souls also bears within itself a characteristic spirit. It is a spirit of exalted peacefulness and confidence of joy, of sweet reasonableness and of goodwill. His voice is not the voice of a bully. It will not run over you and your will... The content of a word that is truly from God will always conform to and be consistent with the truths about God's nature and kingdom that are made clear in the Bible. Any content or claim that does not conform to biblical content is not a word from God (Willard and Johnson 2012, 228-232).

Edgett discerns the voice by asking questions: "Does the word line up with the Word of God? Does it reflect the character of God? Will the word bring forth good fruit? Is it given in love?" (Edgett 2016, 81).

As members of the Christian faith community, we may have to ask others to help us discern. Edgett encourages Christians to confirm with godly, mature believers that they are hearing correctly (Edgett 2016, 80). Standish further emphasizes the instrumental role of the small group in the discernment process (Standish 2014, 201).

It is our responsibility to be cautious concerning the voices we hear and to properly discern the source. At the same time, we have to trust that the indwelling Spirit will guide us to hear His voice according to John 14:13. Meditation should never be labeled as a dangerous practice or as personal effort but viewed as a channel for hearing God. When He sees our desire, He will reveal to us His will, according to Matthew 7:7-8.

## **Methodology and Methods**

This section explains in detail the methodology and methods which were employed in this project. The methodological approach for this project was that of participatory action research. Three tools were used for the collection of the data.

### **Field**

An hour-long seminar on *lectio divina* was delivered to the participants at the church to inform them concerning the process. The slides can be found in Appendix 6. Afterward, the participants engaged in *lectio divina* on site as a group, focusing on the biblical passage of Matthew 5:43-48, followed by group sharing. In the subsequent eight weeks, they did *lectio divina* individually for seven weeks at home, each week focusing on specific biblical passages: Matthew 8:23-27, Matthew 24:36-44, Matthew 26:69-75, John 4:27-38, John 8:1-12, John 10:11-15, John 12:1-11. The original plan to get together in the fourth week could not be carried out due to a busy church schedule and was cancelled. Since most of the participants were also involved in either choir or fellowships and their weekends were fully occupied for November and December, I felt that I had no choice but to cancel the fourth-week get together in order to lessen their burden. On the last day, six of the eight participants gathered in a small group to do *lectio divina* together on the biblical text of John 21:15-19, followed by group sharing. The other two participants did not attend and gave no prior notice of their absence. All participants were congregants of the Mandarin congregation I am pastoring.

### **Scope**

This project was executed to explore whether or not the practice of *lectio divina* enables participants to hear God through the Bible. Since the length of the project was only eight weeks, it was not reasonable to expect major transformation in the participants' lives. Therefore, the scope of the project was limited to whether *lectio divina* had an effect on helping the participants to hear God while studying the biblical text.

Except for the first and last sessions of *lectio divina* at the church, the participants were instructed to do *lectio divina* individually every week, at a time best suiting their own schedule, as most were heavily involved in the Christmas ministry season and some also had busy jobs. If they had been instructed to take part in *lectio divina* collectively at a fixed time every week, my concern was that they might have been burdened, which would have defeated the purpose of this project. My assumption may have been wrong, but in order to avoid the potential risk, the decision was made to hold only two get-together sessions at the church.

### **Methodology and Methods**

The chosen methodology for this research study is participatory action research, which is defined as “a collaborative approach to inquiry or investigation that provides people with the means to take systematic action to resolve specific problems” (Stringer 2014, 8). Patton lists the major characteristics or principles of participatory action research:

Participants in the process own the inquiry. They are involved authentically in making major focus and design decision. They draw and apply conclusion. Participation is real, not token. Participants work

together as a group and the inquiry facilitator supports group cohesion and collective inquiry. All aspects of the inquiry, from research focus to data analysis, are undertaken in ways that are understandable and meaningful to participants (Patton 2002, 185).

In this project, I, the researcher, designed the protocol of doing *lectio divina* (see Appendix Five). I orally asked the participants to give feedback about the protocol after the first session of *lectio divina*, and they all accepted the protocol. An individual who was not one of the participants was trained as an assistant to take field notes during the group sharing. I analyzed and interpreted the collected data, and the interpretation was emailed to all the participants to solicit their input. One oral suggestion received was the possibility to include the data of the middle seven sessions. The data collected from these sessions were not included in the analysis. My concern was that these data might not be appropriate for comparison, for the lengths of individual sessions might vary. No other suggestions were received. The authority issue of my pastoral role was minimized as described in the section on ethics.

Three tools were used to collect data: questionnaires, focus groups and participant observation (field notes). The data were all collected in Chinese, analyzed in Chinese and presented in English for the sake of this paper. The advantage of using three tools for data collection (triangulation) is that this overcomes the limitation of any single approach and ensures the reliability of the data, as it allows for cross-checking of the findings. As Sensing states, triangulation “provides breadth and depth to your analysis and increases the trustworthiness of your research” (Sensing 2011, 72).

I developed two questionnaires with open-ended questions. The merit of a questionnaire with open-ended questions is that it “creates a relaxed, conversational atmosphere necessary for eliciting narratives” (Sensing 2011, 91). Questionnaire One (Appendix Three) was distributed to the participants before the intervention (the first session of *lectio divina*) and collected within two weeks. After the intervention (the ninth session of *lectio divina*), Questionnaire Two (see Appendix Four) was distributed and returned within two weeks to me. The aim of these two questionnaires was to determine if the participants had had any sacred experiences.

Group sharing sessions were conducted after the first and the ninth sessions of *lectio divina* at the church and were recorded with a cellphone (Samsung Galaxy V) by the assistant. The recorded audio data was immediately downloaded into a password-locked laptop computer and transcribed (in Chinese) by the assistant later on. The atmosphere of the group sharing sessions was very harmonious because everyone was actively involved and there were no silent periods. Sensing affirms the value of the group interview:

Through group interaction, data and insights are generated that are related to a particular theme imposed by a researcher and enriched by the group’s interactive discussion. The synergy of the group will often provide richer data than if each person in the group had been interviewed separately. (Sensing 2011, 120)

During the group sharing sessions, the assistant took field notes as she had been trained, including not only the participants’ comments, but also any expressions of emotion, including tone, facial expressions, gestures, etc. Field notes as observation data were collected because they are complimentary to

interview data “ for it tells ‘the characteristics of the participants, their styles of interaction with one other, the content and manner of their conversation, as well as more subtle factors, such as silences, body language, and tone of voice,’ which could not be found otherwise” (Sensing 2011, 76).

The data was analyzed through coding. The merit of coding data is that the codes given “attribute interpreted meaning to each individual datum for later purposes of pattern detection, categorization, assertion or proposition development, theory building, and other analytic processes” (Saldaña 2016, 4).

