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Tyndale University

Three Dimensions of Spiritual Formation:
Grow Deep, Grow High, Grow Wide

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

by

Anita Kwan-Wai Wong

Toronto, Canada

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Unless otherwise indicated all Scripture quotations are taken from the Holy Bible,
New International Version at biblegateway.com

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ABSTRACT

In this research portfolio, the author articulates spiritual formation using a model that involves three dimensions, Grow Deep, Grow High, Grow Wide. This will be explored through three avenues. The first is a spiritual formation model integrating the three dimensions. The model is by no means an ultimate or a perfect model. Spiritual formation is an evolving process, which involves the grace of God and the power of the Holy Spirit. God has a different pathway for everyone of his beloved children. The second avenue is a spiritual autobiography describing the author's own spiritual formation. It is the synopses of the author's major life events with reference to the three dimensions. The third avenue is a field research project with a focus on social justice. It intends to answer the question "Can *Lectio Divina* transform us by shaping our view on social justice?" (Rom. 12:2). The research shows that *Lectio Divina* was able to shape the views of the participants on social justice, who are senior Asians, and did draw them closer to God. It shows that *Lectio Divina* was able to help the participants Grow Deep, Grow High, Grow Wide.

DEDICATION

To my heavenly Father

Thank you for creating me, shaping me, healing me, and restoring me.

To my parents

Thank you for loving me, nurturing me, and guiding me.

To my husband

Thank you for your steadfast love and unwavering support all the time.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am deeply grateful to be surrounded by great people during these years of studies. I offer my heartfelt thanksgiving to my wonderful husband and my beloved family members for their sacrifice during my studies. To the members of my small group, I am grateful for your enthusiastic participation in our action research project. To my spiritual director and my research portfolio advisor, thank you for inspiring me and carrying me through this doctorate with love and patience. To my spiritual directees, I am grateful for your unwavering prayer support. To my Doctor of Ministry professors, thank you for being grace personified. You were my trustworthy navigators through the program! Finally, to all my fellow students in Spiritual Formation Cohort 5, my doctoral experience was wonderfully enriched by your presence. Because of the love and grace of these great people, I was able to finish this doctorate with joy and peace. Thank you.

EPIGRAPH

Psalm 1:2-3

but whose delight is in the law of the Lord, and who meditates on his law day and night. That person is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither – whatever they do prospers.

Romans 12:2

But do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world. But be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will.

Matthew 22:37-40

Jesus replied: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”

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CHAPTER 1:

INTRODUCTION: A NEW ENDEAVOR

God led me to my retirement after a successful career as an educator. Not only was retirement a new chapter of my life, but it was also an excellent opportunity to examine my relationship with God. I yearned for God to lead me through my retirement years. I saw this time as a precious opportunity to get to know more about God, and more about myself. It was a season in which to celebrate, to rest, to reflect, and to discern God's plan for me.

Retirement is an end to a career, but it can also be the beginning of many new endeavours. What was God's plan for my retirement years? How could I discern his plans? How could I hear him? I longed to live out God's purpose for my life. There was also a sense of urgency in seeking God's will for my life during this time because retirement reminded me of my mortality and my limitations. I just could not wait to get to know God more and love him more. I felt that I had not loved God enough or focused on him enough when I was working. I was too preoccupied with my family and my career. Now was the time to return to God and to invite him to embark on this new phase with me. I needed him to guide me so that I would not be lost amid the freedom associated with retirement. I needed him to comfort and to encourage me as I coped with the sense of loss resulting from retirement. I yearned to know him more and to learn about him systematically before my time ran out. I had never considered pursuing

a Doctor of Ministry (DMin), but I was attracted by the courses offered by the DMin in Spiritual Formation at Tyndale. I needed to make “Space for God,” spend time “Listening to God,” and be active in “Engaging Scriptures,” in order to discern God’s will as I embarked on this new chapter of my life. It was with much curiosity and a little bit of fear that I started to pursue the DMin in Spiritual Formation at Tyndale University. This journey turned out to be the most inspiring and transformative years of my life.

This portfolio for the Doctor of Ministry in Spiritual Formation comprises of three major projects. This first project attempts to synthesize my spiritual formation experience and learning about spiritual formation into a spiritual formation model: Grow Deep, Grow High, Grow Wide. In a nutshell, Grow Deep refers to the development of our personal relationship with God, which also represents the private and the invisible component of our spiritual formation. Grow High refers to the development of our spiritual character shown in visible ways to become more like Christ. Grow Wide refers to the caring for others on earth, which is also a visible part of our spiritual formation. Grow High and Grow Wide represent the public and visible elements of spiritual formation. My spiritual formation model of Grow Deep, Grow High, Grow Wide is symbolized by a tree with deep roots, strong branches, lush leaves, and ripe fruits.

Robert Mulholland, in *Invitation to a Journey: A Road Map for Spiritual Formation*, explains that “Spiritual formation is a process of being formed in the image of Christ for the sake of others” (Mulholland 2016, 17). Spiritual formation is an ongoing process through which Christians are shaped to become more like

Christ so that they can better serve God and his people on earth. How can Christians be shaped and formed to become more like Christ? Richard Foster, in *Streams of Living Water: Essential Practices from the Six Great Traditions of Christian Faith*, reminds us that “it is to Jesus that we must turn” (Foster 1999, 16). My spiritual journey began with knowing Jesus at a young age. My mother told me “Jesus loves the little children.” I knew that Jesus was my good friend. I knew that I was talking to Jesus when I prayed. This seed of faith was planted deep inside my little heart at a young age. God continued to nurture this seed and my faith began to grow. I accepted Christ Jesus as my personal saviour when I was fifteen years old. This seed of faith continued to grow deep into the soil of God’s love through the significant events of my life. As the seed started to germinate, the growing stem pushed the seed up and out of the ground. The roots grew further deep in the soil. As my roots grew deeper down into God, my life started to be built on him (Col. 2:7). Like a tree, I grew high and grew wide as my roots grew deep in God. I grew high to become more like Christ. I grew wide to better serve others. I grew deeper as I experienced God’s marvellous love in growing high and growing wide. Thus, the three elements in my spiritual formation model are interrelated as they support each other.

The second project is a Spiritual Autobiography describing my spiritual formation through the significant events of my life. It is a collection of synopses on how God shaped my soul through major life events. The beginning of my retirement was the perfect time to reflect on God’s work in my life. As I began to reflect and write, I noticed that my spirit began to develop “in strange and

unexpected ways, and it helps to know that we are not alone on the journey” (Mandelker & Powers 1999, 13). God used my mother to introduce me to him and to prepare me to become a teacher during my formative years. He brought me to Christ Jesus through my Christian high school in Hong Kong. He allowed me to experience his sovereignty and his tender loving care during the sacred moment of the passing of my dad. He gave me a spiritual director through the challenging times of my life. These are just a few examples of how I was not alone on my journey. He also placed many significant people around me to help and to guide me. In addition, he placed many signposts in my life. I could see these signposts as I was reflecting on his work in my life. For instance, God allowed me to meet my spiritual director, who inspired me to also become a spiritual director. Another significant signpost was my mother’s wish for me to become a teacher. Without much hesitation, I ended up going to teacher’s college right after university. Through the writing of my spiritual autobiography, I was reminded to stay focused on my eternal destiny, and not to be distracted by roadside objects of less importance, especially during my retirement years, as time was slowly running out. Last but not least, my spiritual autobiography attempts to explore my spiritual formation in the context of my spiritual formation model, namely Grow Deep, Grow High, Grow Wide.

The third project of this portfolio is an action research project to explore the impact of *Lectio Divina* on spiritual formation. It explored whether or not *Lectio Divina* could shape the social justice views of senior believers and seekers. In a nutshell, it attempted to answer the question if *Lectio Divina* could renew our

minds for the transformation of our souls (Rom. 12:2). The data collected was analysed and interpreted in relation to my spiritual formation model of Grow Deep, Grow High, Grow Wide. The practice of *Lectio Divina* has been a transformative spiritual experience for me. It has renewed my mind and allowed me to cope with unchangeable life situations. It has helped me grow deeper into God's word as I desire to be "like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither – whatever they do prospers" (Ps. 1:3). I long to be like the tree in Psalm 1 in my retirement years, and *Lectio Divina* is helping me with this. I saw this research project as an opportunity to share the benefits of *Lectio Divina* with my small group. I see each small group as God's beautiful orchard. God is the pruner, and we are his growing trees. The trees will grow high and grow wide as their roots grow deep in God's word.

The closing chapter of this portfolio includes my reflection on the making of this portfolio, on my DMin formational experiences, and on what God has in store for me. The writing process of this portfolio was a spiritual formation experience in itself. I felt peaceful and content like "a weaned child with God" throughout the writing process (Ps. 131:2). My mind was renewed, and my soul was healed and restored through the different components of the DMin program. I look forward to the new endeavours that God has in place for me upon the completion of the DMin program.

This portfolio is a synopsis of God's work in my life, and his work in others. It comprises works of different genres such as an autobiography and a research report. It describes God's work in forming our souls. It proclaims God's

compassion on his people. His compassion was with me even before I was born as he “created my inmost being” and he “knit me together in my mother’s womb” (Ps. 139:13). He brought me to this world and has been transforming me ever since, as described in my spiritual autobiography. He shaped me as I grew deep, grew high and grew wide as described in my spiritual formation model. He renewed the minds of people as shown in my field research report. All in all, he is a God of transformation. He is not done with me yet. Thus, my hope is in him as my soul is formed, for he is good and faithful.

CHAPTER 2:
SPIRITUAL FORMATION MODEL:
GROW DEEP, GROW WIDE, GROW HIGH

God is a relational being. He enjoys our company and desires for us to find delight in His presence. The great commandment which calls us to “love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind” (Mt. 22:37), reveals the intensively relational character of God. In addition, the second great commandment, which instructs us to love our neighbours as ourselves (Mk. 12:31), reflects the relational character that humanity inherited from God, as we are made in His image. In short, “We were created for fellowship and intimacy not only with God but also with each other” (Boa 2001, 28). God’s intimate love for us is exemplified by the fact that “he reached down to us and, in the ultimate act of sacrifice, purchased us and made us his own” (Boa 2001, 30). We were redeemed by the blood of his one and only son, Christ Jesus. How do we respond to such great love?

Kenneth Boa, in *Conformed to His Image*, shares his response to God’s great love as he writes:

Thanks be to thee, O Lord Jesus Christ, for all the benefits which thou hast given us: For all the pains and insults which thou hast borne for us. O most merciful Redeemer, Friend, and Brother, may we know thee more clearly, love thee more dearly, and follow thee more nearly; for thine own sake (Boa 2001, 31).

Loving God completely is Boa's response to God's love. He demonstrates that the desires of our hearts need to include our responses to God's love. To love God is to know Him, "because the more we grasp – not merely in our minds but also in our experience – who he is and what he has done for us, the more our hearts will respond in love and gratitude" (Boa, 2001, 32). In other words, the more we experience God, the more we will love Him and develop a deeper relationship with him.

The process of developing a deeper relationship with God is often known as spiritual formation. In *Life in the Spirit: Spiritual Formation in Theological Perspective* edited by Jeffrey P. Greenman & George Kalantzis, spiritual formation is defined as "our continuing response to the reality of God's grace shaping 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 2010, 24). Spiritual formation is a process with a purpose. It is a process that allows us to cultivate intimacy with God, through the work of the Holy Spirit, to become more like Jesus, so that we can better serve the world according to God's will. It is a life-long journey of transformation, which cannot be achieved either overnight or through a course or a program. It is the progressive formation of spiritual character and personal growth. It is like running a race, which requires perseverance. Hebrews 12:1 says, "...let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us" (Heb. 12:1).

This chapter defines spiritual formation with a focus on God's grace. It also discusses a spiritual formation model inspired by Henri Nouwen, which is based on a threefold movement involving an inward, outward, and upward thrust. It addresses our relationship with God, self, and others (Hernandez 2008, 3). Henri Nouwen, in *Reaching Out: The Three Movements of Spiritual Life*, articulates that spiritual formation deals with our relationship with ourselves, our relationship to others, and our relationship with God (Nouwen 1986, 4). Nouwen believes that spiritual formation begins with the development of the inner sensitivity that helps us to listen to our own inner voices through silence and solitude, which can help us attach "to God and each other in a surprisingly new way" (Nouwen 1986, 48). This inward movement will result in a loving response creating an outward movement, which is our relationship with others. Our hostilities will be converted into hospitality (Nouwen 1986, 65). In order to convert our loneliness into solitude and our hostilities into hospitality, Nouwen believes that "we need the willingness and courage to reach out far beyond the limitations of our fragile and finite existence toward our loving God in whom all life is anchored", resulting in the third movement, which is our relationship with God (Nouwen 113). My spiritual formation model, Grow Deep, Grow High, Grow Wide, also involves the three movements of inward, upward, and outward, which will be discussed later. This chapter also explores how to Grow Deep through self denial and spiritual disciplines, how to Grow High by bearing the fruit of the Spirit and becoming more like Christ, and how to Grow Wide by

loving and serving others. It also presents some markers for each movement so the reader can reflect on their spiritual development.

Spiritual Formation is God's Grace

For the purpose of this portfolio, I am discussing Christian spiritual formation, acknowledging that spiritual formation “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” (Willard 2002, 19). Christian spiritual formation is a process defined by “a continuing response to the reality of God’s grace” and not by “someone’s search within themselves for spiritual health” (Greenman & Kalantzis 2010, 24). In other words, spiritual formation is not our effort to cultivate inward awakening for its own sake through human techniques or personal willpower. It is primarily our response to God’s grace, which is “God’s own initiative and God’s vital action” (Greenman & Kalantzis 2010, 24). We simply do not have the ability “to seek God apart from God’s prior movement of grace” (Greenman & Kalantzis 2010, 24). From a theological perspective, grace encompasses the divine gift of God’s love and mercy towards sinners, and is exemplified in Christ’s life, his death, and his resurrection. We accepted Christ Jesus as our personal saviour by God’s grace through faith as illustrated in Ephesians 2: 8-9, which says, “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast” (Willard 2002, 11). We are created by God, saved by God, and can be transformed by God. Jesus gathered his disciples two thousand years ago in order to train them to “teach all nations”

(Willard 2002, 11). These disciples were transformed in order to “bring all of human life on earth under the direction of his wisdom, goodness, and power, as part of God’s eternal plan for the universe” (Willard 2002, 11). This reality of the past is also the reality of the present. God has his purposes for believers in the present since his children are “called with the purpose of cooperating with God to bring restoration to his creation in the present” (Jacob 2018, 242). God transforms his children with the purpose of restoring a fallen people living in a fallen world.

Moreover, spiritual formation reflects “the biblical logic of divine grace,” which is demonstrated in the truth that “we love because he first loved us” (1 Jn. 4:19). As Christians, we are called to respond in faith, trust, and obedience to the good news of salvation and “to welcome God’s transforming power into our lives” (Greenman & Kalantzis 2010, 25). God’s divine grace is not only a reality of the past, but it is also a reality of the present since it continues to shape our current Christian character and experiences. Therefore, spiritual formation is an extension of the narrative of Jesus’ crucifixion, resurrection, and mission on earth. In summary, spiritual formation is God’s own work, through the Holy Spirit, in order to cultivate Christ’s character in us, so that we can see this same character reproduced in others as we spread the Gospel and live out his love on earth.