The data for coding are two transcripts of group sharing, two sets of field notes and two sets of questionnaires for each participant. As the project facilitator, I read the data over and over to familiarize myself with the information and to look for repetition. Most codes were in vivo codes which are “taken directly from what the participant himself says” (Saldaña 2016, 100). Three in vivo codes (hearing God, a touched heart, and closeness to God) were categorized into sacred experience because these three codes are all related with God (hearing God, heart touched by God, and closeness to God). Details of the in vivo codes are shown in Table 2. Comparison was made between pre- and post-intervention of *lectio divina* on the codes. For example, Naomi felt that bible reading was boring (one of the codes) in the regular way, but the boredom was gone while she approached the Bible by doing *lectio divina*.

Table 3 shows the details of the work carried out before, during and after the research project, which include the preparatory work, execution of this project, data collection and interpretation.

**Table 2: Coding Information**

<b>In Vivo Codes</b>	<b>Category</b>
Hearing God	Sacred Experience
A touched heart	
Closeness to God	
Fast reading	
Informational	
Boring	
Enjoyable	
Change in prayer's content	
A lively method	
Adopting it	

Table 3 shows the details of the work carried out before, during and after the research project, which include the preparatory work, execution of this project, data collection and interpretation.

**Table 3: Phases and Timetable**

Phase	Action	Time Frame	Who	How
<b>Developing the Innovation</b>	Submit REB application	Sept. 1	Seng	Written report
	Submit final action research proposal	By Sept. 1	Seng	Written report
	Obtain signed informed consent	By Sept. 11	Seng and participants	Seng distributed letters to be signed by participants and returned
<b>Gathering Pre-Intervention Data</b>	Hand out questionnaire one	Sept. 11	Seng	Seng passed out at church
	Fill out and return questionnaire one	Sept. 18	Participants	Participants filled out and returned directly to Seng
<b>Other Pre-Intervention work</b>	Train assistant	Oct. 1	Seng and assistant	Seng trained assistant
	Give seminar on <i>lectio divina</i>	Oct.15:Saturday	Seng and participants	Seng at church
<b>Intervention</b>	Session 1	Oct.15:Saturday	Seng and all participants	Assistants took notes and the sharing was recorded at church
	Session 2-8	Oct.17-22, 24-29, 31-Nov.5, Nov. 7-12, 14-19, 21-26, Nov.28-Dec.3	participants	Participants did individually at home
	Session 9	Dec.10: Saturday	Seng and all participants	Assistants took notes and the sharing was recorded at church
Gathering Post-Intervention Data	Fill out and return questionnaire two	Between Dec. 11 and Jan. 15	All participants	Participants filled out and return directly to Seng
<b>Analysis</b>	Code data for questionnaire one and session 1 sharing	By Oct. 22	Seng	Seng coded the data
	Code data for questionnaire two and session ten sharing	By Jan. 30	Seng	Seng coded the data
	Review coded data	Feb1	Seng	Seng reviewed coded data
	Interpret coded data	Feb 15	Seng	Discern meaning of data
	Draft written report for participants to review	March 18	Seng and participants	Seng wrote and participants reviewed the report
<b>Interpretation</b>	Final written report	April 30	Seng	Written report
<b>Reporting</b>	Submit report	April 6	Seng	Written report

## **Ethics in Ministry-based Research**

A pastor-researcher has the potential to influence the participants of the project, especially if they belong to the congregation overseen by the pastor. To mitigate this potential, three actions were taken. First, all participants were not handpicked by me, the researcher. It was their own decision to participate in the project. They read the information letter for the project and signed the Chinese version of the research study consent form. Second, they were given the privilege to quit the project anytime, for whatever reason. Given the option to discontinue their involvement at will, two participants were absent without notice for the ninth session. Afterwards, they apologized for missing the session due to other commitments. Although they did not finish the whole process, their data was still used in the final analysis. Third, the data was shared with the participants to ensure that the findings were not manipulated.

Conflict sometimes occurred between the two roles of pastor and researcher. In such times, I gave priority to my ministry. I prioritized my pastoral role because I was called by God and the church to be a pastor, and the only purpose of my DMin. study is to equip me to be a skilled and faithful pastor. Sensing shares the same opinion: “D. Min. students are pastorally connected to the participants in their projects. At times, these roles are mixed and confused. Your first priority is always to your ministry and to the service of the people in your parish” (Sensing 2011, 42).

Data from all sources, including group interviews, have been safely stored and have not been released to a third party without the permission of the participants. My congregation board approved my project, and the Tyndale Research Ethics Board approved my DMin. research proposal on September 25, 2016.

### **Outcomes, Findings and Interpretation**

The collected data include two questionnaires, two group sharing sessions (transcripts) and two sets of field notes taken during the two sharing sessions. The data were coded and in vivo codes were listed in Table 2. Three in vivo codes (hearing God, a touched heart and closeness to God) were categorized as sacred experience because they were all considered subjective feelings of the participants. Common themes are observed in the data gathered using the three tools of data collection (questionnaires, focus group sharing sessions and field notes). In general, participants had a positive response to *lectio divina*.

### **Questionnaires**

The purpose of the pre- and post-intervention questionnaires was to distinguish *lectio divina* from non-*lectio divina* Bible reading. Martha submitted the first questionnaire but not the second one. David did not submit either questionnaire. Tables 4 and 5 indicate a clear distinction between the two Bible reading methods.

The first difference was the speed of Bible reading. Five participants reported that they were accustomed to reading the Bible quickly before this project. Ruth said that she used to read the Bible as she would read a novel, and Martha used to read fast so that she could finish church reading requirements. Nobody mentioned their reading speed with *lectio divina* for the obvious reason that *lectio divina* requires slow reading.

**Table 4: The Features Of Bible Reading Before Intervention According To Questionnaire One**

Features	Kevin	Nancy	Mary	Joseph	Ruth	Naomi	Martha
<b>Fast Reading</b>	Yes	NS	NS	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>Informational</b>	Yes	NS	Yes	Yes	NS	Yes	NS
<b>Sacred Experience</b>	NS	Yes	NS	Yes	Yes	NS	Yes
<b>Boring</b>	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	Yes	Yes
<b>Enjoyable</b>	NS	Yes	NS	Yes	NS	NS	NS

**NS: not mentioned in the data**

The second difference was the purpose for reading. Four participants clearly indicated that they used to read for biblical information before this project. Joseph shared his motive for fast reading: “to have good command of the Bible helps me to understand sermons and religious materials.” Interestingly, none of the participants mentioned anything about reading for information while doing *lectio divina*.

The third difference was that only four participants had had a sacred experience (defined in the introduction of Chapter 4) while Bible reading prior to this project. However, *lectio divina* enabled all participants to have a sacred experience in Bible reading. It was observed that this experience strongly influenced the participants’ attitudes toward Bible reading. Two participants had

enjoyed Bible reading before this project. However, the number of participants who enjoyed Bible reading doubled after using the *lectio divina* method. Naomi felt that the manner in which she used to read the Bible was uninspiring; as a Christian, she read merely out of a sense of obligation. However, *lectio divina* enabled her to enjoy Bible reading. Martha handed in only the first questionnaire on which she indicated that, prior to this project, she had been bored with Old Testament reading and was occasionally touched while reading the epistles of the New Testament, meaning that she had had a sacred experience according to Table 2.

**Table 5: The Features Of Bible Reading Using *Lectio Divina* According To Questionnaire Two**

<b>Features</b>	<b>Kevin</b>	<b>Nancy</b>	<b>Mary</b>	<b>Joseph</b>	<b>Ruth</b>	<b>Naomi</b>
<b>Informational</b>	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS
<b>Sacred Experience</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Ye
<b>Boring</b>	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS
<b>Enjoyable</b>	NS	NS	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

NS: not mentioned in the data

### **Focus Group Sharing**

The focus group met twice. As shown in Table 3, they met for Sessions 1 and 9. After doing *lectio divina* together as a group, they shared on reading the Bible with *lectio divina*. Tables 6 and 7 present the data collected during the first and second focus group sharing sessions. Martha and David attended the first group sharing session but not the second one (see Ethics section).

In the first sharing session (Table 6), six participants (Kevin, Nancy, Mary, Joseph, Martha and David) used phrases such as “I heard God say to me” or “my heart was touched.” Therefore, they had a sacred experience according to the

definition in the introduction. Two (Ruth and Naomi) did not report any sacred experience, but both reported that *lectio divina* helped them to experience a shift in prayer from self-centeredness to God-centeredness. Naomi said, “I am a prayerful person. However, my prayer was full of self-centered requests. I never asked God what He wanted me to do.”

**Table 6: Sharing After The First Session Of *Lectio Divina***

Response to <i>Lectio divina</i>		Kevin	Nancy	Mary	Joseph	Ruth	Naomi	Martha	David
Sacred experience	Hearing God	Yes	Yes	NS	Yes	NS	NS	Yes	NS
	A touched heart	Yes	NS	Yes	NS	NS	NS	NS	Yes
	Closeness to God	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS
Change in prayer's content		NS	NS	NS	NS	Yes	Yes	NS	NS

**NS: not mentioned in the data**

**Table 7: Sharing After Nine Session Of *Lectio Divina***

Response to <i>Lectio divina</i>		Kevin	Nancy	Mary	Joseph	Ruth	Naomi
Sacred experience	Hearing God	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
	A touched heart	Yes	Yes	NS	Yes	Yes	Yes
	Closeness to God	NS	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
A lively method		NS	NS	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Adopting it		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

**NS: not mentioned in the data**

Six participants attended the second sharing session, and two (Martha and David) were absent. After nine sessions of *lectio divina*, the participants were more familiar with *lectio divina*. In comparison with the first sharing session, they had more positive thoughts on *lectio divina*. Four participants viewed *lectio divina* as a method which makes the Word of God come alive. Although two did not clarify in this regard, all participants indicated their determination to adopt *lectio*

*divina* in reading the Bible; and Naomi, the participant who had found reading dull and uninspiring, fell in love with the *lectio divina* method and vowed to practice it regularly.

All participants reported that *lectio divina* enabled them to hear God, unlike their former approach to Bible reading, which focused on analyzing the Word. Five expressed that they felt closeness to God while reading by *lectio*. One participant (Joseph) said that he felt as if he were entering the gospel story to stand before Jesus Christ, and two participants (Ruth and Naomi) felt that God spoke to them in person. Five of the participants felt that their hearts were touched by the Word of God, which is quite consistent with the response in Questionnaire Two.

### **Observational Data**

Consistent with data obtained from the questionnaires and the focus group sharing sessions, observational data (Table 8 and Table 9) demonstrated that *lectio divina* helped participants to have a sacred experience while reading biblical text. Except for two participants, the rest expressed excitement or other strong emotions in both sharing sessions. With regard to the biblical text for the first *lectio* session, Matthew 5:43-48, Mary commented that it touched her heart and revealed to her that she did not love her coworkers who were not nice to her. She felt guilty of being unloving and expressed her sorrow as she shared. Concerning the biblical text for the last *lectio* session, John 21:15-19, Ruth and Naomi wept. Ruth said that although she allowed the church to have a group Bible study at her home, her love for God was far less than it should be.

According to Ignatius’ model of discernment (desolation and consolation), Ruth’s expressed strong emotion indicates that she was in spiritual consolation because she moved to God. As Susan Weinschenk, a behavioral psychologist states, “Your hand gestures are speaking for you” (Weinschenk 2012). In both sharing sessions, Joseph openly displayed his excitement, speaking loudly and quickly, with enthusiastic hand gestures. His words and gestures were outward expressions of his inner excitement. In the first sharing session, he said, “the practice of *lectio divina* helped me to taste the real flavor of the food (Bible).”

**Table 8: Field Notes In The First Sharing**

<b>Features</b>	<b>Kevin</b>	<b>Nancy</b>	<b>Mary</b>	<b>Joseph</b>	<b>Ruth</b>	<b>Naomi</b>	<b>Martha</b>	<b>David</b>
<b>Voice loudness</b>	Normal	Low	Normal	High	Normal	Normal	Normal	High
<b>Speed</b>	Normal	Normal	Normal	Fast	Normal	Normal	Normal	Normal
<b>Hand Gesture</b>	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	No
<b>Emotion</b>	No	No	Tearing	Excited	Excited	Excited	Excited	Excited

**Table 9: Field Notes In Second Sharing**

<b>Features</b>	<b>Kevin</b>	<b>Nancy</b>	<b>Mary</b>	<b>Joseph</b>	<b>Ruth</b>	<b>Naomi</b>
<b>Speed</b>	Normal	Normal	Normal	Fast	Normal	Normal
<b>Hand Gesture</b>	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>Emotion</b>	No	No	Excited	Excited	Tearing	Tearing

### **Interpretation**

The Scripture says, “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16-17). God gave us His Word to form us like Christ so that we can do the good work He intends us to do. However, in my experience, some Chinese immigrant Christians

fail to apply biblical teachings despite reading Scripture and having plenty of biblical knowledge. XiWei Luo has a similar observation (Luo, 2013).