Joshua Choonmin Kang, in *Deep-Rooted in Christ: The Way of Transformation*, reminds us that “all spiritual growth is initiated by God. He’s the one who causes any transformation a Christian may experience” (Kang 2007, 50). Spiritual transformation is God’s gracious touch on our souls through the work of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, we must submit to the work of the Holy Spirit in our

lives. Kang urges us to “set the stage for the Holy Spirit to work in our lives” (Kang 2007, 50). He further compares spiritual formation as planting a seed as he says:

Before a seed is planted, we must first prepare the soil. Later that seed will grow and bear fruit. We are tools in God’s hands. But God can use such tools – ourselves – to cultivate his world, to bring transformation in the lives of people everywhere. (Kang 2007, 50)

Although Kang’s analogy seems to be simple, it illustrates our relationship with God in spiritual formation. We need to prepare ourselves to be transformed by God through life experiences, no matter if they are bitter or sweet, in order to grow and to bear fruit. God is the master, and we are the tools that he uses. God’s kingdom is like an orchard. Not only do we grow as individual trees, but we also help God plant the orchard. We are the trees, and he is the pruner. At times we are the pruners for other trees too. He uses us as his tools by transforming first our own lives, and then the lives of others through us. God is the master and the centre of spiritual formation. He has a purpose for forming us and we must yield ourselves to his plan. The Apostle Paul explains his role clearly in 1 Corinthians 3:6-7, when he says, “I planted the seed, Apollo watered it, but God has been making it grow. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God who makes things grow.” Paul wants to illustrate that spiritual formation is God’s work through the Holy Spirit in us and with us. Spiritual formation is a gift from God through his grace. Thus, we need to surrender to God’s grace as we are transformed by him. In fact, as Kang concluded “apart from the grace of God spiritual growth is simply impossible” (Kang 2007, 52).

Spiritual formation is the work of God through his grace and by the power of the Holy Spirit. We are only his partners and his tools in the process.

Grow Deep, Grow High, Grow Wide

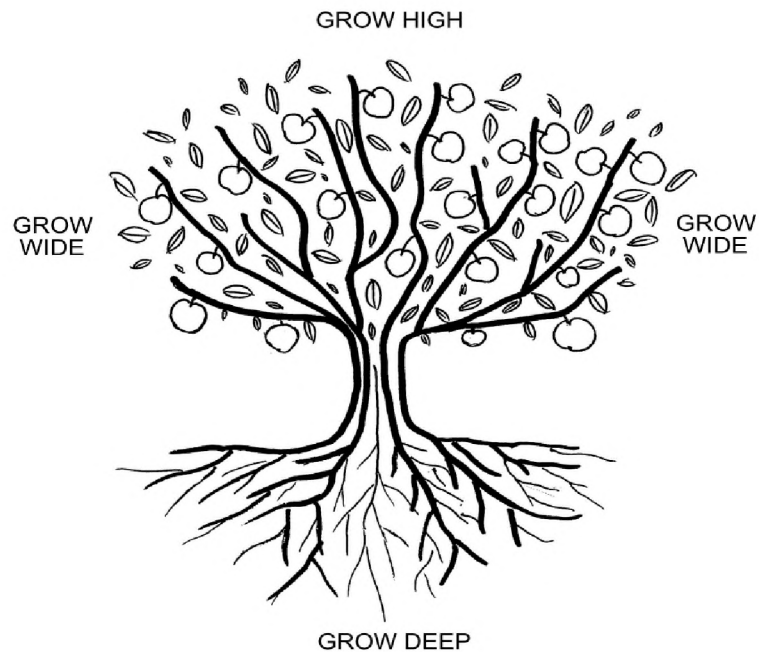


Figure 1: Spiritual Formation Model: Grow Deep, Grow High, Grow Wide

The spiritual formation model of Grow Deep, Grow High, Grow Wide is represented by the full and lush fruit bearing tree with deep roots as indicated in the diagram above. It was inspired by my love for nature. I love to dwell in nature as it reminds me of my father's world. Every time I ponder the blue sky, the green grass and the tall trees, I can hear the echoes of "This is my father's world, I rest me in the thought, of rocks and trees, of skies and seas, his hand the wonders wrought" from "This is My Father's World" written by Maltbie Davenport Babcock. I especially love looking at all kinds of trees. A forest is a community of trees. The trees exist in harmony to sustain the forest. They are the stewards of the forest as we are the stewards of the world. They provide food and

shelter for the living creatures in the forest as we provide food and shelter for the needy.

My house is surrounded by many trees as it backs onto a park. In front of my house is a thirty-year-old maple tree. It provides good shade from the sun for the house during the summer months since it is tall, full, and lush. I have been watching the tree grow since the first day it was planted. It was a baby tree with only a few stems. As I watch this tree grow, I can see it getting taller and wider as it gains its height and fullness. This is the visible growth of the tree nourished by the invisible growth of the roots that I cannot see from the outside. These roots growing deep into the soil allow the tree to grow high and wide above the soil. In return, the leaves and branches above the soil, nourish and strengthen the roots so that they can go even deeper. There is a visible and an invisible component to the growth of a tree. Although they seem like two distinct components, they are interrelated.

Similarly, there is a visible and an invisible component to our spiritual growth. Grow Deep, in this portfolio, refers to the invisible component, which happens in our inner life, while Grow High and Grow Wide refer to the visible component, which happens in our outer life. Grow Deep is the formation process that is hidden in our inner world, while Grow High and Grow Wide are the visible signs of formation in our outer world. The visible signs are also the results of Grow Deep as the roots dig deep into the soil. Dallas Willard reminds us that “only God knows our depth, who we are and what we would do” (Willard 2002, 13). We are at God’s mercy just as the psalmist is as he cries out to God for help

to renew in him a right spirit so that his thoughts and words can be acceptable to God (Ps. 51:10, Ps. 19:14). The psalmist needs God's help to renew him on the inside, which is the invisible internal component, so that he can say the right words and dedicate his life for God's purpose, which can be the visible external component. Thus, Grow Deep, in this portfolio, refers to the formation of "the hidden world of the self as our spiritual side," which is invisible to the naked eyes (Willard 2002, 14). Spiritual formation is the transformation of the inner life of human, "from which our outer existence flows" (Willard 2002, 16). In a nutshell, it is "the Spirit-driven process of forming the inner world of the human self in such a way that it becomes like the inner being of Christ himself" (Willard 2002, 18). It is the shaping and reshaping of the inner life, which affects how we live for God in our physical world. Therefore, spiritual formation involves more than Grow Deep. A tree cannot be called a tree without its branches and leaves, which are the visible components. The process of spiritual formation is not complete without the person living out God's purpose of formation.

We need to Grow Deep before we can Grow High and Grow Wide, which completes the process of spiritual formation, as we live out God's purpose on earth as transformed people. As the roots of a tree grow deeper into the soil and are nourished, the branches will grow higher towards the sky. The nutrients that the branches and the leaves absorb from the process of photosynthesis in the air, return to nourish the roots so that they can grow deeper in the soil. Although Grow Deep, Grow High, Grow Wide seem to be three distinct processes, they are interrelated. The smooth operation of one process supports the well-being of the

other processes. In order for a tree to flourish, the three processes of Grow Deep, Grow High, Grow Wide, must be in good condition to support one another.

Spiritual formation requires the three components, Grow Deep, Grow High, Grow Wide, to work well with God's grace so that our souls can be transformed to become more like Jesus in order for us to live out God's purpose on earth.

In this model, Grow Deep refers the invisible growth or changes that take place deep inside our hidden self. It resembles the growth or the changes of the roots hidden deep in the soil. It is invisible, internal, and hidden. It is the spiritual formation that happens in our inner private selves. Grow High refers to the visible elements of spiritual formation connected with our relationship with God. This has a focus on the fruit of the Holy Spirit, which is developing in our visible character, and on becoming more like Christ. It resembles the visible fullness of a tree as depicted in Psalm 1:3 which says, "That person is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruits in season and whose leaf does not wither – whatever they do prospers." It is visible and external. It is the changes that happen to our outer life as a result of the changes in our inner life. Grow Wide refers to the visible impact of spiritual formation connected with our relationship with others. It has a focus on community and mission. It also resembles the visible shape of a tree, which grows wide to provide good shade for people. The maple tree in front of my house is one of the beautiful trees on my street. Not only does it offer an ideal nesting place for birds, but it also provides nice shade in the summer for my neighbours. One of my neighbours usually rests under my tree for a little while before returning to his house after jogging. I once asked him why he

liked to rest under my tree instead of under his tree. He replied, “Your tree is wider than mine so it’s cooler under your tree.” Grow Wide explores the impact of spiritual formation on the outer world, which is visible and external. It usually requires our involvement in church and community.

Last but not the least, we must remember that elements of Grow Deep, Grow High, and Grow Wide are interrelated, and they support each other. The deeper are the roots, the taller and wider the tree will grow. The fuller is the tree, the deeper the roots will grow. The more God shapes our inner souls, the more we will be like Jesus and the better we will serve him and his people. The deeper we grow in God’s love, the more we will love God in return. The more we love God, the more we will love our neighbours. Although Grow Deep, Grow High, Grow Wide seem like three distinct components of my spiritual formation model, they are three interdependent components for spiritual formation. We need to be shaped and reshaped by all three movements to become more like Christ in order to better serve God and his people on earth. In summary, the spiritual formation model of Grow Deep, Grow High, Grow Wide describes how we live out the great commandment as Jesus taught in Luke 10:27, which says, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and love your neighbor as yourself.”

My spiritual development experiences have taught me that spiritual formation is an ongoing process that happens only by the grace of God and the power of the Holy Spirit. I believe that one’s definition of spiritual formation will continue to be shaped by one’s spiritual experiences. There is no single, ultimate,

or perfect model for spiritual formation. Instead, it is an evolving process. Boa explains that there is no single model of spiritual formation that can fully capture “the mysterious process that mutually incorporated both the divine the human” (Boa 2001, 122). The model of Grow Deep, Grow High, Grow Wide is by no means an ultimate or perfect model, since “all models are false, but some are useful,” as mentioned by Dr. Len Hjalmarson in a lecture in the Tyndale Doctor of Ministry Spiritual Formation program. My spiritual formation model utilizes the tree as a whole. It does not intend to do an anatomy of the tree by examining each single branch or leaf separately. The three movements in the model are fluid. These movements often flow into one another “as the different movement of a symphony” (Nouwen 1986, 20). They cannot be clearly separated but they support each other. Hopefully the distinction provided in this model can help us better recognize the elements of spiritual formation and encourage us to examine our visible and invisible relationship with God and our relationship with others.

Grow Deep: Invisible Relationship with God

Kang reminds believers as he quotes Richard Foster, who says. “The needed change within us is God’s work, not ours. The demand is for an inside job, and only God can work from the inside” (Kang, 2007, 6). In fact, God started his work inside us long before we were born as he created our inmost beings and knitted us together in our mothers’ wombs (Ps. 139:13-14). Our souls were saved by God when we accepted Christ Jesus as our personal Saviour. As discussed previously, we need to grow deep to uncover our true self and through the practice of spiritual disciplines.

Grow Deep through Self-Denial

As mentioned in the introduction, God loves us first and we need to respond to his deep love for us. God's love motivates us to deny ourselves as we are touched by his unconditional love. Self-denial can be an expression of our love for God. For instance, a loving mother denies her own needs by placing the needs of her children first. Self-denial for the love of God is putting God's will first. We need to reclaim our true self in order to discern God's will and to live out God's purpose for us on earth. Grow Deep involves self-denial as God helps us to reclaim our true self created by him. Jesus said, "Whoever finds their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it" (Mt. 10:39). Jesus taught us that we must lose our lives if we are to find them. Jesus was trying to point out that those who think they are in control of their life will find that they are not in control in the end (Willard 2002, 58). They will find that they are totally at the mercy of forces beyond their control. They will end up "on a sure course to disintegration and powerlessness, of lostness both to themselves and to God. They must surrender" (Willard 2002, 58). In summary, being the master of oneself will lead to the destruction of one's life as echoed by Paul in Romans 8:5-7, which says,

Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires, but those who in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace. The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God, it does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so.

Those who choose to be the masters of their lives will be destroyed by their desires, which are driven by the flesh. Those who surrender their lives to the

Spirit will experience life and peace as they desire God. Those who deny their ruined self and surrender to the sovereignty of God “will want the good and be able to do it, the only true human freedom” (Willard 2002, 58). As these believers grow deeper in their relationship with God, their minds will also be renewed by God so that they can understand God’s good, pleasing, and perfect will (Rom. 12: 2). God helps us to uncover our real selves as we deny our false selves. God’s desires will gradually become our desires as our real selves are restored. As a result, those who deny themselves will “be able to be truthful and transparent and helpful and sacrificially loving, with joy – and they will want to be” (Willard 2002, 58). Grow Deep empties our inner space for God to begin the transformation. However, we also need to be cautious as self denial can be destructive without the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

“Spiritual formation begins when we empty our lives” (Kang 2007, 21). Kang reminds us that spiritual formation begins with emptiness instead of fullness. Spiritual formation begins with Grow Deep, as it happens in our inner and hidden world. Jesus exemplified self denial as he “... emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross” (Phil. 2:7-8). Jesus denied himself and set aside the privileges of his holy identity to come to earth to be crucified so that we could be saved. Moses is another example of self denial. God helped Moses deny his royal identity so that he could find his authentic identity in God before he participated in God’s plan of taking the Israelites out of Egypt (Kang 2002, Ch. 24). Jesus

said, “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me” (Mk. 8:34). Following Jesus means denying ourselves, which refers to our inner ruined world. As we surrender our deep inner private space to God, we will be transformed by his grace and by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Grow Deep in True Self

Grow Deep is the spiritual formation movement that uncovers the invisible self so that it can become visible. This invisible true self is created by God in his image. It is “the new and original self given to us by God and restored to us by Christ” (Finley 1983, 25). The psalmist praised God and said, “I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know it full well” (Ps. 139:14). The psalmist reminds us that our true self, which is a wonderful creation of God, encompasses God’s goodness and beauty. We need to reclaim our true self through spiritual formation so that we can live out the goodness of God. Grow Deep refers to the inward thrust of my spiritual formation model. It is the process through which one abandons the false self and uncovers the true self created by God (Finley 1983, 23). James Finley, in *Merton’s Palace of Nowhere: A Search for God through Awareness of the True Self*, describes the false self as an outcome of sin, as we are in denial with our relationship with God, when he writes:

Sin is the word we most often use to refer to this latter aspect of human experience in which we find ourselves negating our own intrinsic relationship to God. Sin taken in this sense does not, of course, refer simply to the isolated actions which we call sinful. Rather, such actions are seen as symptoms or manifestations of sin taken as the state or condition of alienation

in which we find ourselves. (Finley 1983, 27)

Merton further illustrates his argument by referring to Roman 7:14-20, which says, "... I am weak flesh sold unto the slavery of sin. I cannot understand my own actions. I do not do what I want to do, but the evil I do not intend. But if I do what is against my will, it is not I who do it, but sin which dwells in me" (Finley 1983, 27). In short, Merton believes that the false self is a result of our sin that alienated us from the true identity established by God. Grow Deep in this model refers to a quest for our spiritual identity.