In recent years, Bible reading methods have come into the focus of study. Mulholland's observation regarding the typical approach to Bible study is one with which many of us may tend to agree:

We have a deeply ingrained way of reading in which we are the masters of the material we read. We come to a text with our own agenda firmly in place, perhaps not always consciously but usually subconsciously.... Thus our general mode of reading is to perceive the text as an object "out there" over which we have control. We control our approach to the text; we control our interaction with the text; we control the impact of the text upon our lives (Mulholland 1985, 19).

The findings in this project demonstrate that, before using the *lectio divina* method, four participants were accustomed to reading the Bible for information. There is nothing wrong with reading for information. As a matter of fact, having a good command of biblical information or knowledge aids believers in their spiritual growth, for example, enabling them to discern heretical teachings and to equip themselves for apologetics. However, if believers focus on biblical information only, they may not deeply be touched by the Word of God in their heart. Payne stresses the importance of listening to God: "Listening to God is a vital part of the practice of the Presence... We are called to listen for the creative, healing Word, and to teach others so to do" (Payne 1996, 132).

The data gathered using the questionnaires, sharing sessions and observations indicate that *lectio divina* helped all participants in this project to have sacred experiences. Although the descriptions of their sacred experiences

vary, I noticed that there was some interaction between them and the biblical text. Joseph's comments and his over-excitement illustrate the effectiveness of *lectio divina* in enabling believers to interact with the biblical text. Naomi's dramatic change in her view of Bible reading also shows the helpfulness of *lectio divina* in experiencing the power of the Word of God. Before this project, Naomi had felt that Bible reading was boring, but she found that she enjoyed Bible reading with *lectio divina*. She even got emotional while sharing.

In the model and resources section, many examples in the Bible and church history have been included to show that hearing the Word of God is followed by the transformation of lives. In this project, life transformation is not the focus since the length of this study is too short. However, participants' sharing and outward behaviors indicate that *lectio divina* enabled them to have heart-felt interaction with the biblical text and not merely gain head knowledge.

In this project, all participants were accustomed to reading the Bible regularly, but not all of them had experienced hearing God through the Bible. Here is a quote from Naomi's first sharing: "I read the Bible a lot, but I feel empty in heart and no sense of satisfaction at all." The issue is that approaches to the biblical text tend to be information-oriented, as Mulholland points out: "we have been trained primarily to seek information when it comes to reading" (Mulholland 1985, 51). Kevin, a participant in this project, shared, "I used to read more than ten chapters of the Bible a day like a person rushing on with his or her journey." Ruth, another participant, had a similar story.

Reading more biblical text is not wrong. However, if we read too much a day, we may have little or no time to meditate on the biblical text. All participants reported that the slow reading pace of the *lectio divina* method, coupled with the practice of meditation, quiets them down before God, allowing them to interact with the biblical text. If we have no time to interact with the text, in reality we are not open to God at all, and the biblical text is just a text. One of the merits of *lectio divina* lies in its potential to help people's "minds and hearts open to God" (Foster 2005, 1). Once our minds and hearts are open to God, the biblical text is brought to life, and "God is speaking his words to us" (Foster 2005, 20).

This project does not focus on life transformation or behaviour changes due to its relatively short length. However, two participants, Ruth and Naomi, do show signs of change in prayer. They shared that *lectio divina* helps them to know what God-pleasing prayer is. Ruth said, "I am a prayerful person, but my prayer is always the pattern of self-centeredness. *Lectio divina* makes me realize that my prayer is not biblical at all. From now on, I will ask God what he wants me to do." Naomi confessed that her prayer was always self-centered too and that she was not in the habit of asking God "what He wants." Addressing *lectio divina* and prayer, Foster writes:

*Lectio divina* is a big help also in learning to pray for things, either in intercession or in supplication for oneself. This is because God himself teaches us in our reading and meditation the way he sees things; as we learn to see things from his point of view, we learn what he wants, and begin to get a sense of the big picture of his desires and purpose. In this

way he is able to teach us to want different things from before, to desire in a different way, according to his will. (Foster 2005, 75–76)

Four participants considered *lectio divina* a lively method for studying the biblical text. Joseph said, “*Lectio divina* is a lively method. I don’t have to read the original language Bible. I don’t have to analyze the tense of the verbs. It helps me to hear God through the Bible...it helps me to be a listener rather than a master.” Joseph explained why he used the word *lively* to describe *lectio divina*, “Doing *lectio divina*, I feel that I enter the biblical scene and hear Jesus speak to me”. Naomi, who used to read the Bible every day but found it tedious, shared that she fell in love with *lectio divina*: “Now I love meditating on the Word of God. Through meditation, the Word of God is imprinted in my heart. I will keep on doing *lectio*.” The other participants also indicated their determination to use *lectio divina* as at least one of the ways to approach Bible reading.

How did the practice of *lectio divina* inspire the participants to such an extent? First, *lectio divina* quiets the heart. Nancy, Mary and Ruth emphasize that *lectio divina* helps them to quiet down before God so that their hearts are not distracted and they can concentrate on the biblical text. Busyness often pushes people to read the Bible as an assignment and makes it hard for people to quiet down their hearts before God to listen attentively. Kevin, for example, set a goal of reading more than ten chapters of the Bible every day. He described that his busyness with reading was like running a race so that he did not have time to think about the Word of God. In my model of spiritual formation, one of the three hurdles for Chinese immigrant Christians to overcome is busyness. If they do not overcome busyness, not only will they have no time to read the Bible, but even if

they do, they will not be able to concentrate on the Word if their hearts are still busy like what happened to Kevin.

### **Outcomes**

Data from this project of a small group of participants has shown that *lectio divina* enabled all participants to interact with the biblical text. This interaction allowed participants to have sacred experiences which include a touched heart, hearing God, and closeness to God. Such sacred experiences were new to four of the eight participants. Their emotions could be an outward expression of their sacred experiences. All participants expressed their desire to adopt *lectio divina* as a Bible study method.

My expectation was that participants would familiarize themselves with *lectio divina* and learn to hear God through the biblical text, but I had no idea what the outcome would be. First, the length of this project was relatively short; second, all participants are seminary students and are familiar with the inductive method of Bible study; and third, my concern was that they might be uncomfortable with meditation, one component of *lectio divina* which was thought by some Chinese Christians to be linked with Buddhism or Falun Gong, the latter having been labeled a cult by the Chinese government. One participant did share his concern before the start of the project, leading me to consult with my professor about the possibility of negative data. In the end, it was encouraging that all participants had a positive response to *lectio divina*.

Many factors might be attributed to the positive data of this project. One factor is the participants' thirst for the Word of God. Kevin, one of the participants used to read more than 10 chapters of the Bible every day. The Bible says, "He who is full loathes honey, but to the hungry even what is bitter tastes sweet" (Proverbs 27:7). Another factor is the approach to the Bible as a humble listener, which is young Samuel's attitude toward the Word of God: "Speak, for your servant is listening" (1 Samuel 3:10). Joseph, one of the participants, said that he used to approach the Bible as a master, but *lectio divina* taught him to be a listener.

### **Further Research**

This research is a first step in the exploration of the functionality of *lectio divina* in helping immigrant Chinese Christians to hear God in the biblical text. There are parameters which require adjustment and areas that need more exploration in this research, as explained below.

#### **To Enlist More Participants of Different Backgrounds**

In this research, all of the participants' physiological ages are over 40 years old, and their Christian ages are all over 10 years. In addition, most of them (seven of the eight) have received theological education, which might be one of the factors in the positive data obtained. Therefore, more participants of different backgrounds (such as physiological age, Christian age and theological education) should be considered.

### **To Explore the Benefits and Difficulties of Practicing *Lectio Divina* in small group versus individually**

In this research, due to many limitations, seven sessions of *lectio divina* had to be practiced by participants alone at home and only two sessions were practiced in a small group at the church. Two separate studies are needed on the practice of *lectio divina*: one collectively in a small group setting and another individually, each for an equal period of time. The results of these two studies can be compared so that the benefits and challenges of small group and individual practice can be observed.

### **To Include Behavior/Hurdle Questions**

In this research, due to the short period of the project, the parameters studied were the subjective feelings and emotions of the participants. Although two participants vowed to change their prayer practice, this has not yet been followed up. More research is needed to explore the extent to which practicing *lectio divina* brings about changes in behavior and aids in overcoming the hurdles to spiritual formation, which is our pursuit.

### **To Discern the Voice of God from Other Voices**

To discern whether the voice heard is from God or other sources is of paramount importance for Christians. In classical models of spiritual formation in Chapter 3, Ignatius' discernment through consolation and desolation was discussed and has been shown to be helpful in discerning the voice of God in this project. Naomi, one of the eight participants, was in desolation before participating in *lectio* project because she felt bored reading the Bible. However,

she did not give up and continued to read daily, but only as a church assignment. *Lectio* helped her to be in consolation, for she now felt that reading the Bible was an enjoyable activity, and she had a corresponding change in her prayer from self-centered to God-centered prayer.

However, sometimes discernment is not as obvious as done in this research. “Ignatius became convinced that consolations did not always have their source in God but could be used by evil spirit against those who seek to follow after God” (Warner 2010, 151). Therefore, we have to look at the nature of emotions and make more effort and spend more time in discernment discussed in detailed in the section of desolation and consolation of chapter 3, which is critical in the spiritual formation of Chinese immigrant Christians.

### **Conclusion and Implications**

Helping congregants to hear God and grow spiritually is my desire. This research has found that *lectio divina* has a positive effect on hearing God in the biblical text. Although participants vary in the descriptions of their experience, the fact remains that *lectio divina* enabled them to hear God in the biblical text. Hearing God touched the participants’ hearts, stirring up their emotions, which some had never experienced before. Emotional expressions signify the start of life transformation. Two participants expressed their desire to change their prayer to God-centered prayer. My assumption is that in the long run, attitudes towards their hurdles will be transformed accordingly.

Before the execution of this project, my expectation was that some participants would respond positively and some negatively due to their different backgrounds. Some Chinese immigrant Christians view meditation, a component of *lectio divina*, as a discipline of Buddhism and Falun Gong, as mentioned above. And some have concerns about the concept of hearing God, fearing that what they hear may not be from God but their own heart or even the devil. Their concern is valid, for mistaking the voice of the devil for the voice of God will result in damage not only to our own spiritual growth but also to the growth of the church. However, this concern should not hinder people from meditating on the Word of God. When we meditate, we have to be cautious over what we hear and undertake serious discernment with a small group of Christians. Only by hearing God will we understand the will of God and do it.

This project was a great blessing for me personally. Although I had some previous interest in meditation on the Bible, I had never heard of *lectio divina*. Recently, I have experienced the blessings of hearing God through *lectio divina* in the preparation of sermons. From now on, more time will be devoted to *lectio divina*, especially in my sermon preparation, in addition to doing regular exegesis.

I will make every effort to teach congregants *lectio divina* so that they will learn to hear the living God in the biblical text. However, there are potential challenges. First, resistance is foreseeable among Chinese immigrant Christians due to reasons already discussed. According to the Bible, it is a natural thing for God's people to hear the voice of God. Jesus says clearly, "The watchman opens the gate for him and the sheep listen to his voice...his sheep follow him because

they know his voice. But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger's voice" (John 10:3-5). We have the potential to develop the ability to discern God's voice from the devil's. On the other hand, the Bible teaches how to discern false teachings. McLaughlin writes, "It is your responsibility to be accountable to God to study and search the Bible so you can discern truth and the lies of the devil" (McLaughlin 2016, 1).

Another challenge is busyness. As I stated in the model of spiritual formation, one of the three hurdles in the spiritual growth of Chinese immigrant Christians is busyness. Many Chinese immigrant Christians read the Bible and then turn to commentaries for quick answers. It is not wrong to check commentaries. However, in my experience, some Christians resort to commentaries because they do not have enough time to interact with the Bible and have no confidence in their ability to hear from God. This is very common in my congregation. As Naomi said, "I opened the Bible and then read many different commentaries to check many interpretations." Busyness leads Christians to take shortcuts.

Although there are obstacles to guiding others in the practice of *lectio divina*, I will make an effort to integrate *lectio divina* into my church Bible study ministry and prayer ministry. Many Chinese immigrant Christians come to prayer meetings, but their prayers are filled with self-centered requests. I feel the urgency to guide them to turn self-centered prayer into God-centered prayer; otherwise, it will be difficult for them to grow spiritually. From the book of Acts, it can be

clearly seen that Church renewal and revival starts with prayer. Southland Church in the city of Steinbach, Manitoba, for example, has been experiencing the power of prayer. They hold prayer meetings on Wednesday mornings and Friday nights, as well as the occasional prayer summit. Over 1,000 people attend each prayer meeting. Most importantly, however, is that they gather not just to utter self-centered requests to God, but to listen to God and then pray for each other, their church and their country (Southland Church, 2016).