Since we need to shed our false self to uncover our real self, we need to know what the false self is made of. Rohr defines the false self as the "role, title, and personal image that is largely a creation of our own mind and attachments" (Rohr 2011, 85). In brief, the false self is a creation of our own worldly experiences and values. It is not a creation of God. Since my retirement, I had been trying to abandon my false self with the support of my spiritual director. The false self, which I had created, was myself as a high school principal, after many years of experience as an educator. Being a school principal was the goal of my career, and the title of "Principal" was the incentive for me to excel in my job. The image of myself as a respectable principal enticed me to move upward in my career. After being a vice-principal and a principal for many years, I developed a false self, which led me to be striving and in control all the time. I was defined by what I did, and not by who I was. My identity was based on my doing, and not on my being. As soon as I retired, I began to explore my false self and my true self with the help of my spiritual director. Although I had a successful career, I felt

sad when I realized that for many years, my life was driven by a job title, which I now had to bid farewell to. Although being a school principal gave me good sense of achievement and many fond memories, it was not an everlasting job. During the first few months of my retirement, I was hit by an intensive identity crisis. Knowing that I was not a school principal anymore, I started to contemplate who I was. Not only did I feel unsettled, but I also experienced an immense sense of loss. I mourned the loss of my job title, which had defined me for many years. As I was pondering who I was, God's gentle voice reminded me that I would always be his beloved child. Being God's child was my true, but forgotten, identity. This reclaimed identity of being God's child was not defined by what I did but by who I was, and by my relationship with him. It was based on my being and not on my doing. Not only did reclaiming this true identity heal my sense of loss, but it also changed my life perspectives. I was to move forward and strain toward what was ahead in order to "press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 1:13-14). Uncovering my true self gave me new hope and direction for my life.

Our journey away from the God-intended true self begins almost as soon as we are born. It is too easy for us to lose our true self "as an interdependent person living with the awareness of the Presence in the present moment" (Hasse 2008, 37). We gradually become obsessed with what we are not, which is our false self. We became alienated from our true self as we are influenced by our culture, which is inundated with human desires and secular expectations. Instead of being like "a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruits in season"

(Ps. 1:3), we develop into naked trees as we acquire bad habits and addictions due to the detrimental impact of our culture. For instance, “We are convinced by television commercials and become obsessed with the latest laptop computer, the newest model of an automobile and the miracle drug that will solve our weight problem, our sexual dysfunction or our struggles to have a good night sleep” (Hasse 2008, 37). We are so desperate for affection and attention that we will do anything to get them. Meanwhile, we cannot focus on the present as we are worried or concerned about what tomorrow will bring. We become so consumed by what we do that we end up defining ourselves by our careers and roles. We become what we have and what people think of us. As we spend our energy in pursuing pleasure, praise, power, prestige, and position, we completely forget about who we are. (Hasse 2008, 36). We are like a restless hamster spinning nonstop on a wheel. We feel empty as the foolish desires generated by our false self can never make us content. Unfortunately, for some of us, it takes “half a lifetime, usually around midlife, to discover that things found in shopping malls, places of honor and short-lived infatuation cannot fill the hole in the heart.” (Hasse 2008, 39). We look for changes to improve the condition of our lives. We are like the prodigal son, who needed to return to his father, as mentioned in Luke 15:11-32 (Hasse 2008, 51). It is only through reconnecting with the father that the prodigal son can regain his true identity. It is only through our Heavenly Father, who has the power to transform us, that we can recover our true self. In brief, spiritual formation “shapes us inside the story of God and exposes the falsehood of the stories of our culture” (Keely 2010, 15). Only God can open our eyes to see

the damages of the falsehood of our culture on the true self, so that we can reclaim it.

God never gives up on us. He shapes and reshapes the false self inside us so that we can reclaim the true self. Spiritual formation involves changes of the inner self. It is not a change of our behaviour through the work of our own willpower. In *The Good and Beautiful God: Falling in Love with the God Jesus Know*, James B. Smith illustrates that we fail not because of a lack of will power, since the will has no power. He explains that “the will is the human capacity to choose” (Smith 2009, 22). For instance, should I wear a red skirt or a blue skirt? The choice is usually the result of our will. Spiritual formation shapes our will so that God’s desires gradually become our desires. Spiritual formation leads us to make choices based on God’s will and not on our own will. Willard reminds us that “the will of God is not foreign to our will” as we were made in his image (Willard 2002, 139). Spiritual formation helps us discern God’s fully functional will as we deny ourselves, so that we can choose to make decisions based on God’s good, perfect, and pleasing will.

The uncovering of our true self also connects with psychology and spirituality since knowing self and knowing God are interconnected (Hernandez 2008, 3). Richard Rohr, in *Falling Upward: A Spirituality for the Two Halves of Life*, challenges the reader as he asks, “How much false self are you willing to shed to find your true self?” (Rohr 2011, 85). We need to grow deep in our relationship with God to uncover our true self. As we grow deep and uncover our true self, it will result in the experience of grow high, which will be discussed

later. If we grow deep in our relationship with God, we will become more like Christ as we no longer need to hide behind our false self. Uncovering our true self is a lifelong formation process, and its ultimate goal is conformity with Christ (Hernandez 2008, 50). Hernandez reminds the reader that “Your real...self...will not come as long as you are looking for it. It will come when you are looking for Him” (Hernandez 2008, 50). In other words, we can only recover our true self by seeking God. The spiritual disciplines discussed below are just a few of the many disciplines that can help us to seek God. Deciding on a spiritual discipline to practise can be a subjective experience pending on one’s comfort level and lifestyle. The disciplines that are discussed below are by no means more important or more effective than the others. They are the disciplines that I find helpful for my spiritual growth.

Grow Deep by Spiritual Disciplines

Spiritual disciplines create space for God in our lives. They create the space for us to grow deep by seeking God through contemplating his Word. They help us reflect on our spiritual journey and life experiences so that we can deny our false self and uncover our true self. Ken Shigematsu, in *Survival Guide for the Soul: How to Flourish Spirituality in a World that Pressures Us to Achieve*, shares his experience as he writes, “These life-giving habits leave me feeling less restless, more comfortable in my own skin” (Shigematsu 2018, 52). Spiritual disciplines are essential to grow deep as they awaken us to God’s presence and enable us “to live freely out of our new identity as beloved children of God” (Shigematsu 2018, 52). Spiritual disciplines connect us to our true identity that we

are the blessed children of God. Unfortunately, it is easy for us to forget God when we are usually busy and preoccupied. Spiritual disciplines “attune us to God’s presence, acting as sticky-note reminders that God is with us all the time” (Shigematsu 2018, 52). They are the sticky notes that remind us of God’s presence. The practices “attune us into the invisible waves of God’s loving presence in whom we live and move and have our being (Acts 17:28)” (Shigematsu 2018, 56). They foster a deeper relationship with God. Shigematsu also suggests that we need to embrace spiritual practices that are “consistent with the grain of our character” (Shigematsu 2018, 64). We may not have a good grasp of the spiritual practices at the beginning. However, these disciplines need to meet our deepest joy and our deepest needs in order to become sustainable and enjoyable practices eventually. The spiritual disciplines discussed below are the ones that I have embraced the most. *Lectio Divina* and spiritual direction have become my regular spiritual practices. The practice of silence and solitude also fits my character, and I am working on making it my spiritual habit too.

Lectio Divina

My house is situated across from a ravine through which a stream flows. The trees growing beside the ravine are stronger and lusher than the other trees on the street. They thrive and flourish because they are planted by a stream of water. This stream beneath the ravine, which nourishes the trees, reminds me of the Word of God, which nurtures the blessed one, who meditates on the Word day and night (Ps. 1:1-2). The lush and leafy trees also remind me of Psalm 1:3, which compares the blessed one to “a tree planted by the streams of water, which yields

its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers.” Wilhoit and Howard point out that the first Psalm offers “a radical way of addressing our deep thirst” (Wilhoit and Howard 2012, 16). Psalm 1 illustrates that blessed are those who refuse “to walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of the sinners or sit in the seat of mockers” (Ps. 1:1). Instead, the blessed simply plant themselves “near the law of the Lord to allow the deep, thirsty...lives to be habitually exposed to it” (Wilhoit and Howard 2012, 16). They focus their lives on putting down deep roots that can draw spiritual nourishment from the God’s Word. “One way of putting down those deep roots is to meditate on Scripture. How do we deal with our deepest thirst? We plant ourselves by the streams of living water. We meditate on Scripture” so that we can prosper like a tree without withering (Wilhoit and Howard 2012, 16). This is one of the many essential practices for spiritual formation.

Lectio Divina shapes my visible and invisible relationship with God, and my relationship with others. My soul is formed by reading and contemplating on God’s Word. The Word reminds me of who I am, which helps me grow deep as I reclaim my true self. It also tells me who Christ Jesus is, which helps me grow high as I strive to become more like him. It also reveals God’s expectations for me on earth, which helps me grow wide as I learn to love and serve others.

Lectio Divina is a type of formational reading. It focuses on “reading Scripture for spiritual formation through receptive openness to God’s loving call of grace” (Foster 2005, 1). In other words, *Lectio Divina* intends to form our soul by drawing us closer to God through his Word. It literally means divine or holy

reading. We read “with our mind and hearts open to God as if he were reading his words to us.” We are always ready to turn to him as we are reading and listening to him (Foster 2005, 1). *Lectio Divina* is the mutual communication between God and the reader through Scripture. God speaks to us first as “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (Jn. 1:1). *Lectio Divina* continues the conversation that God has begun. We need to respond to the conversation that God has started by reading and meditating on his Word, which heals, renews, and restores us.

The fundamental biblical basis for *Lectio Divina* is that Scripture is the Word of God as stated in 2 Timothy 3:16-17, which 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.” The word “God-breathed” means inspired by God. Stephen J. Binz, in *Conversing with God in Scripture*, explains that “inspired” literally means “breathed in” by God. He further explains that the breath of God, which is the Holy Spirit acting through the human authors, has made these biblical words the living Word of God (Binz 2008, 25). God, through the Holy Spirit, “inspires/breathes himself to humankind through the scriptures” (Wilhoit and Howard 2012, 35). God reveals Himself to us through Scripture, which is basically God’s word in human speech.

For centuries the two common terms, *revelation* and *inspiration*, have been used to describe the characteristics of Scripture. God chose to reveal himself to us through the Bible, which “manifests God’s life and will in a more specific,

verbal way. It is God's Word" (Wilhoit and Howard 2012, 35). However, God did not physically write the scriptures. Wilhoit and Howard further explain the process of inspiration, "whereby men and women moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God" as stated in 2 Peter 1:23 (Wilhoit and Howard 2012, 31). In other words, God provides humans with the guidance about the content of the Scripture and "yet allowing the personality and background of the writer to show through in the final work. This more closely resembles what we call inspiration" (Wilhoit and Howard 2012, 31). However, "...the inspiration of Scripture – as the expression of God – is special as the divine Spirit of God oversees this inspiration process such that the words and expression of Scripture are both naturally and authentically the words of the different writers and just what God wants to say" (Wilhoit 2012, 31). All in all, the Bible is a written document of intentional communication from God to human beings. The writers were inspired by the Holy Spirit to communicate what God wanted to say naturally and authentically.

Not only is Scripture inspired by God, but it also expresses God's Word for us when we read it. In *Reading with God: Lectio Divina*, David Foster explains:

This is absolutely fundamental - not only that the scriptures have been inspired by God, but also that they express for us, when we read them in faith, God's personal word of salvation. Only when we listen to the scriptures in faith, hope and love can we expect to hear God's addressing us. (Foster 2005, 5)

As a matter of fact, God intends to speak to us through the scriptures. *Lectio Divina* helps us tune in to a "divine wavelength" so that we can hear God's voice through the biblical texts (Foster 2005, 6). Since *Lectio Divina* is an interaction

between God's Word and the Christian reader, it is important to learn a little bit about the revelation aspect of Scripture.

Scripture is also a revelation from God through the human words to us (Wilhoit and Howard 2012, 31). God intentionally expresses His love and invites us into His love through the Bible. Wilhoit and Howard describe the Bible as God's divine love letter and a holy record of human relationship with God. The scriptures are a love letter from God to humanity as they reveal the heart of the sender. They are definitely "a window into the heart of God" (Wilhoit and Howard 2012, 32). Not only do they reveal the character of our beloved God, but they also reveal his plan and expectations for humanity. The delightful thought of the Bible being a love letter and an invitation to love, written directly from God to human beings, entices us to meditate on God's Word. We listen for God's voice through the words of the writers, who were inspired by the Holy Spirit. God loves humankind and chose to reveal himself to us through the scriptures. He wants to speak to us as he desires to be in close relationship with us. He loves to become our friend (Wilhoit 2012, 36). Therefore, God has chosen to reveal himself to us. In fact, the term "revelation" is derived from the Greek word *apocalypsis*, which means "uncovering." God has chosen to be uncovered for us so that we can see him and hear him, because he loves us. Moreover, the Bible, in addition to being a love letter, is also a sacred record of human experiences in encountering God. It is an invitation to love God, to grow in him, and to be transformed by him. Wilhoit and Howard conclude that the Bible is "Our longings," "Holy Scripture," and "New Life," since:

We long for living water, for truth, for transformation.
We immerse ourselves in the text of Scripture: reading,
meditating, praying, contemplating, and acting. As a result
of this practice, we receive life from God for ourselves and
for others. Our wants are remade and fulfilled. Our minds
are enlightened such that we are wiser than our elders.
Our lives begin more and more to exhibit the values
of our Creator. (Wilhoit 2012, 41)

Lectio Divina is a spiritual practice that helps us read, meditate, pray, and rest in
God's Word with the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Our inner self will be
transformed by God in the end.

Lectio Divina simply means "divine reading." David Foster explains that
"divine reading" means reading "with our minds and hearts open to God, as if
God were reading his words to us. While we are reading, we are always ready to
turn to him in prayer as we listen to him" (Foster 2005, 1). *Lectio divina* is an
organic and interactive approach for Scripture reading. It involves the interaction
or communication between the reader and God through the divine power of the
Spirit. Wilhoit and Howard describe *Lectio Divina* as "an encounter of three
elements: the inspired text of the Scripture, the Christian reader and the Holy
Spirit" (Wilhoit and Howard 2012, 44). The authors assert that "the Holy Spirit,
who inspired the text of scripture, also indwells the Christian reader. And the
presence of the living Holy Spirit makes all the difference" (Wilhoit and Howard
2012, 44). Christians must realize that we are not alone in the reading process.
The Spirit is whispering nearby as we read the love letters from God to us. The
authors also explain that *Lectio Divina* is not simply about interpreting a book.
They insist that "Rather it is an encounter between ourselves and with the Spirit of
Christ through the act of engaging with a book" (Wilhoit and Howard 2012, 45).

Since the Holy Spirit plays a significant role in facilitating the interaction between the reader and God during *Lectio Divina*, we also need to learn a little bit about the Holy Spirit.

Christians must remember that the “Holy Spirit is God, the third person of the Trinity” (Wilhoit and Howard 2012, 45). We must also acknowledge that “the work of God’s Spirit is an ongoing reality within the inspired books. The sacred texts remain inspired, they are always inspired; they are filled with the Spirit of God” (Binz 2008, 26). In other words, the Spirit, who inspired the authors of the books many centuries ago, is with us, and is speaking to us today through the books inspired by God. We trust that through the Holy Spirit, God addresses his word to us here and now. God’s Word is alive and has the power to transform us (Binz 2008, 27). Moreover, the Spirit is described as having a mind in Romans 8:27, which says, “And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God’s will.” Since the mind of the Spirit understands God’s will, it can intervene in human thoughts to make God’s will clear to us. Moreover, the Holy Spirit has emotions, as described in Ephesians 4:30, which says, “And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.” We can cause the Spirit to grieve by being malicious. Finally, the presence of the Holy Spirit is a defining feature of the Christian life, as we are often described as “receiving the Holy Spirit” or “born” of the Spirit. In fact, the Holy Spirit dwells within us. He is a divine personal force “particularly associated with communicating to us the heart and mind of God” (Binz 2008, 45). The presence of the Holy Spirit is

essential to *Lectio Divina* as it connects the reader with the heart and the mind of God.