Overcoming self-centered prayer is not easy. But once we hear God from the biblical text or, in other words, the biblical text comes alive, probably we will be changed like Watchman Nee, whose life-transforming experience was mentioned earlier. Our eyes will be shifted from self to God, and our prayers will be shifted from self-centeredness to God-centeredness. It will take some time, but we can be certain that we will be transformed, for the Word of God has power.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Three years ago, my strong desire to help my congregants to be formed like Christ drove me to Tyndale's Doctor of Ministry program to explore a practical way to assist them. Looking back on my three years of study, I give thanks to God for His grace and faithfulness in sustaining my exploration. At the end of this portfolio, I cannot say that I have found the perfect solution to support Chinese immigrant Christians in their spiritual formation. Nevertheless, I have come to conclude that hearing God and belonging to a small group might be helpful in the spiritual formation of Chinese immigrant Christians, and I have designed a model to reflect this conviction. In my own spiritual formation, hearing God and mature Christians (small group) have proven to be of paramount importance. In the *lectio* project, hearing God has been shown to have the potential to help Chinese immigrant Christians to grow spiritually. However, further research on hearing God and the role of the small group needs to be carried out.

#### **Hearing God and Mature Christians in My Spiritual Formation**

My autobiography shows that hearing God and the modeling of mature Christians, including small group leaders and pastors, have played important roles

in my spiritual formation. The experience of hearing God has helped me to realize God's absolute sovereignty in my life and the importance of discerning the voice of God in order to do His will. Discernment is not one's personal business. We need others to discern with us. My transfer from the mother church to the Scarborough site was first confirmed to be the will of God by the church community and then took place. Besides, the Christlikeness of mature believers attracts and encourages me to be willing to pay the price for following Christ.

### **Hearing God and Belonging to a Small Group are Important in the Spiritual Formation of Chinese Christians**

In their spiritual growth, many Chinese immigrant Christians face hurdles such as the pursuit of wealth, busyness and priority issues. My own spiritual experience confirms the importance of hearing God and belonging to a small group in enabling new believers to overcome hurdles to their spiritual growth. Hearing God changes believers' attitudes toward Him. Because some believers do not think that God takes an interest in their everyday life, they continue to live their life their own way. Once they hear God for themselves, it is possible that they are awakened spiritually and start to enter the second stage of worshipping God, as shown in Figure 2 (the diagram of spiritual growth). The more they hear God and grow closer to Him, the more they are likely to be transformed into the likeness of Christ, and the fear of God will rise in their heart.

A small group can enable new believers to see and taste the love of God. A small group also plays a guardian role, for it helps those who claim to hear God

to discern whether what they hear is truly from God so that they will not be deceived.

### **Project Outcomes**

My autobiography shows that God spoke to me in a number of different ways, and that hearing God has played an important role in my spiritual formation. In my model of spiritual formation, *lectio divina*, the divine reading, was proposed to help Chinese immigrant Christians in my congregation to hear God through the Bible so that they can grow spiritually. My three-month *lectio* project has shown that *lectio* has a positive effect in helping participants to hear God.

Eight believers participated in the eight weeks of the *lectio divina* project. Data was collected from pre- and post-intervention questionnaires, focus group sharing from the first and last sessions and observational data or field notes of each participant's sharing. The data of six participants are complete and full, but there is only partial data for two participants.

This research data demonstrates that *lectio divina* is a useful spiritual discipline which helps believers, in this case Chinese immigrant Christians, to hear God in the biblical text. Although participants vary in the descriptions of their experience, the crucial point is that they are able to hear God in the biblical text. The evidence of hearing God can be seen in their expressions of emotion while sharing, which is rarely seen in regular group Bible study. Two participants shared that *lectio divina* helped them to learn how to pray God-centered prayers.

In summary, all participants showed great interest in *lectio divina*, and one participant vowed to practice it daily.

### **Implications**

The Prophet Habakkuk had a desire to hear God, so he stood at his watch and stationed himself on the ramparts (Habakkuk 2:1). Hearing God is a must for prophets of God, otherwise they have no message to proclaim to people. It is encouraging that Ruth Y. Copland's research on Inter-Varsity leaders finds that one of their desires is to hear the voice of God (Copland 2011, 189). Hearing God does not negate the necessity for regular exegesis. It is good for preachers to meditate on the biblical text and wait for the enlightening of the Holy Spirit in addition to analyzing the text.

Preachers may have a perfect sermon; however, if it consists only of the major points of our analysis, it only fills the heads of our audience but probably never touches their hearts. On the other hand, if we preach what we hear from God and we have certainty about it, the results probably will be dramatic, for God says that His Word "will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it" (Isaiah 55:11). My own experience and the experience of the participants of the *lectio* project have shown that hearing God not only informs people about God but has the potential to touch people's hearts so that they take the actions God desires for them.

It is difficult for believers to practice *lectio divina* in this information age, for they may view *lectio divina* as boring or a waste of time. Besides, some Christians consider hearing God through *lectio* a risky practice. An elder in CGC

English congregation has been practicing *lectio divina* for many years and has experienced life transformation. He shared with me the difficulty he met in teaching *lectio*. We talked about the possibility of a joint effort in helping congregants to hear God through *lectio divina*. Once believers hear God through the Bible, I believe that their lives will be transformed.

### **Plan for My Congregation**

In the completion of this study, I have devised a plan to help immigrant Christians in my congregation in their spiritual formation.

First, I will do *lectio divina* daily on a paragraph of biblical text. Through daily practice, I will not only become more familiar with each step technically, but also ask God to help me to enter the state described by Wilhoit and Howard, "...savor its beauty and its personal message...we zealously chew and ponder the text, and we happily bathe in it" (Wilhoit and Howard 2012, 18). In addition, I will take up the habit of praying and meditating on the memorized biblical verses as practiced by monks (Chan 1998, 164).

Second, in preparation for sermons, I will spend more time meditating on the biblical text chosen for preaching until I have assurance of what God desires to have me preach. At the same time, I will also do expository work, as this will help me to discern whether what I hear is truly from God. Hearing God and expository work are not in conflict, and they deserve equal attention.

Third, I will teach the *lectio divina* Bible reading method in church fellowships and home Bible study groups in the future. It requires patience to

teach Chinese immigrant Christians the discipline of *lectio divina*, for some do not readily grasp the concept of slow reading, which is in conflict with the speed at which so much else in the 21<sup>st</sup> century operates. Therefore, my plan is to teach the concept to a small group first. Once they see the benefits of *lectio*, they will be divided into two groups and more believers will be invited into each group.

Fourth, believers who practice *lectio divina* in a small group will be followed up on for a period of time, and their behaviours will be studied through questionnaires and observation to determine whether they achieve success in overcoming their hurdles. The behaviors to be studied include attendance at Sunday worship services and other church programs, offerings, evangelism, devotion, evidence of a loving heart to others, etc.