Lectio Divina usually involves four steps, namely *lectio*, *meditatio*, *oratio* and *contemplatio*. *Lectio* is listening to God's Word and allowing ourselves to be drawn to the word or phrase that grabs our attention. *Meditatio* is to listen again to God's Word and opening ourselves to receive the essence of God's message to us. It can also be an invitation into a deeper understanding of our relationship with God. *Oratio* is our response to God in silence or by writing and by expressing our thoughts, feelings, and desires about the meaning of the message. *Contemplatio* is resting in God during the experience by opening ourselves to contemplate what God has stirred in us (Phillips 2015, 226). *Lectio Divina* is a spiritual practice that can transform the invisible inner self as we can usually discern God's will and hear his voice through the process.

Spiritual Direction

Christ Jesus became a human companion to communicate God's divine will to us (Fryling 2013, 15). In fact, Jesus told his disciples that he was their friend in John 15:15. When he was on earth, Jesus offered spiritual guidance to those who seek God, and to those who are willing to be transformed. Alice Fryling, in *Seeking God Together: An Introduction to Group Spiritual Direction*, asserts that "God is a friend. Spiritual friendship, human and divine, is clearly God's idea and God's desire for us" (Fryling 2013, 15). God intends for us to have spiritual companions throughout the soul journey. Spiritual direction is sometimes called soul friendship because it is a relationship where the soul

speaks, listens, and receives (Fryling 2013, 17). During spiritual direction, God, together with the Holy Spirit, is the actual director, while the spiritual director plays the role of a spiritual companion to the directee. Spiritual direction takes place when two people meet in the presence of the Holy Spirit, and seek God's direction, focusing on one of their lives. Both participants must remember that "The most important part is what goes on between the directee and the Spirit of God" (Fryling 2013, 19). In spiritual direction, the director accompanies and supports the directee to discern God's will in the presence of the Holy Spirit, so that healing and renewal can occur.

Spiritual direction is not a special ministry for those experiencing crises. It is a necessity for all leaders. Morris Dirks, in *Forming the Leader's Soul: An Invitation to Spiritual Direction*, writes, "I don't think spiritual direction is a specialized ministry for persons facing unique situations. I believe every leader needs a soul friend" (Dirks 2013, 5). Dirks further emphasizes that spiritual direction is not optional for church leaders as many of them are unable to sustain the increasing challenges in the complicated world of ministry (Dirks 2013, 9). Spiritual direction is crucial to the well-being of church leaders today as they face a world of unreal responsibilities. It is a non-negotiable component of one's spiritual journey to develop a deeper relationship with God. Fryling reminds us that "God is a friend" (Fryling 2013, 15). Therefore, spiritual friendship, human and divine, is God's desire for us. In short, "soul friends" are a necessity for the forming of our souls to become more like Christ Jesus. God intends for our spiritual journey to be a communal one, not a lonely process. Not only do our

spiritual companions share our joy and pain, but they also help us listen to God's voice and read the signposts along the way. They can also validate God's will for us. Spiritual direction is an experience of receiving God's love and grace so that we can extend his love and grace to others.

I agree with Fryling that spiritual direction is a non-negotiable component of spiritual formation. The meetings with my spiritual director are joyful and affirming experiences. They are joyful as I usually feel inspired and relieved at the end of most sessions. Spiritual direction manages to address the issues hidden in my most inner world. By the power of the Holy Spirit, I can usually see beneath the tip of the iceberg and get closer to the source of the issues. The closing prayers are usually accompanied by tears of joy and a sense of comfort. There is also a sense of healing at the end of most sessions. Together with the Holy Spirit and my spiritual director, I try to discern God's plan for my life. We usually come up with a few small things that I should work on until the next session. Spiritual direction is a formational and healing experience for me. It helps me go deep into my inner self so that I can examine it with the help of the Holy Spirit and my spiritual director.

Silence and Solitude

Silence and solitude are "an invitation to enter more deeply into the intimacy of relationship with the One who waits just outside the noise and busyness of our lives" (Barton and Willard 2010, 12). We need silence and solitude in order to hear what God is saying to us and to the world amid our busyness. In *Sacred Ways: Spiritual Practices for Everyday Life*, Tony Jones uses

the analogy of listening to a friend to illustrate the importance of silence and solitude as he writes:

It's like being on a phone with a friend who has something important to tell me. I will move out of the noisy room where the TV is on and the vacuum is running and shut myself in a closet so I can hear what my friend is saying. That's the kind of attentive listening silence and solitude engender. (Jones 2005, 40)

Silence and solitude create the opportunity for us to hear the still quiet voice of the Holy Spirit. The tradition of silence and solitude goes back at least as far as Jesus. Jesus spent 40 days in the wilderness outside of Jerusalem to prepare for his ministry. He was in silence and solitude, talking only to *Abba*, his heavenly father, and finally defeating Satan. In fact, Jesus developed the habit of withdrawing to "the hills" or "a lonely place" or "the wilderness" or "a high mountain" or the Garden of Gethsemane, in order to be with God before he set off for his many missions on earth. Jesus spent an ample amount of time in silence and solitude "before he chose his disciples, after he heard of his cousin John's beheading, after feeding the 5000, after healing a leper, before his transfiguration, and of course, to prepare for his passion" (Jones 2005, 40). Not only is Jesus' practice of silence and solitude an example for the desert fathers and mothers to follow centuries later, but it is also an example for Christians to follow today.

The reason for Christians to seek silence and solitude is like that of Jesus. We need to be able to hear God. John Climacus, a Desert Father wrote, "The lover of silence draws close to God. He talks to him in secret and God enlightens him" (Jones 2005, 41). Silence and solitude open our ears and help us hear God's voice through the Holy Spirit. As a matter of fact, Kang reminds us that "our souls

thrive on silence. When does our spirituality build a deeper root system? When we make space for silence” (Kang 2007, 106). He further explains that silence enriches our souls, which revel and grow in solitude (Kang 2007, 107). There are a lot of living things around us that grow in silence, and trees are typical examples. The maple tree in front of my house has been growing silently for thirty years. Its roots have grown deeper without making a sound. Silence and solitude help to immerse us deeply in God’s presence. This habit also helps us to nourish meditation on the Word so that we can digest it better for the wellness of our souls (Kang 2007, 107).

“Our society is not a community radiant with the love of Christ, but a dangerous network of domination and manipulation in which we can easily get entangled and lose our soul” (Nouwen 2009, 4). As our souls are entangled in our society, we need to return to God for deliverance through silence and solitude. Silence and solitude give us the space to reconnect with God as we pause, think, and reflect. It is only through God that we can be liberated from being entangled in the fallen society. Another benefit for the practice of silence and solitude is “to discover what we can learn from ourselves when we turn off the external stimuli that are so much a part of our world” (Jones 2005, 41). It is an essential practice to help us uncover our real self buried deep inside as we learn more about ourselves. We can recover our identity as “beings” loved by God and not as “doers” enslaved by the world. The purpose of silence and solitude is to “Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him” as mentioned in Psalm 37:7 (Jones 2005, 42). For many people, the practice of silence and solitude may be scary

and lonely to begin with. However, it will turn into peace and joy if we persevere along the way. It will bring a new sense of freedom to our busy lives.

Markers of Grow Deep: Invisible Relationship with God

The markers of Grow Deep, Grow High, Grow Wide can be found throughout the Bible. This is by no means a thorough list of markers. However, they do offer some areas for us to reflect on our invisible and visible relationships with God, and our relationship with others. This section focuses on five markers of Grow Deep, which can be the outcomes of the spiritual disciplines formerly discussed. However, Grow Deep is difficult to measure as the process and its outcomes are usually intangible. Therefore, the implications of these markers tend to be subjective. The first sign is the love for God's word as described in Psalm 119: 47-48, which says, "for I delight in your commands because I love them. I reach out for your commands, which I love, that I may meditate on your decree." The second marker is obedience to God's word as described in 1 John 2:5, which says, "But if anyone obeys his word, love for God is truly made complete in them. This is how we know we are in him." Obedience to God's word helps us abide in God's love. The third marker is praying faithfully as described in Roman 12:12, which says, "Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer." Constant prayer is a spiritual routine for growing deep. The fourth marker is trusting in God as described in Psalm 37:3, which says. "Trust in the Lord and do good, dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture." Our trust in God reflects our close relationship with him. The fifth marker is thinking about godly things as described in Philippians 4:8, which says, "Finally; brothers and sisters, whatever is true,

whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lively, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things.” I will be referring to the markers of the three movements in the following chapters as I reflect on my own spiritual journey and my research project.

Grow High: Visible Relationship with God

A good tree grows high and yields good fruits, which are visible to the external world. This image is affirmed by Matthew 7:17, which says, “Likewise, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit.” Good fruits are the results of good roots digging deep into the soil. An example of good fruits is the fruit of the Holy Spirit as described in Galatians 5:22-23, which says, “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Against such things there is no law.” These qualities are noticeable and can make an impact on the lives of others. They can also help people to be “prepared for and capable of responding to the situations of life in ways that are good and right” (Willard 2002, 173). The fruit of the Spirit helps us manage and overcome life challenges with God’s goodness and grace so that God’s power can be proclaimed in the end. All in all, “God desires fruitful Christians, not highly achieved or financially successful Christians,” as he wants us to “bear witness to his grace in the world” (Kang 2007, Ch. 35). In addition, a good fruit also reflects the image of God on earth. It proclaims God’s good and perfect character. As we continue to grow high to yield the fruit of the

Spirit, we will become more like Christ Jesus. We will continue to move toward the goal of *Imago Dei*, which will also be discussed in this section.

The Fruit of the Spirit

One can argue that the development of the fruit of the Spirit can also be seen in Grow Wide due to the organic fluidity of this model. The fruit of the Spirit can fit in both sections of Grow High and Grow Wide. It is placed in the section of Grow High to illustrate the visible and the invisible thrusts of the spiritual formation model. The invisible thrust moves downward beneath the soil while the visible thrust moves upward above the soil. Grow High is a result of Grow Deep as echoed in Isaiah 37:31, which says, “Once more a remnant of the kingdom of Judah will take root below and bear fruit above.” The fruit of the Spirit is placed in the section of Grow High to explore our visible relationship with God for the purpose of this model.

Much of our spiritual development is invisible, especially with respect to the Holy Spirit and the soul, and the relationship between them. However, we can see the impact of the work of the Spirit in our lives and in our world. “In cultivation terms, we look for the fruit of spiritual experience while knowing that the Spirit is also at work in ways beyond our ken, in the soil of our lives” (Phillips 2015, 193). Although we cannot see the Holy Spirit, we can witness and taste the fruit he bears in our lives through our spiritual experiences. The word *fruit* comes from the Latin word *frui*, which means “to enjoy.” Therefore, the cultivation of spiritual fruit is about receiving joy. From an agricultural perspective, the fruit of

a plant is usually the part that we enjoy the most. It reflects the commitment and the effort of the cultivator.

To grow high and to become Christ-like is like planting trees beside a stream of water (Ps. 1:3). Not only will the trees bear fruit, but they will also not wither. Christians are like the trees described in Psalm 1. They need to “grow high” and bear fruit by extending their roots deep into the “life-giving elements” in the water (Phillips 2015, 193). People will see the fruits that they bear.

Christians, who are transformed by God, are like the mature fruit bearing trees. Not only are the fruits delightful, but they are also examples of God’s wonderful work. In *The Cultivated Life: From Ceaseless Striving to Receiving Joy*, Susan S.

Phillips asserts that:

The upward thrust into visible fruit is a joyful manifestation of the gift we receive. We see this in the lives of people who are sustained by God’s grace as they work to help the people of the world; skillfully and lovingly care for others; creatively and diligently apply their resources and energies for the world’s benefit, and pray when in the desert of the belly of a whale. (Phillips 2015, 203)

The spiritually formed Christians exemplify the fruit of the Holy Spirit as they grow high. In fact, “participation in the life of Christ, by the Spirit, reproduces the character of Christ in his followers. The distinctive virtues of Christian faith are the fruit of the Spirit: ‘love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control’ (Gal. 5:22-23)” (Greenman & Kalantzis 2010, 26). As Christians mature and bear the fruit of the Spirit, they are ready to make the world a better place for the kingdom of God.

The *Imago Dei*

Christopher Wright, in *Cultivation the Fruit of the Spirit: Growing*

Christlikeness, explains,

Why does a tree bear fruit? Not because there is some law of nature that says it must. But simply because of the life within it, rising up from the soil and water that feeds its roots and flowing the sap through every branch and twig. A tree does not bear fruit by keeping the laws of nature ... by simply because it is a living tree, being and doing what a tree is and does when it is alive (Wright 2017, 21).

He further explains that the list of virtues encompassed by the Fruit of the Spirit describes “the qualities that God himself will produce in a person’s everyday, ordinary human life because the life of God (by his Spirit) will bear fruit in the tree of a person’s life, simply because this is what God is like and this is what God produces” (Wright 2017, 22). The Spirit of God will make the life of Christ grow in a person’s life, so that they become more and more like Christ. As a result, the *Imago Dei*, which is Christ likeness or the image of God, is formed in the person.

We need the desire to grow high and to become like Christ Jesus. *Imago Dei* reflects “humankind’s capacity for...becoming further restored into God’s image through the sanctification process as not only a present reality but also a divine goal and destiny” (Chandler 2014, 33). We are designed by God to have the capacity to be transformed to become more Christ-like by his power. *Imago Dei* is “a divinely given goal or destiny that anticipates present transformation for future eschatological fulfillment” (Chandler 2014, 37). Christians have the potential to reach the destiny of *Imago Dei* through spiritual formation. Our ultimate life purpose is to be conformed to the image of God and to the character

of Christ Jesus. Not only is it a work in progress, but it can also be a painful process. The carving and shaping of the soul can be painful for a moment, but the joy and peace in the end is everlasting. Chandler explains that the word *transformed* (Gk. *Metamorphoo*) is made up of two Greek words: *meta*, meaning “with,” “among,” or “after,” and *morphe*, meaning ‘form’ (Chandler 2014, 37). Therefore, to be transformed into Christlikeness means to be changed into another form, which is the form of Christ, with his attributes and character. The mission of Christ is the ultimate fulfillment of *Imago Dei* as our fractured identities are restored in fullness through Christ the Saviour (Jn. 1:12) and God’s abundant grace (Eph. 1: 6-8) (Chandler 2014, 38). We need to strive to grow high in order to bear the fruit of the Spirit, and to develop the *Imago Dei* that God intends for us at the beginning.

The more fruit of the Spirit we bear, the more we will be like Christ Jesus.

In the beginning, we were made in the image of God as described in Genesis 1:26-27, which says:

Then God said, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground. So, God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

We were made in God’s image to govern the earth and all the living creatures created by God. We are not the products of a random venture but the demonstration of God’s loving goodness. “Christians are Christ-people. Christ is our context, our aim, our means, and (through the Spirit) our agent” (Howard 2018, 19). We were saved by Christ and belong to God. Diane Chandler, in

Christian Spiritual Formation: An Integrated Approach for Personal and Relational Wholeness, declares, “God, as originator of life, spoke creation into existence” (Chandler 2014, 29). Not only did God create Adam from the dust of the ground, but he also “breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being” (Gen. 2:7). Although all creation has its origin from God, only humankind is made in the image of God as they receive the breath of life from God (Chandler 2014, 29). Among all his creation, God is most fond of human beings. We are precious and special in his eyes.

We were created in the image of God. Some linguistics analysts think that “the words *image* and *likeness* make little distinction between the terms but rather reinforces the parallelism” (Chandler 2014, 30). In other words, the words *image* and *likeness* reinforce each other, which implies that Scripture does not use the two words as “technically distinct expressions” (Chandler 2014, 30). However, some theologians notice a slight difference between the two words. The Hebrew word for *image* (*tselem*) derives from the root word that means “to carve” or “to cut.” Thus, *image* can imply a carved likeness of the original piece. The Hebrew word for *likeness* (*demut*) derives from the root word that means “to be like” (Chandler 2014, 30). Despite the nuance between the perspectives of the linguists and theologians, human beings are made to be like God, and can be carved to conform to the image of God, which is a visible result of spiritual formation.

Chandler explores what this image and likeness generally comprise. First, human beings are like God “in that they are God’s representatives on earth, having been made in God’s image (Gen. 1:26-27)” (Chandler 2014, 31). We need

to grow high to bear good fruit in order to grow wide and be good representatives of God on earth. A representative is usually a visible person chosen by those they serve or represent. Thus, a representative for God is usually a visible person chosen by God to represent him on earth. We need to be visible to represent God on earth, regardless of our giftings and abilities, since God can shape the despised and the meek to represent him. Not only is this a noble calling, but it is also a visible position, as we represent God as his royal priests, a holy nation and a people belonging to God on earth (1 Pet. 2:9). Second, human beings “are like God in having dominion over the earth (Gen. 1:26, 28-30)” (Chandler 2014, 31). God appointed us to govern other creatures on earth as his good stewards. Unfortunately, most of us are not good stewards as we ruin the earth with our unsatisfiable greed and our foolish desires. Third, human beings “are like God in that being created in God’s image entails being male and female, capable of companionship and procreation as social beings (Gen 1:27; 2:23-24)” (Chandler 2014, 31). Fourth, human beings in the image or likeness of God “implies the capacity for relationship with and responsiveness to God (cf. Gen. 2:15; 3: 8-13)” (Chandler 2014, 31). When God created the world, he gave human beings the capacity to develop an everlasting relationship with him. This capacity also reminds us that God is a relational being. He loves us first, and he enjoys our companionship. We can always delight ourselves in God since he blessed us with the capacity to do so.

As the *Imago Dei* is formed in us, the bondage with our false self is broken. We do not need to hide behind our false self anymore as we are restored

into God's image. We regain the freedom to reveal our true self to the world. Grow Deep restores our invisible relationship with God as we abandon our false self so that we can live out our true self in Grow High, which is a visible sign of our relationship with God.

Markers of Grow High: Visible Relationship with God

This section focuses on five markers of Grow High. The visible markers are usually noticed by the Christian being formed spiritually and by the people around him or her. The Christian being formed and those around him or her will notice the change in character and/or behaviour of the Christian. The Christian may also notice the changes through self reflection and self examen. The changes are not human accomplishments as they are the results of spiritual formation. However, one should note that changes may not be apparent if a Christian happens to be in a desert place spiritually or in the dark night of the soul. There tends to be little or no fruit unfortunately. Therefore, the markers discussed below do not represent the experiences of all Christians and does not intend to generalize Christian experiences. The first marker is to be gentle and humble in heart as described in Matthew 11: 29, which says, "Take my yoke and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls." If we want to become more like Christ, we need to learn from Jesus. The more we learn from Jesus, the more we can uncover the true self. In the end, we do not need to hide behind the pride of the false self and will become humble people. The second is to be contented as described in Hebrew 13:5, which says, "Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have because God has said,

‘Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.’” The third is to be self reflective as illustrated in Matthew 7:3, which says, “Why do you look at the sawdust in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye?” Being self reflective creates the willingness and the courage to be formed. The fourth is not to be self seeking as instructed by Philippians 2:4, which says, “not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of others.” The fifth marker is to be steadfast and unwavering as illustrated in 2 Chronicles 15:5, which says, “But as for you, be strong and do not give up, for your work will be rewarded.” These five markers are some of the characters that Christian may develop as God shape them to become more like Christ. It is by no means a thorough list or a generalization for Christian character formation.

Grow Wide: Relationship with Others

As the roots grow deeper into the soil, the tree grows higher and wider. As the tree grows higher and wider, it absorbs more sunlight to nurture the roots so that they can grow even deeper. Grow Deep, Grow High, Grow Wide are three distinct but related processes, which support each other. Boa stresses that “Nurturing spirituality is centered on cultivating a lifestyle of evangelism and discipleship so that we are part of the process of introducing people to Jesus and assisting them in their spiritual growth after they have come to know him” (Boa 2001, 456). Nurturing spirituality involves sharing the gospel (Mt. 24:14) and making disciples (Mt. 28:19), which are the visible outcomes of spiritual formation. It is God’s desire to heal and redeem humanity as mentioned in John 3:16-17, which says, “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only

Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his son into the world to condemn the world. But to save the world through him”.

In addition to salvation, it is also God’s purpose to shape and reshape his children so that they can make disciples on earth. Christians are expected to extend the redemption narrative through the Great Commission and the Great Commandment. We are called to extend Abraham’s vocation to bless all nations. We need to grow wide by stretching ourselves and by opening our arms wide to welcome the outside world to our churches. We need to grow wide by helping believers to become disciples of Jesus. We need to grow wide to live out our servanthood for God by making disciples and by serving the church and community. These are the external and visible outcomes of my spiritual formation model. Jesus exemplified servanthood with God when he was living on earth. In *Full Service: Moving from Self-Serve Christianity to Total Servanthood*, Siang-Yang Tan explains that “servanthood is serving Jesus, or serving with Jesus” (Tan 2006, 2). It involves being a servant with Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. God’s servants abide in Christ (Grow Deep), follow him in “loving humility and caring compassion,” (Grow High) to serve the people we serve, (Grow Wide) as servants of Christ (Tan 2006, 3). This section discusses the movement of Grow Wide in the formation model, with a focus on making disciples and serving Church and the community. It is about planting an orchard for God, and how to be effective workers in that orchard.

Grow Wide through Discipleship

According to Boa, the discipleship process involves three primary dynamics. These are exposing, equipping, and encouraging/exhorting. Exposing focuses on the example and the character of the discipler, equipping focuses on teaching and training, and encouraging/exhorting focuses on the accountability and character of the disciple, as illustrated in the table below:

Table 1: Nurturing Spirituality (Boa 2001, 378)

Exposing	Equipping		Encouraging and Exhorting
Example (Modeling)	Teaching	Training	Obedience and Accountability
	Thinking	Habits	
	Theory	Technique	
	Truth	Skills	
	Principles	Practice	
Being (Discipler)	Knowing	Doing	Being (Disciple)
Character	Conviction	Conduct	Character
Heart	Head	Hands	Heart

Most elements of these dynamics involve human interaction. Thus, they are the visible elements of spiritual formation. They are the results of Grow Deep and Grow High, which in return will benefit the three movements of the formation model. It is important to note that these dynamics are concurrent and not necessarily chronological (Boa 2001, 377).

Exposing

We must be disciples first before we can become disciplers. When the disciplers grow in maturity and in the grace and in the truth of Christ Jesus, “they also grow in authenticity and personal authority. Their holy aspiration and personal passion become contagious as they make discipleship attractive” (Boa 2001, 378). They grow deep as they are shaped to live out their true self. They grow high as they develop the godly character to become more like Christ. As a result, the disciplers become examples or role models for disciples. When disciples struggle in their spiritual journey, “Exposure to people who exhibit a radiant walk with God is a powerful impetus in the life of a disciple, because this provides a tangible demonstration of the relevance of biblical truth to daily endeavor” (Boa 2001, 378). Disciples need the exposure to the disciplers, who experienced Grow Deep, Grow High, Grow Wide, to support them through the spiritual journey.

Equipping

Equipping involves both teaching and training in the discipleship process, and it encompasses more than imparting knowledge (teaching) or developing skills (training). In fact, the purpose of equipping is to show disciples “how to learn and applying the Word in such a way that the truth is understood and integrated in the context of everyday life” (Boa 2001, 379). Jesus expects his disciples to live out God’s word (Jm. 1:22) Disciples need to first understand, and then live out, biblical truth in their daily lives. This process of equipping involves theory and techniques, principles and practice, and knowing and doing. In the end,

it moves convictions into conduct as guided by the conversation between the head and the hand.

Encouraging and Exhorting

The third dynamic in the discipleship process is about the heart and the character of the disciples. The formation of the heart can be part of Grow Deep, and the formation of godly character can be part of Grow High and/or Grow Wide. Spiritual transformation requires a person to be receptive and responsive to “the humility of a teachable spirit and a willingness to respond to teaching, reproof, correction, and training in righteousness (2 Tim. 3:16)” (Boa 2001, 381). It is the transformation of the whole person of the disciple through the sincere and authentic relationship with the discipler in partnership with God and the Holy Spirit. Both the disciple and the discipler need to be FAT (faithful, available, teachable), and HOT (honest, open, transparent), which are some character traits to develop as they grow deep, grow high and grow wide (Boa 2001, 378). For most people, these attributes are not easy to develop, as they contradict the autonomy and the individualism promoted in the North American culture. The discipler should develop an atmosphere in which obedience and submission to the sovereignty of God is cultivated, as the purpose of discipleship is the total commitment to the person of Jesus (Mt. 22:37). This commitment is also non-negotiable as it calls for personal dedication and self-denial. Therefore, both the discipler and the disciple are accountable to God, the master of the formation process. Discipleship is a spiritual process that forms the discipler and the disciple. Both will grow deep as they renew their relationships with God, grow

high as their character are shaped to become more like Christ, and grow wide as they learn to serve others.

Grow Wide with the Church

The church is a manifestation of the body of Christ as described in Romans 12: 4-5, which says, “For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many form one body, and each member belongs to all others”. It is a community of believers sharing one God, one Christ and one Spirit. It is a community that exemplifies God’s love through its people and its ministry. Hernandez emphasizes that “true spiritual ministry is centered on the existential reality of community life” (Hernandez 2008, 4). Thus, the purpose of spiritual formation is not only for the transformation of one’s inner self, but it also extends wide into one’s community. Henri Nouwen perceives “growing wide” as reaching out to the community through a “multitasking” style of doing ministry, which “holds a special appeal for today’s generation. It values integration and multidimensionality in ministry” (Hernandez 2008, 5).

Gary V. Nelson, in *Borderland Churches: A Congregation’s Introduction to Missional Living*, echoes Henri Nouwen’s perspective, but focuses more on the Canadian churches and their social context. He warns that the marginalization of the church is taking place south of the Canadian border, “but in Canada, it is already woven into the fabric of society. Canadians are not angry at the church – they simply do not care about it” (Nelson 2008, 3). Sadly, Canadians seem to be indifferent about the church. Although over 80% of Canadians are spiritual in

their searching and say that they believe in God, almost the same percentage of people admit that they do not believe in the church (Nelson 2008, 3). Nelson concludes that Canada is “a country of genuine spiritual inquiry and religious institutional rejection all wrapped up into one.” (Nelson 2008, 3). Canada is an interesting place for Christians to live, as what and how we live as a church is being challenged.

In response to the challenge, Nelson shares his ministry vision of “taking the church into streets, neighbourhoods, and workplaces,” as he asserts “that we must move from ‘come to’ to ‘go to’ models of being church” (Nelson 2008, 4). Instead of inviting people to come to the church, Nelson suggests bringing the church to their neighbourhoods, which is an invitation for Christians to grow wide. Not only do we need to proclaim the gospel to our neighbours, but we also need to live out the fruit of the Spirit and the core Christian values within our neighbourhoods. We need to stretch ourselves to reach every corner of our neighbourhood in order to be the witnesses of God’s compassion. Not only does Nelson call for an attitudinal change in most churches, but he also urges Christians to embrace this inconvenient ministry. He is asking Christians to leave their comfort zones, culture, and convenience to reach out to their neighbours, so the church and its believers can grow wide. Moreover, Nelson explains that the nature of the church should be a congregation of Christ followers, who are not simply a “called together” people but also a “called out” people (Nelson 2008, 5). He reminds us that “Missionary life is full of inconvenience and discomfort. It will require that we work outside of ourselves. It will require that we substitute

‘that which is comfortable to us’ for ‘that which will be comfortable for you’” (Nelson 2008, 5). In order to spread the good news to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8), we may need to part with the model of the traditional church. We probably need to be creative, leave our comfort zones, and take the cross and the church to where our neighbours live. We need to share our neighbours’ sufferings because of the cross, and to give them peace and joy by bringing them the church. We will have to speak their languages, enjoy their foods, and learn their cultures. All in all, it must be a multidimensional, multilingual, and multidisciplinary ministry as we bring the cross and the church to our neighbours.

However, we need to develop a good understanding of the transformation roles of the church and its support before we can take the church to our neighbourhoods. “There is a considerable number of spiritual writers who say that the priority of religious life today is the witness to community life. ... Christian faith can create communities in which peace, justice, love and true brotherhood and sisterhood are not just empty words but lived realities...” (Fuellenbach 2002, 137). These communities, supported by the church, bring people hope as they serve as the visible and tangible reminders of the final perfect community that God intends for humanity. With the reconciling power of the Holy Spirit, these communities also reveal “the unity and harmony that are to find their fullness at the end of time” (Fuellenbach 2002, 137). Moreover, as illustrated in Ephesians 4:1-16, the church is a dynamic structure that provided believers with access to God and restored their relationship with one another. It is “a natural consequence or result of God’s eternal plan for the church to have freedom to speak the gospel

(Eph. 3:11-12)...The focus is on the relationship of believers to the world and to Jesus Christ” (Lotter & Van Aarde, 8). The church is a catalyst for the transformation of society. Its presence is crucial for building relationships and communities, which are the visible outcomes of Grow Wide. The discussion below intends to define the church through its transformational role in society, with a focus on community service and hospitality.

The Church as Community Service

The Greek term *Diakonia* (διακονία) occurs thirty-two times in the New Testament. *Diakonia* means service or ministry with a particular focus on charitable service. It carries “the idea of giving aid and support to the needy ones” (Ayuch 2018, 6). It also implies the service of God as a ministry, which is always related to the community. It is an essential component of Grow Wide, as the tree provides fruit to feed the hungry, and shade to rest the weary. It stresses the importance of doing good deeds in addition to preaching God’s Word, as the fundamental function of the church. In fact, “Preaching the Word is a service as much as attending the tables of the poor is...There is no dichotomy between both services” (Ayuch 2018, 6). Furthermore, in Luke 10:25-37, Jesus illustrated the importance of supporting the needy through the Parable of the Good Samaritan, as he instructs the lawyer to “love your neighbor as yourself,” which is the second greatest commandment. This expectation of caring for the needy was further fulfilled by the early Christians as they practiced charitable relief to such an extent “that there were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales” (Acts

4:34). In the name of *Diankonía*, the Apostles took care of the sick ones and even raised the dead (Ayuch 2018, 6).