Fifth, I will train small group leaders to discern the voice of God through Ignatius' consolation and desolation, which were discussed previously. Small group leaders have to be warned not to look simply at the surface meaning of emotions and feelings but to look into the nature of emotions and feelings: is the person moving towards God or away from God( which is discussed in detail in section of desolation and consolation in Chapter 3)? In this project, some participants experienced spiritual consolation in their shift from self-centered to God-centered prayer (moving closer to God). Once the leaders are trained, they can train their members to discern. The training itself helps people to realize the importance and seriousness of hearing God.

In summary, there are three hurdles for immigrant Chinese Christians to overcome if they are to be formed into the likeness of Christ. Hearing God and

belonging to a small group can enable them to overcome these hurdles. *Lectio divina* is one way to help Christians to hear God in the biblical text, and active participation in a small group not only encourages them to practice spiritual disciplines such as *lectio divina* but, more importantly, helps them to discern what they hear.

## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1 - Information Letter for *lectio divina*

By Rev. Seng Song

Dear brothers and sisters,

From October to December of 2016, I, Seng Song, will conduct a research project titled “Meeting God in the biblical text: *lectio divina* for small group” and this project will be part of my studies as a Doctor of Ministry at Tyndale University College. I invite you to work on this project together with me. You are invited not only to participate but also to give feedback or suggestion in the process of this project.

To execute this project, we will have nine sessions of *lectio divina* over selected biblical texts following the four steps of hearing the Word, receiving the Word, praying with the Word and wondering at the Word. Then we will have a period of time of sharing about our feelings or anything which touches or grabs our heart. The sharing will be recorded and observational notes will be taken in the first, the fourth and the final session.

There are some potential risks and benefits to participate in this research. One obvious risk is that our vulnerable parts will be exposed to peer participants. To prevent the leakage of the personal information shared among participants, participants will be asked to sign a covenant to respect each other and no sharing with nonparticipants.

There are many potential benefits anticipated for participants. The obvious one is that participants will get closer in the small group community. Participants may hear the voice of God one way or another, or at least learn another way of reading the Bible, *lectio divina*.

It is important that you have to know that total anonymity is not possible. Since this project is not carried out secretly or underground, other congregants will know who is participating in this research easily. Besides, congregants may be able to identify the participants in the final written report based on familiarity with their stories although I will do not mention any of your identity information.

All data generated in this project will be kept in the cabinet in my office or stored in my password protected laptop. In the final written report, personal identifying information will not be included. This report will be kept in the Tyndale library as part of my project portfolio.

All participants are volunteers. If you have prompting from the Holy Spirit or you simply are interested in this new way of reading the Bible, you are welcome to participate. Since the size of participants is limited to twelve, I can't take everyone in if more than twelve are interested. Lastly, if anyone wants to quit for some reason, he or she can do so. I pledge that your withdrawal will not affect my care for you. You are not waiving any legal rights by joining this research.

If you have any question, feel free to contact me, by my cell phone  
, office phone or email

. You are also welcome to contact my research supervisor, Dr. Mark Chapman, Assistant Professor of Research Methods, Tyndale Seminary, by his email [mchapman@tyndale.ca](mailto:mchapman@tyndale.ca) or his office phone 416-226-6620, Ext. 2208. You may also direct any question or concern about the ethical nature of this study to the Chair of the General Research Ethics Board at Tyndale Seminary at [reb@tyndale.ca](mailto:reb@tyndale.ca).

Thank you for your interest in this research project. May the Lord use this project to bless you.

Rev. Seng Song

## Chinese Version of Information Letter

### 圣经祷读邀请函

亲爱的弟兄姊妹，

2016年十月到十二月期间，我会进行一个课题研究，题为《小组圣经祷读遇见上帝》，分析祷读法是否能帮助基督徒在圣经中听见上帝的声音，就像基督教历史中许多古圣先贤所说的那样。这个研究课题是我在天道神学院教牧学博士学习的一部分。我邀请你们帮助我一起来参与这个课题研究。你们的参与、建议和反馈非常宝贵，会让这个课题做的更好。

我们将有九次祷读选定的圣经经文。祷读有四个过程，听神的话、领受神的话、用神的话祷告、感叹神的话。第一次和第九次祷读后有一起分享时间，分享个人的内心感受。分享将被录制下来，观察资料也会被保留，便于分析。

参加这个课题研究有益处也可能有风险。风险是参加者对你的缺点可能认识的更多。为了防止分享的信息外泄，参加者必须要签订一个文件，保证不泄露小组内分享内容。好处是，参加者可能会以不同的形式听见上帝的声音，至少学会了祷读法读经。总之，参加者或多或少都能体会到上帝的祝福。

但是，完全保密是不可能的。这个课题不是秘密进行的，会众一定会知道谁是课题的参加者。此外，会众从最后报告中也可能分辨出参加者的个人故事，尽管报告中不会注明参加者的个人资料。

课题研究的所有资料会保存在我办公室的文件柜中，和有密码保护的电脑中。最后报告将会被天道神学院的图书馆收藏，作为我课题的一部分。

所有参加者都是自愿的。如果你有感动或者对此读经方法感兴趣，都欢迎参加。由于最多只能有十二名参加者，我不保证每一位报名者都能够参与。最后，在课题进行过程中，如果参加者因为某种原因不能继续，有权退出，这不会影响我对你们的关心。

如果有任何问题，请联系我，手机 \_\_\_\_\_，办公室 \_\_\_\_\_，  
\_\_\_\_\_；也可以联系我的课题导师，Mark Chapman 博士，天道研究方法助理教授，他的办公室电话 416-226-6620x2208，[电邮 mchapman@tyndale.ca](mailto:mchapman@tyndale.ca)。如果你对这个研究课题的伦理性有问题，请联系天道神学院伦理部门，[电邮 reb@tyndale.ca](mailto:reb@tyndale.ca)

谢谢你对这个课题的兴趣，愿主用这个课题祝福你！

主仆宋胜牧师敬邀

## Appendix 2 - Research Study Consent Form

Name (please print):

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1. I have read and understood the attached “Information Letter”.
2. I understand that I will be engaging in a research of reading the Bible through doing *lectio divina* in a small group at Chinese Gospel Church. I understand that I will have the opportunity to share my feelings, understanding or gains after each session. And I understand that my sharing will be recorded and observational notes will also be taken at the first, the fourth and the seventh session.
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 further understand that complete anonymity will not be possible due to the intimate nature of the congregation.
5. I understand the risks and benefits of the proposed study.
6. I understand that my participation in this research project is completely voluntary, and that I may withdraw at any time without consequences.