Furthermore, the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ Jesus resulted in the reconciliation between God and humanity. It brought the kingdom of God to earth. The kingdom of God is characterized by “abstract values such as justice, reconciliation, and affluence,” as illustrated by Avery Cardinal Dulles in *Models of the Church* (Dulles 2002, 94). Thus, preaching and sharing should be the core ministries of the church, and they cannot be separated from each other. With the support of the church, we should spread our wings wide to proclaim the gospel, to provide for the needy and to heal the wounded. These are the visible outcomes of spiritual formation, which in turn will help us grow deeper in God’s love and yield higher in the fruit of the Spirit.

A contemporary example of *Diakonia* regarding charitable relief and support for the poor can be found among the contributions of the Nigerian churches in the transformation of their society. In “The Church as a Catalyst for Transformation in the Society” published by HTS Theological Studies/Theological Studies, Solomon O. Akanbi argues that:

the assumption that religion in modern societies would gradually diminish in importance or become less capable of influencing public life is now becoming a matter of dispute and that Christian doctrine and practices could be earnest and integrated into the developmental process with a bid to enhancing the livelihood of Nigerian citizens.
(Akanbi & Beyer, 4)

In Nigeria, the Pentecostal movement, through their engagement in public and civic activities, have moved their communities forward by establishing

rehabilitation centres, hospitals, and youth empowerment programs. In addition, some of the Pentecostal churches also created a project entitled “rescue, rehabilitation and reconciliation,” which focused on “individual and social transformation in Nigerian Pentecostal spirituality” (Akanbi & Beyer, 4). Moreover, the Pentecostal churches also established schools and other educational institutions to nurture the youth in order to extend the transformation of value systems and worldviews to future generations (Akanbi & Beyer, 4). In summary, the churches and religious institutions in Africa will continue to play an important role in influencing and in improving “the social-political and economic life of the people within their community” (Akanbi & Beyer, 7). These African churches grew wide through community services as they extended themselves to different public and civic sectors to care for the needy.

The Church as Hospitality

The hope of the church is rooted in “Jesus’s resurrection and that reaches out to anticipate God’s new creation in all its fullness” (Wright 2008, 270). As mentioned in 1 Peter 1:3, God in his great mercy has “caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Christ Jesus from the dead.” As a result, “a new reality has opened up in the world, a new kind of life both inward and importantly outward in holiness and in the hope of our own resurrection” (Wright 2008, 271). Love is an important inward element required to live out holiness, as mentioned in Corinthians 13:1-3, which says:

If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but

do not have love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

Love is the most important attribute that we need to develop as we live out holiness. Love is needed to restore God's new creation and new order to its fullness among humanity. Not only is love the driving force for community service, but it is also the powerhouse for hospitality. Without love, we cannot be joyful givers. Without love, we cannot grow wide by serving our neighbours. However, with love, the truth of the resurrection can be manifested through hospitality.

The New Testament is a narration of hospitality. A community that supports the needy and the poor and opens its door to all people regardless of their backgrounds is a community of hospitality to everyone. "The New Testament has two relevant words related to hospitality: the noun 'hospitality' (Φιλοξενία, Rm 12:13; Hb 13:2) and the verb 'to show hospitality or to lodge' (ξενοδοχέω 1Tim 5:10)" (Ayuch 2018, 10). These texts describe the practice of offering shelter and food to strangers. The Apostle Paul explicitly reminds Christian to "share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality" (Rm. 12:13). In addition, the book of Acts is full of examples of hospitality as practised by the early church. In fact, "Without hospitality St. Paul would have never been able to move between towns, regions and even continents" (Ayuch 2018, 10). For instance, an example of hospitality can be found in Acts 12: 11-14, when the angel took Peter to the house of Mary, the mother of John Mark, to find a shelter after Peter was released from the prison. In summary, the book of Acts is a comprehensive account for the

practice of hospitality, which sustained the early church. Although the examples above refer to food and shelter, one should remember that hospitality encompasses more than the examples given above.

In addition to fostering spiritual formation at a personal level, the church is a catalyst for the transformation of society. Its presence is essential to building relationships and communities. Through transforming the community, Christians will Grow Deep, Grow High, Grow Wide as God shapes the community, which in return will shape the church and its people. “It is possible to describe Christianity in one word, and ‘change’ could well be that word” (Oliver, Tsabele, Baartman, Masooa & Laister, 1). The church can change the community and vice versa. The Bible, especially the New Testament, “provides evidence of radical changes that took place in the lives of people and society due to the preaching and ministry of Jesus Christ” (Oliver, Tsabele, Baartman, Masooa & Laister, 2). Jesus did not intend to preach about the church, but to preach about the kingdom of God, as stated in Mark 1:15, which says, “The time has come...The Kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!” A person who repents and believes in the good news will also inherit the kingdom of God, which is a new world order (Boff 1986, 51). The church has been able to sustain, to adapt and to transform communities throughout history in order to remind humanity of the perfect new world that God intends for them. The church is “ever old and ever new, it has never lost its identity” (Boff 1986, 60). Thus, we must continue to learn from the church and work with the church to Grow Wide by serving God’s kingdom on earth.

Markers of Grow Wide: Relationship with Others

This section focuses on five markers of Grow Wide. These markers remind us to extend Christ mission of earth. The first marker is to make disciples as mentioned in Matthew 28:18-20, which says, “Then Jesus came and said to them, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations.’” The second marker is to love others as instructed by Mark 12:31, which says, “The second is this: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’ There is no commandment greater than these.” The third is to do good as illustrated in Matthew 5:16, which says, “In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.” The fourth is to do justice as explained in Micah 6:8, which says, “He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.” The fifth marker is to practice hospitality as instructed in Romans 12:13, which says, “Share with the Lord’s people who are in need. Practice hospitality.” These markers help us to reflect on our participation in Christ mission on earth. Although they are by no means a thorough list or a generalization of Christian experiences, they offer some areas for us to reflect on our relationship with others.

Conclusion

The model Grow Deep, Grow High, Grow Wide presented in this chapter is by no means an ultimate or a perfect model for spiritual formation. It might even be lacking in discussing the roles of motivation and suffering with respect to spiritual formation. The incentives for spiritual formation and the growing pains

during the formation process also need to be explored further. I am aware of the shortfalls, but it is not within the scope of this portfolio to explore them. This chapter discussed a spiritual formation model based on three movements, Grow Deep, Grow High and Grow Wide. The model is represented by a tree with deep roots, lush leaves, strong branches, and ripe fruits. The movement of Grow Deep refers to our invisible relationship with God. The movement of Grow High refers to our visible relationship with God. The movement of Grow Wide refers to our relationship with others. The model is fluid as the three movements cannot be totally separated since they support each other and happen simultaneously for the tree to grow well. Spiritual formation begins with God's grace as we are transformed to become more like Christ Jesus in order to live out God's purposes for us on earth. Spiritual formation does not happen overnight as God continues to shape and reshape us through our life journey with him. My spiritual formation model of Grow Deep, Grow High, Grow Wide explores the invisible formation of the true self inside us, and the visible formation of ourselves in relation to God and others. God loved us first and he took the initiative to redeem us. He desires for us to grow into the image of Christ so that we can better serve him in his kingdom on earth. We are transformed to restore God's new creation and new order.

The maple tree in front of my house is tall and lush, which reflects the healthy condition of the roots, which is invisible to the naked eye. Grow Deep in the model refers to the transformation that happens deep inside our invisible inner world. It involves self denial and the recovery of our true self through spiritual

disciplines. It shapes our inner world so that we can be humble servants and useful tools for God in his orchard. Grow High in the model refers to the visible changes in our character as we bear the fruit of the Holy Spirit and develop the *Imago Dei* to become more Christ Jesus. It makes us effective disciplers, full of God's character, who can help others grow deep, grow high, and grow wide in God's orchard. Grow Wide in the model refers to the visible outcomes of spiritual formation on discipleship, which is an individual level, and on the church and community, which is a corporate level. It is the visible element of spiritual formation as it involves the shaping of the outer world, which includes our neighbours, our churches, and our communities.

Although Grow Deep, Grow High, Grow Wide seem to be three distinct components of the spiritual formation model, they cannot be totally separated as they are interrelated. Each component requires the support of the other two for the formation to continue. For instance, we need to grow deep in order to deny our selfish desires, so that we can grow high to bear the fruit of the Spirit, and grow wide to reach out to our neighbours, which in turn will help us grow deep as we experience God's presence in our ministries. In the end, as our roots grow deeper, we will be mature enough to bear fruits, to make disciples and to shape our communities. Spiritual formation makes us become more like Christ Jesus, so that God's kingdom can live to its fullness on earth. This does not happen overnight. Instead, it is an ongoing working progress. The beautiful maple tree in front of my house will continue to grow for the many years to come. As its roots dig deeper

into the soil, it will grow taller and wider to provide an even nicer shade for people, and a better home for birds.

It is my desire to grow deep, grow high and grow wide like a lush tree, which bears fruits in God's orchard. The spiritual autobiography in the next chapter is a recollection of my spiritual journey. It allows me to reflect on various areas of my spiritual development by using the markers of Grow Deep, Grow High, Grow Wide discussed in this chapter. As I look back, I can see that God has used the people around me and my life events to form my inner self, to build my character and to strengthen my relationship with him and others. God is not done with me yet. I will continue to grow and learn as he shapes me.

CHAPTER 3:

SPIRITUAL AUTOBIOGRAPHY: GLIMPSES OF MY LIFE

This chapter contains glimpses of my life. It is like a collection of micro-memoirs. It allows the reader to flip through a photo album which captures the significant events of my life. This chapter uses the literary device of flashbacks in order to take the reader back in time to experience past events. Flashbacks are great literary device that authors use to describe events in an interesting manner. It is a creative alternative to the commonly used chronological approach in writing an autobiography. For instance, *Wuthering Heights* by Emily Bronte is a collection of flashbacks telling the story of Cathy and Heathcliff. *The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins is another effective example of using flashbacks. In this chapter, flashbacks are mainly introduced in the form of dreams or memories. This chapter involves the many areas in my life including my career, my family, my studies, and my ministries. It also covers the many roles that I played including being an educator, a daughter, a mother, a student, and a spiritual director. Last but not least, it captures God's work in my life. It is a synopsis of how God has shaped me through many life situations. It reflects God's work in forming my soul with reference to my spiritual formation model of Grow Deep, Grow High, Grow Wide. It captures my spiritual journey in growing deeper in my relationship with God, in growing higher to become more like ChristJesus, and in growing wider to love and to serve others. This spiritual autobiography is about

God's work on my soul. He is the main character of this chapter, and he used the people and events in this chapter to shape me into the person that he wanted me to be. He is the potter, and I am the clay (Isa. 64:8). God has not finished his work in me yet. He has shaped me in the past, he shapes me in the present, and he will continue to shape me in the years to come.

A New Job

I officially retired from my career of a few decades in 2017. I immediately returned to Tyndale Seminary as a full-time student to finish my Master of Divinity (MDiv), which I started twelve years ago. I graduated in the spring of 2018 and was ready to begin the new phase of my life. I was experiencing a tremendous sense of freedom as I was no longer tied to any vocational contracts. I could wake up whenever I wanted to in the morning, and an alarm clock was no longer a necessity for my life. This new season brought me a great sense of joy. I was quite pleased with my achievement of retiring at the pinnacle of my career as a high school principal.

It was a crisp fall morning when I first walked into the classroom of a publicly funded high school situated in a major Canadian city. I was the English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher. It was my first Canadian teaching job away from home. It was less than a year that I had left home to come to Canada as an immigrant. I could not sleep the night before the first day of school. I felt excited but anxious at the same time because English was not my first language. On the one hand, I felt so blessed that God had given me a good teaching job at a local school board. On the other hand, I was worrying about not being able to handle

the job. Could I be a good ESL teacher when I spoke with an accent? Would I be accepted by the students and parents as I did not look like a typical white middle-class Canadian teacher at all? Would I be able to survive in a school where I was the only Asian teacher? I felt like a tree waiting for the arrival of a long and cold winter. I could not fall asleep as I tossed and turned in my bed through the night.

I thought about my mother, who was a retired English teacher in Hong Kong. She had introduced me to the English language when I was a little child. As an English teacher in a British colony, my mother knew the importance of being proficient in speaking and in writing English. Proficiency in English was the key to success in Hong Kong. Thus, my mother taught me English at home when I was only four years old. In the dream, I was sitting on a wooden stool in the kitchen, reading aloud lines from an English book to her, while she was cooking with a wok and a pot. My mother corrected my pronunciation mistakes as I spelled out the words to her. That was the evening routine for me and my mother during my childhood years. Honestly, it was not an experience that I enjoyed at the time, but God was planting the seed of a second language during my formative years. My mother had high expectations for me as her first born. She did not teach English to my younger siblings. Back then, I felt that I was treated unfairly. In retrospect, I thank God for what my mother did, as I was essentially beginning my career as an English teacher in Canada. God had prepared me for this day a long time ago, when I was only four years old. Although English was not my first language, I began learning the language at a very young age because of my mother. God began shaping me into a teacher when I was a little child. He

planted the seed long before I came to Canada. Not only did he plant the seed of the English language, but he also continued developing my English skills through my high school education in Hong Kong, since all the subjects at my school were taught in English. My high school and university education in Canada consolidated my proficiency in English as I majored in Linguistics at university. God had prepared me well for a teaching career, which would be starting the next day. God planted the seed of being a teacher into my upbringing a long time ago. He nurtured the seed so that it could germinate into roots, and the stems could continue to grow through my educational experiences along the way. This ESL teaching job that I was beginning the next morning was a new stem of a growing tree. This stem would grow wide as I served my students with love as a young teacher. The roots would grow deep as I developed my trust in God's strength and wisdom for my career.

My mind was still full of worries as I was driving to school in the early morning of that first day in September. God reminded me that he had given me a good teaching job so that I could support my family as a new immigrant. My child was only a toddler, and my husband was also starting a new job, which was not as stable as mine. My family needed a stable income in order to establish ourselves in this new country. My teaching position, which offered decent pay and benefits, would help my family to set our roots in Canada. In addition, God had equipped me well as a teacher through a reputable teacher training program in Canada. God had groomed me into a Canadian teacher. Although teaching positions at school boards were rare commodities, he prepared one for me soon after I arrived. I knew

that it was God's plan for me to teach in this school, which was located in an undesirable area of the city, since he had given me the job. Therefore, I tried not to be worried, knowing that this teaching position was a gift from God to my family.

My first year flew by quickly and smoothly. Despite my accent and my immigrant background, I was well-received by the students and staff. I was particularly fond of my first students in Canada. They were immigrant and international students from all over the world. Their strengths and weaknesses reminded me that we were all fearfully and wonderfully made by God (Ps. 139:14). Their different learning styles reflected God's creativity. I was humbled by my students as I learned to love and to care for them. I always considered my students and colleagues the beloved creation of God. They deserved my love and respect since God had created them and loved them first. It was my Christian values that helped me develop a positive, professional relationship with my students and colleagues. In retrospect, I can see that I grew high as I tried to live out Christ gentleness and humility with his help in my career. As a young teacher, I grew wide as I served my students, and witnessed God's love together with the Spirit at my school.

Six years went quickly at the school, and I had made a few genuine friends among my colleagues. During my seventh year, a new political party was elected in the local government. The new government introduced a massive cut in education funding. As a result, I was declared a surplus teacher at my school, even after being there for seven years. I was subsequently placed in another

school in a very different neighbourhood as an English teacher. It was a mainstream neighbourhood with few immigrant students. Once again, I was the only Asian teacher in the school. I worried about my accent as an English teacher for students whose mother tongue was English. I was not sure if I could gain their trust because I neither looked nor sounded like a typical Canadian English teacher. I saw an obstacle as huge as a mountain in front of me. I was reminded that God was with me in the classroom, and I would never be alone. Teaching in an unfamiliar neighbourhood helped me to grow high as I needed to be a humble learner. Besides, the pain of leaving a comfortable and familiar work environment made me turn to God for comfort, which was a sign of Grow High as it strengthened my relationship with him.

Upon arrival at the new school, I was assigned a full timetable of English courses. As I had expected, my students were all native speakers of English, as I had expected. I was the only non-native speaker in their classroom. The thought of teaching English with an accent to thirty native teenage speakers made me sick to my stomach. I was afraid because I spoke with an accent, and my students were all native speakers without accents. I was worried that I might not be accepted by my students and their parents. I knew that I had to work much harder than my colleagues to survive in this new school. More layers would have to be unwrapped for me before I could gain the trust of my students. The students, staff and parents had to see through my accent and my appearance before they could begin to appreciate my professional competence. It was a sad reality, but unfortunately it was the price I had to pay as a new immigrant working in a

mainstream setting. As a young teacher, I grew deep as I cried out to God for help. I knew that God could shape the thinking of my students and their parents. I grew wide as God reminded me to love my students in all circumstances.

Despite this harsh reality, God gave me the strength and wisdom to plough through that first year at the new school. I was assigned to teach English to the senior grades. The students in one of the courses gave me the most difficult time. I was challenged by a few of them together with their parents on how I graded their essays. I praised God that with the support of the department head, I managed to maintain the grades that I had originally assigned to them. Knowing that they could not pursue this any further, the students and parents backed down in the end. However, the incident was a stressful and hurting experience for me. It revealed a lack of trust about my professional judgement on the part of the students and their parents. Looking back, I can notice that I grew high as I was humbled by reflecting on my teaching style and the students' responses. I also grew deep as I followed God's Word and forgave "those who trespassed against [me]" since God had forgiven my trespasses against him (Mt. 6:14).

Two years had almost gone by at the school, and I gradually felt at home there. My family continued to grow, and I was blessed with two adorable children. I had to pick up my children from their school every day after work. This was becoming a great challenge as my school was quite far away from my children's school. As a result, I started looking for a teaching job closer to my children's school. At the end of the school year, I was offered a teaching position

at a high school only a ten-minute drive away from my children's school. God had lifted a heavy burden off my family.

My third school was in a multicultural middle-class neighbourhood. I was assigned a full timetable of ESL courses. I praised God for giving me back these familiar courses! It was a relief indeed. He knew that I needed a familiar teaching load so that I could cope with the demands of a growing family. The proximity between my workplace and my children's school was also a blessing from God. The shorter commute allowed me to spend more time with my children at home. With a familiar teaching load, and a supportive administration, my first few years at the school went by like a breeze. These were the most enjoyable years of my teaching career. I was able to establish a positive rapport with the students and the staff. I felt very at home at the school, and it became my second family. At the end of my sixth year there, my department head retired. With the support of my husband and the principal, I applied for the department head position. I was not sure if it was God's will for me to advance in my career since there were a few candidates competing for this position. However, I was certain that God would open the door if it was in his will. The interview was difficult and rigorous. On September 11, 2001, the day of the attack on the New York twin towers, I was informed by my principal that I was the successful candidate for the promotion. With much gratitude and joy, I accepted the promotion and began a new phase in my career. God had taken years to prepare me for this leadership position. As a teacher and a mother, I praised God for providing for my family and advancing my career. I also envisioned a challenging career ahead of me.

Moving Up the Ladder

The role of department head in a high school was a steppingstone to the position of vice-principal. The responsibilities of department head gave me ample opportunities to work closely with my vice-principals on school wide initiatives. It had also allowed me to collaborate with other school leaders within the school board. Moreover, my principal was an excellent mentor, who encouraged me to become a vice-principal. As I gained a better understanding of the portfolio of a vice-principal, I felt that I had the appropriate skill set to give it a try. However, I was not sure if it was the career path that God wanted me to pursue. Why did I want to become a vice-principal? Did I really want to leave the classroom, which I loved? As I was reflecting on my own identity, I came to realize that I was a female Christian of a visible minority. If I became a vice-principal, I could become an excellent role model for the students of the visible minority. I wanted the Asian students to know that there were good career opportunities for immigrant children in Canada and that they could climb up the employment ladder if they worked hard and performed well. Moreover, a Christian vice-principal could also be a voice for God in the system to advocate for the poor and needy. I always felt that there was a strong need for more Christian representation at the leadership level of different government organizations. It would be wonderful to have an Asian Christian female vice-principal in the public system in this multicultural city of mine. An Asian Christian female immigrant school administrator was quite an unusual combination, but God could make it happen. With a desire to glorify God, and to better serve the students, I embarked on the

rigorous vice-principal selection process of the school board. Looking back, I can notice that I grew deep as I prayed earnestly through the demanding selection process. Being aware of my limitations, I learned to trust God more. I grew high as God used the selection process to humble me and to strengthen my perseverance.

God blessed me with a supportive husband, who took up most of the family responsibilities while I was going through the gruelling promotion process. It was a process which involved resume validation, reference checks, and an interview. It was a warm morning in the fall when I arrived at the headquarters of the school board. My interview was scheduled for 10:30 a.m., and I was a bit early. I was soon taken into a conference room together with a few other candidates. Inside the room was an oval conference table big enough for all of us to sit around it. We were given a set of questions and had thirty minutes to prepare the answers. The face of the clock had gigantic numbers to remind us of the time. Tension flooded the room as the candidates scrambled to figure out the best answers for the questions. The only noise that I could hear was the pens scribbling on the paper. It was a career-deciding moment for everyone in the room. Half an hour went by very quickly. We were then escorted into an interview room to meet the interview team made up of superintendents and principals. On the table was a ticking clock reminding us of the time we had for each question. The interview would be cut off at forty minutes whether the candidates managed to answer all the questions or not. Even though it was a very stressful, rigorous, and humbling experience, I felt excited and peaceful

throughout the interview. It was actually a pleasure for me to attend the interview. It was like unwrapping a gift from God, and it was a privilege to have a focused and professional conversation with the interviewers. I shared my passion about teaching, and my vision for the new role as genuinely as possible during the interview. I was being myself, and I spoke from my heart. Afterwards, I felt good. I had tried my best, and God would do the rest. I knew that I had nothing to lose because I could still be a teacher even if I did badly in the interview. I felt close to God, was able to cling to my real self, and spoke my heart.

The interview experience affirmed my calling as an educator as I shared my belief and vision with the interview team. A few mornings after the interview, my principal appeared at the door of my classroom when I was teaching. She asked me to see her at her office right after class. I knew instantly that it would be about the interview result, and I was very nervous. As soon as the class was over, I made my way to the principal's office. The short walk there was one of the longest journeys of my life. My heart was pounding, and I wished I could fly! As soon as I stepped into the principal's office, she gave me a big hug and congratulated me on being the successful candidate. I would probably be promoted to vice-principal at the end of the school year. My eyes filled with tears of joy when I heard the good news. All my hard work had finally paid off! Praise God! I would soon be a Christian female immigrant vice-principal of a local high school. At that time, there were only a few Asian vice-principals among the hundreds of vice-principals in the system. God made the impossible possible in my career. At the end of that school year, I was promoted to vice-principal. By

then, I had been a teacher for seventeen years. This promotion was a profound life experience. As a new administrator, I praised God for answering my prayers. It was a tremendous achievement for an immigrant female. In retrospect, I can see that I grew high as God shaped me into an administrator, who was caring and not self seeking. God also help me grow wide as I continued to “do good” for the students and the community (Ps. 37:3).

God had blessed me with several supportive mentors throughout my vice-principal career. I was promoted to principal after serving at two high schools as a vice-principal. At that time, there were only a few Asian principals among the hundreds of high school principals in the system. Once again God made the almost impossible possible for me. The promotion process was another profound life experience. I praised God for placing one more Asian Christian female immigrant principal into the system to advocate for his values and the immigrants’ needs. As a new principal, I grew deep as I prayed faithfully for my students, staff, and parents. I also grew wide as God helped me to serve the students and staff with his love. God also used the demanding job to teach me the importance of unwavering commitment. I was also humbled by God’s power as there were many times that I felt so undeserved of his blessings. My career turned out to be much better than I would have expected when I first stepped into the classroom many years ago. I had never thought about becoming the principal of a school, but God made it happen for me.

A Token of Gratitude

After being a principal for several years, I did not forget about my unfinished Master of Divinity (MDiv). I had started the MDiv soon after I was promoted vice-principal. It was my token of gratitude to God for his abundant blessings in my life, especially in my career. I wanted to thank God for guiding my career, for providing for my family and for giving me Canada as my new home. As a token of gratitude to him, I decided to spend time studying in a seminary so that I could continue to grow spiritually. I needed to know more about him as my best friend, my anchor, my father, and ultimately, my God. I wanted to prepare myself for seeing him eventually. As soon as I was eligible to retire from my education career, I returned to Tyndale University to finish my MDiv. I spent the first year of my retirement studying full-time to complete the program, since I could not extend the completion date any longer,

I finally finished the program twelve years after taking my first course. Looking back, I can notice that I grew deeper in my trust in God as he was faithful in sustaining those who desired to achieve what he intended for them. Twelve years seemed to be a long time to complete an MDiv. However, it was a great opportunity from God for me to grow high as I developed perseverance through working and studying at the same time. I grew deep as I cried to God to help me finish my papers after an exhaustive day at work. God also taught me the importance of not giving up. There were many times that I contemplated quitting my MDiv, especially when I had to give up my summer holidays to study. However, the Holy Spirit reminded me of my purpose of taking the MDiv. I did

not want to stop expressing my gratitude to him. These struggles helped me grow deep as I learned to rely more on God, who gave me strength and wisdom to be a student, a mother, a wife, and a school administrator at the same time. God also replenished my well-being soon enough for school to begin in each September after the many summer courses I took at Tyndale. He also helped me juggle between my course work and job responsibilities so I could manage the many night courses, which I took after a long day of work. It was all God's blessings that I could complete my MDiv as a part-time student and a full time worker. I decided to thank God by learning more about him, and he granted the desire of [my] heart (Ps. 37:4).

The Anchor

With a successful career in my pocket and a few major life goals accomplished, I felt relieved and happy to embark on my retirement life. Sleeping in was what I enjoyed the most. It was such a treat after so many years of getting up at six o'clock in the morning to go to school. I also enjoyed doing groceries and shopping on weekdays. The supermarkets were not crowded, and the lineups were short. It was a real treat for someone who could only find time to shop on the weekends for many years. Unfortunately, despite the tremendous sense of joy and freedom, I started to develop a sense of insecurity. I began to miss my identity, which was very much associated with my career. I also began to contemplate the purpose of my life more often than I used to. Who was I? I was God's creation, and He was my Creator. My life purpose was to live out the creator's plan for me on earth. I was created by God, and he expected me to

Trust in the Lord and do good; dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture. Take delight in the Lord, trust in him and he will do this: He will make your righteous reward shine like the dawn, your vindication like the noonday sun. Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him, do not fret when people succeed in their ways, when they carry out their wicked schemes (Ps. 37:4-7)

God expected me to trust in him, to do good, to delight myself in him, to commit my ways to him and to be still in him for the rest of my life.

God would always be my anchor as I began each new phase of my life. I felt like a kid swimming in open water. The sky was blue, and the sun was warm. However, I did not feel safe because the sea was enormous, and I could end up drowning myself. I found retirement like drifting in open water. I needed my anchor as I entered this new phase of my life. Since I could always find my anchor in God's Word, I was praying if I should continue my studies at Tyndale. God graciously opened the door of the DMin program. Soon after I handed in all my assignments for my MDiv, a couple of my professors approached me regarding the program. I had missed the application deadline as I had never thought of pursuing a doctorate degree. However, God encouraged me to enroll in the program, with much support from my MDiv professors. I felt very blessed that God had given me a new anchor. Not only does he love me, but he also called me to continue to journey with him through my studies. In retrospect, I can notice that I grew deep, grew high and grew wide in my spiritual development as I anchored myself in studying about God. The DMin journey turned out to be more eventful and intensive than I would have expected. God continued to shape my soul through my studies.

The Fire

My spiritual director also played a crucial role in my transition into retirement. Not only did she actively listen to my concerns, but she also read the signposts together with me along the soul journey. During the few sessions at the beginning of my retirement, we explored God's plan together. During the quiet time at one of these sessions, I saw an image of me sitting with Jesus and quietly resting beside him by a river. Neither Jesus nor I were talking. Both of us were still as I rested in him. The night was dark, but the sky was clear. Across from the river was a town full of houses and sparkling lights. At the end of the session, my spiritual director and I concurred that I was entering a season of rest for my life. It was not unusual for a season of rest to be disrupted by intrusive memories of traumatic events. The memories of the fire intruded into my resting season. It was a cold night in March when I was woken up by the ringing of my phone at one o'clock in the morning. The person on the other end introduced herself as the emergency department of the school board. She said that the main office of my school was on fire, and that the firefighters and the policemen were already at the scene. She asked me to go to the school right away. I immediately jumped out of my bed and rushed to the school with my husband. The night was dark and cold. Although there was no traffic on the streets, the twenty-minute drive seemed to be much longer. At a distance, I could see the red and white lights flashing. The blinding lights of the fire trucks and police cars intruded on the tranquility of the quiet neighbourhood. I knew that I would soon be at the scene. The fire marshal was waiting for me at the door and the terrible odour of smoke greeted me as soon

as I entered the building. He took me to the main office immediately. The once clean and bright office was covered by a veil of darkness as it had been devoured by the fire. The devilish flames had engulfed all the office furniture, sparing nothing. The windows were broken, and the ceiling was dripping. The floor was covered with ashes that came up to my ankles. It did not take long for my throat to feel itchy and my eyes to get teary, since the room was filled with soot. I was in complete shock and disbelief. It was a scene that I thought could only happen at another school, but not at mine. I wished it were a dream. I wished everything that I saw were unreal. Unfortunately, it was a harsh reality that I had to deal with. I had to pick up the phone and called my superintendent at three o'clock in the morning.

My superintendent arrived at the school at around five o'clock in the morning. The first thing we dealt with was communication with students and parents, as the school had to be closed for at least that day. As soon as possible, we had to put together a message for the media to release, and we had to let the staff, students, and parents know what had happened. By six o'clock in the morning, the accident was reported on the television news. It was difficult to see my school appear on the news. My heart was broken, and I felt surreal. I cried out to God for help as I felt extremely desperate. The fire only affected the main office of the school, and the rest of the school building remained intact. However, the soot had gone through the whole ventilation system of the building, and all the air ducts were affected. As a result, the school had to remain closed until it was cleared by health and safety inspections. What was I going to do with a hundred

staff and almost a thousand students? God blessed me with a supportive and understanding superintendent. Together with his help, and with the help of the two vice-principals, we stayed at the school until 8:00 p.m. the following day to come up with a series of contingency plans so that curriculum delivery would not be interrupted. It was the longest workday in my life: nineteen hours non-stop, managing a crisis. I did not know where my energy came from, other than the fact that God was giving me enough strength and wisdom to cope with this crisis. God made me grow high as he sustained my perseverance through this crisis. He kept me calm so that I could order in the chaos. He also helped me stay composed and to conduct myself professionally throughout the crisis. My superintendent was quite impressed with my performance too. The fire was like a valley of darkness in my career. However, “Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear not evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me” (Ps. 23:4). I could have passed out during that nineteen-hour workday, but I did not. I could have lost my patience, but God helped me endure. He was my hiding place as the phone in my office was ringing off the hook. He was my shelter as I was bombarded with questions from the staff and students. In fact, it was truly a blessing that the fire took place in April, which was only two months before the summer holiday. The main office was moved to the guidance office for the remainder of the school year. I was kept busy working with the contractor, who was rebuilding the main office. God blessed the school with a brand-new office for the following September.