I have read the above statements and freely consent to participate in this research project in a small group at Chinese Gospel Church Scarborough:

YES \_\_\_ NO \_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Chinese Version of Research Study Consent Form

### 参与圣经祷读同意书

名字（请拼写）：

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1. 我已经阅读明白了圣经祷读邀请函。
2. 我明白我将要参与在华人福音堂士家堡进行的小组圣经祷读课题研究。我明白我会在小组内分享我的领受。我明白我的分享会被录音，和观察材料一起被用于分析研究。
3. 我许可宋胜把我的资料写进最后报告，我知道如果我不同意的话，我的资料不会被用于最后报告。
4. 我明白宋胜会尽一切努力妥善保管资料和我的个人信息。我也清楚完全的匿名是不可能的，因为会友之间非常的熟悉和了解。
5. 我明白参加这个课题研究有益处也会有风险。
6. 我明白我参加这个课题研究是出于完全的自愿，我有权随时退出而不会有任何的后果或付任何的责任。

我阅读了以上的声明，同意参与在华人福音堂士家堡进行的小组圣经祷读课题研究。

是 \_\_\_ 否 \_\_\_

签名： \_\_\_\_\_

日期： \_\_\_\_\_

### Appendix 3 - Questionnaire One

Please fill out the questionnaire and return it to me within two weeks.

请完成问卷，两周内交给我

1. How do you read the Bible?  
你如何读圣经的？
2. How do you feel in bible reading?  
你读经的感受如何？
3. How does the Bible affect your life?  
圣经如何影响你的生活？

## Appendix 4 - Questionnaire Two

Please fill out the questionnaire and return it to me within two weeks.

请完成问卷，两周内交给我

1. How do you like *lectio divina*? Why?

你对祷读的态度是什么？为什么？

2. Did the project affect your view on the Bible? If so, how?

参与祷读影响你对圣经的看法吗？如有影响，怎么影响的？

3. Have you have sacred experience while doing *lectio divina* in the last three months?

过去三个月祷读中，你有神圣经历吗？（比如，心被摸着，心被抓住或者感动）

**Appendix 5** - Instruction for doing *lectio divina* according to David Foster's book:  
*Reading with God: lectio divina*

<p><b>Step one: Hearing the Word</b></p> <p>Read slowly to yourself as if Jesus speaks to you or read to you. Repeat reading three times and write down the words, phrases or even sentences which grab or strike your heart the most</p>
<p><b>Step two: Receiving the Word</b></p> <p>How does it strike me? What are the echoes? Where do they come from? (digesting and taking them into one's heart)</p>
<p><b>Step three: Praying with the Word</b></p> <p>A response to a word we have taken to ourselves, a word that has made its home in our hearts, to which we can only say 'Amen'.</p>
<p><b>Step four: Wondering at the Word</b></p> <p>The discovery and thankful appreciation of the fact that we have found him whom our souls seek; we have found our hearts' desire.</p>

# *Hearing God through the Bible by Lectio Divina*

宋胜牧师

Chinese Gospel Church Scarborough

October 15, 2016

## 中文翻译

- 生命读经法
- 属灵阅读
- 祷读

## 优点

- 默想圣经与神交心
- 向神开放自己
- 经由圣经倾听神的声音

## 历史

- 多数认为起源于第三世纪的 Oregan
- 圣本笃 Benedict of Nursia (480-547) 于六世纪制度化
- 宗教改革家 马丁路德 Martin Luther (1483-1546)
  - Wilhoit & Howard, *Discovering Lectio Divina* page 17-19

## 四部曲的祷告

( David Foster, a Benedictine monk of Downside Abbey )

- 听上帝说话Hearing the Word
- 领受上帝的话Receiving the Word
- 回应上帝的话Praying with the Word
- 感叹上帝的话Wondering at the Word

### Step 1

## 听上帝说话 (Hearing the Word)

申命记6:4-9节

以色列阿，**你要听**.....

；

太7:24-27节

所以，凡 听 见我这话就去行的 .....

## 怎么听？

- 撒母耳的例子

“耶和华又来站着，像前三次呼唤说：‘撒母耳啊！撒母耳啊！’撒母耳回答说：‘请说，仆人敬听！’”撒  
上3:10节

- 马利亚的例子

“她有一个妹子，名叫马利亚，在耶稣脚前坐着听他的道。”路10:39节

## 关键

- 那个字、词、甚至句子抓住注意力

## Step 2 领受上帝的话 (Receiving the Word)

思想那些打动我们的字、词或者句子，思想它与我们生活或者生命的联系，省察自己的心思行为，以便明白上帝要对我们说什么

# 圣经

可9:9-10节

下山的时候，耶稣嘱咐他们说：“人子还没有从死里复活，你们不要将所看见的告诉人。”门徒将这话存记在心，彼此议论从死里复活是什么意思。

• 路1:28-29节

天使进去，对她说：“蒙大恩的女子，我问你安，主和你同在了！”马利亚因这话就很惊慌，就反复思想这样问安是什么意思。

路2:16-19节

他们急忙去了，就寻见马利亚和约瑟，又有那婴孩卧在马槽里；既然看见，就把天使论这孩子的话传开了。凡听见的，就诧异牧羊之人对他们所说的话。马利亚却把这一切的事存在心里。



接受上帝的话，  
有人用牛反刍来比喻

也有人说是从头到心的过程

### Step 3

## 用上帝的话祷告 (Praying with the Word)

1. 对上帝的话做出回应
2. 让上帝的话成为我们的灵粮
3. 跳出自我中心的祷告“要的祷告”进入以上帝为中心的祷告
4. 我们的心与上帝的心合一



# 圣经

- 大卫之约 撒下7: 8-16节

- 大卫的回应祷告 撒下7: 18-29节

于是大卫王进去，坐在耶和華面前，说，“主耶和華阿，我是谁。我的家算什么。你竟使我到这地步呢？主耶和華阿，这在你眼中还看为小，又应许你仆人的家至于久远……你所应许仆人和仆人家的话，求你坚定，直到永远。照你所说的而行。愿人永远尊你的名为大，说，万军之耶和華是治理以色列的神……现在求你赐福与仆人的家，可以永存在你面前。主耶和華阿，这是你所应许的。愿你永远赐福与仆人的家。

## Step 4

### 惊叹上帝的话

### (Wondering at the Word)

1. 上帝的同在
2. 静默
3. 享受上帝的爱—与上帝合一
4. 单字或者短语的祷告
  - 1) “主耶稣啊，我愿你来”（启示录22:20）
  - 2) “阿爸，父！”（罗8:15）

## 预备祷读

- 倒空杂念
  - 注意自己的呼吸
  - 简单的祷告：天父啊、主耶稣啊，等等
- 理顺关系：认罪
- 合适的姿势

四个步骤不是截然分开的

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