I returned to Tyndale Seminary that summer in search of rest and healing. God prepared the course *The Compassion of Christ* for me. I rested in God's love, which brought healing to me through the course. That summer I was again touched and replenished by his love. As I look back, I can notice that I grew high as I reflected on the fire, and the toll it had taken on me. The fire challenged my unwavering commitment to my students and my staff. God had allowed the fire to happen, and there must be a higher purpose for "in all things God works for the good of those who love him" (Rm. 8:28). Although I did not know why the fire had happened when it did, I could now see that it was part of a sequence of events that God used to lead me to my retirement. I grew deep that summer as I submerged myself in God's Word. When I returned to the school in September, a few staff members were surprised to see me as they thought that I would have retired after the fire. Nonetheless, I knew I was one step closer to retirement.

Knowing Jesus

I returned to the school the morning after the fire and gathered everyone in the front foyer for a brief announcement. Not only was the foyer crowded and noisy, but it also smelled like the hallways of my former high school in Hong Kong, which were stuffy and damp. The familiar damp smell reminded me of my high school days. My memories took me back to my high school in Hong Kong, which was operated by a Christian missionary organization. In my memories, I saw myself entering the school building. I soon passed by my favourite tuck shop and walked up the stairs to the second floor. I peeked into the staff room and saw my favourite teachers busy marking. I wanted to greet them, but I was not sure if

they would recognize me. I passed by the library and found myself at the entrance to the auditorium where a morning assembly was taking place. The auditorium was full of students in their tidy uniforms. There was a speaker on the stage and beside him stood a huge panel on an easel. I could barely hear the speaker, but I could see him drawing on the panel. It seemed like a very familiar painting. I quietly sneaked into the auditorium and took a seat at the back to find out what was going on. The speaker on the stage was painting two high walls. One at the right side of the panel and the other on the left side. He was painting with pieces of shiny chalk that made the painting glow and glitter on the stage. It was full of sparkling colours, and I could see it well from where I was sitting. The two walls he painted were dark brown in colour, and it looked like two mountain cliffs. The two cliffs were far away from each other. Between the two cliffs was a body of dark water. Then he started to paint a bridge that connected the two cliffs. The bridge was white, it was bright and shiny. The sky was blue, the clouds were white, and the sun was shining. There was also a colourful rainbow at the far end of the painting. It was a special and beautiful painting. Then I heard the speaker say that the body of dark water between the two cliffs represented my sins, including the sins of my lips, of my actions, and of the darkest areas of my heart. It was my sins that had separated me from God's love. I felt so ashamed of myself at that moment, and my tears started to fall. Then I heard the speaker's voice saying, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (Jn. 3:16). I was so moved by this message of God's love that tears started streaming down my face.

The speaker proclaimed, “God loves you so much that he sent Jesus to die for you on the cross. Jesus is the bridge between you and God. He died for you so you can reunite with God. You will be God’s children and have eternal life if you repent and invite Jesus into your heart today.” His words were straightforward and very powerful. I was shaken from head to toe as I was moved by the immense love of Christ Jesus. There was a strong voice inside urging me to repent and to invite Christ Jesus into my heart. As the speaker was calling those who wanted to accept Christ Jesus as their personal saviour to go to the front, I left my seat without any hesitation and started walking to the front. I was joined by a good number of schoolmates along the way. We prayed together at the front of the auditorium. There were some senior students from the school Christian fellowship receiving us at the front. They prayed with us as we confessed, repented, and invited Christ Jesus into our hearts. They became our Christian mentors later at the school.

I began attending the Christian fellowship regularly at the school. It was in this fellowship that my faith was nourished as I learned how to pray and how to read the Bible. In retrospect, I can see that I was growing wide as I learned to serve other students with the support of my mentors. The seed of faith, which was planted by God, started to sprout, as I was nurtured by the Christian fellowship. My high school Christian fellowship in Hong Kong was God’s orchard for me during my teenage years. God saved me and formed me before I came to Canada.

Leaving Home

As I was supervising the students returning to their classrooms the day after the fire, I heard the public announcement system calling me back to the school office. An international student and her mother were waiting to see me. We had a good meeting regarding their concerns, which were the same ones I used to deal with when I was an international student. The sharing of this mother and daughter took me back to a hot summer afternoon at the Hong Kong International Airport, where my parents and my siblings were saying goodbye to me. It was my first-time leaving home and taking a flight. I was on my way to my new high school in Canada. My dad helped me with my luggage as I looked for the check-in counter. My mom's eyes were teary. My younger brother and sisters were curious. They were soon joined by my dear high school friends. Some of them had brought gifts for me. It was one of the most emotional moments of my life. I felt sad leaving my family, my friends, and my home city. I knew I would miss them, especially my mom, very much. I tried hard to hold back my tears. I felt excited about studying in Canada and the opportunities ahead of me. I felt anxious not knowing if I could cope with a new country and a new school. After the heart-wrenching farewell to my family and friends, I was hit by an extreme sense of loneliness at the gate as I was waiting to board the flight. Although it was very crowded, I felt alone. There was no one with me in this unfamiliar environment. Nonetheless, I trusted that God was with me and that he was embarking on this new journey with me. I felt very close to him at that moment. He would board the flight with me and land with me in Canada. He would go to

school with me in the new country. In retrospect, I can see that I grew deep as I continued to trust in God to lead my future. I was exhausted and felt asleep soon after I boarded the flight. I felt his closeness during my first flight to Canada. He was becoming my best companion.

My Canadian High School Days

Although it was a summer decades ago, I can still remember landing at Toronto Pearson International Airport as an innocent teenager, who had never been away from home before. I was a bit scared as my English was not quite fluent. I was waiting for an auntie, who was a friend of my father to pick me up. I had never met the auntie before, but we finally managed to find each other at the huge airport. The auntie drove me to her house, and I stayed there for a few days. The first few nights in Canada were lonely and cold as I was not used to the dry and crisp Canadian air. I put on the wool sweater that my mother had knitted for me. It felt particularly warm. My first day of school in Canada came soon, and the auntie drove me to the boarding school located in a small town. The school building was full of character as it was an old castle. I was soon introduced to my housemother, Mrs. Oliver, who took me to my room. The room had two beds, two desks and two closets. My roommate had not arrived, but I knew that her name was Susan, as indicated by the label on the desk. After unpacking my luggage, I went down to the dining hall for my first meal at the school. I was reminded by the prefect, who sat at the head of the table, that I should not have rested my elbows on the table. With “no elbows on the table” in mind, my journey of learning began in Canada. The first lesson I learned was proper table manners. A

few days later, I started to miss my chopsticks and Chinese food. My roommate, Susan, arrived the following day. She was a Canadian from Montreal. She and I got to know each other quickly as we were in the same grade. We became good friends, despite my broken English. Our housemother, Mrs. Oliver, was one of the most responsible persons that I had ever known. She knocked at our doors at seven o'clock each morning. I could hear "Wake up girls", which was her favourite line, ringing down the hallway each morning. She walked down the hallway and repeated "Wake up girls!" every time she knocked at a door. She was more effective than any alarm clocks that I had ever used. Mrs. Oliver did an excellent job to ensure that all the girls in her house would get up on time. Sleeping in on a school day was never a possibility. Our first class began at 9 o'clock each morning after breakfast and chapel.

The school was operated by the United Church of Canada. It had a nice and cozy chapel for simple morning worship, which was primarily made up of Scripture reading, prayers and hymns. However, it was not the worship that I was used to in Hong Kong. I felt something missing deep inside me. I continued to pray to God, who had never left me alone. I knew that God was with me in the new school even though I could not worship him at a church on Sundays due to the physical distance, and there was no bus service in the small town. All I could do is to continue to trust God to guide me through my first year in this new country. I missed home, especially my mother, very much. Besides, I also felt quite helpless at times. As I look back, I can notice that this sense of helplessness made me grow deep as I cried out to God for help more often than I used to. My

only certainty in the new environment was that Jesus never changes. “Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever” (Heb. 13:8). He was my anchor as I embarked on this new phase of my life.

I took six courses that year, and the most difficult one was English. There was no ESL support at the school, and I ended up taking regular English with the local students. At the beginning of the course, I could barely understand my English teacher, Mrs. Whitaker. I ended up failing my first English essay assignment. I felt desperate and embarrassed. I had never failed an English assignment in my whole life! It was a scary and humbling experience for a new student. I tried to work harder and went for extra help. I resubmitted my essays whenever Mrs. Whitaker allowed me to do so. As the course progressed, my grades in English started to improve. I had experienced the rewards of trying my best until the end, by not giving up. I was never alone, as God was my best study companion. Soon the first snow came, and Christmas was around the corner. I had been away from home for almost four months. I survived although I was in tears every time I got a letter from home. I missed my parents, my siblings, my friends, my church, speaking Cantonese, and having Chinese food. I longed to go home but I had to wait until the end of the school year. Home was too far away at that moment, and it could only be a good dream for that night. These were some snapshots of my first high school days in Canada.

Becoming a Spiritual Director

The transition into my retirement was filled with ups and downs, twists and turns. My spiritual director was with me rain or shine. It was a season of

searching for new directions. At the same time, it was fun and mysterious. There were times that I felt like I was in a hallway with many doors on both sides. I opened the doors and went into the rooms. I had pleasant experiences in some rooms, and traumatic experiences in others. In a couple of the rooms, I had some mysterious experiences, which I did not understand. I started to notice the mysterious nature of God, which amazed me and scared me at the same time. With excitement, anticipation, and a bit of fear, I embarked on my retirement.

God blessed me with a caring spiritual director as I transitioned into my retirement. Not only did she accompany me into the new phase of my life, but she also helped me see my blind spots during this spiritual journey. She pointed out those vulnerabilities and weaknesses that I was not aware of. She helped shape my perspectives regarding life circumstances, such as the boredom caused by retirement. Although I lost some close relationships with my former coworkers after my retirement, I enjoyed the newly found spiritual companionship I had in spiritual direction. Spiritual direction helped me to grow high when I reflected on my weaknesses in the presence of the Holy Spirit as God shaped my character. It also helped me to grow wide as I learned to love and care for others. It was a valuable experience as it inspired me to become a spiritual director. After much prayer and in consultation with my professors, I applied for admission to the Tyndale Spiritual Direction Internship Program after the first year of my DMin. I wanted to be equipped to help others like my spiritual director had helped me. I wanted more people to benefit from spiritual direction. Although I did not know

what I was getting into when I applied for admission to this program, I knew that things would work out since God was with me.

At the end of my admission interview, I was welcomed into the internship program. I had some reservation about applying at first as I did not know what I was getting into. It was uncharted territory and the pathway ahead seemed foggy and misty. God gave me the courage to move forward by being with me. God and I did the internship together and he made me a spiritual director.

The Spiritual Direction Internship turned out to be a transformative experience as God shaped my soul through the training. I experienced the power and the prompting of the Holy Spirit in spiritual direction. The training strengthened my patience in listening to others. I also learned to serve my directees gently and humbly with the heart of Jesus.

A New Spiritual Discipline

Spiritual Direction Internship Part One began in September, and the class had a retreat in October. I was inspired by the use of *Lectio Divina* at the retreat and started practising it soon after the retreat was over. I began to contemplate a word or a phrase regularly from the texts I had been reading. I started to savour God's Word regularly. It gradually became a spiritual discipline for me. Savouring God's word was like chewing gum. Each day there was a word or a phrase that I would savour until it was fully digested. By then, I would usually have it memorized and could apply it to the life circumstances that I was managing. The Holy Spirit also taught me to pray with the word or the phrase that I contemplated. *Lectio Divina* helped me grow deep as I meditated on God's

Word. It was my desire to be like “the tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither – whatever they do prospers” (Ps. 1:2-3). *Lectio Divina* taught me how to pray with scriptures as I tried to pray with the biblical texts that I had contemplated. The texts guided me to pray according to God’s will and not my own will. *Lectio Divina* also made me grow high as it helped me develop the steadfastness required to sustain the practice.

The Covid-19 Pandemic

Spiritual Direction Internship Part One flew by like a breeze. The fog and mist at the beginning of my internship started to fade away as the sun came out. Unfortunately, Spiritual Direction Internship Part Two was hit hard by the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic. The internship was switched to virtual learning with very short notice. The practicum was switched to online as well. It was a huge adjustment for everyone in the program. We could not see the directees in person anymore. I felt so strange during the first few sessions of online spiritual direction. I missed the cues that I used to get from the body language of my directees, and I felt like something was missing. However, soon after the practicum went online, I noticed that there were no boundaries for the power of God, and the presence of the Holy Spirit because God is omnipotent. Since God’s work had no boundaries, our limitations, such as Covid-19, had absolutely no impact on his work. Nothing could stop the work of God. His will for the directees would be done whether we met online or in person. Ultimately God would be glorified. This awareness helped me cope with conducting spiritual

direction online, and I have been doing spiritual direction online ever since the outbreak of the pandemic. My directees grew in number as God kept on sending them to me. God affirmed my calling to be a spiritual director by expanding my ministry. He continued to form my soul as I witnessed his work in my directees. He helped me grow wide as I accompanied my directees in their spiritual journeys.

The outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic turned my life upside down and brought many disruptions to my training as a spiritual director. I thought about quitting the internship and even my DMin studies many times throughout the pandemic. My family responsibilities also increased due to the pandemic. My family members were working from home, and the house suddenly seemed to shrink in size. My senior mother moved out of her long-term care home to live with my sister. My small group, which was the support of my soul, stopped meeting together. My close friends became my distant friends as we could not see each other in person anymore. My school was closed, and I could no longer even go to the library to do my research. I could not go out for fun with my husband anymore. I felt quite desperate, as I was stuck at home studying and cooking all the time. I missed the human contact that I used to have. The course work and assignments became heavier than they used to be, and I felt weaker both physically and emotionally. I felt trapped in my house. I felt desperate and wanted to quit the internship. Looking back, I praise God for not allowing me to quit. God did not give me the courage nor the peace of mind to quit. I knew I would regret it in the future if I were to quit the internship. God completed every task that he

started. In God is the beginning and the end. God is faithful and he never gives up on us. God always keeps his promises, and it was God's faithfulness that prevented me from quitting the internship during that time. Since God had been faithful to me, how could I not be faithful to him in return? I felt that quitting the internship would have been an act of unfaithfulness to him. Did I not trust him enough to help me finish what I had started? I felt that I would have offended God if I had dropped the internship because it had been his gift to me. I felt that I would have disappointed God if I stopped working on my DMin. I did not feel peaceful about quitting. I trusted that the God, who helped me finish twelve years of my MDiv, would also help me finish my DMin. As I was struggling, the clock was ticking for my assignments. I finally managed to lock myself in my room in order to pull together all the strength that I had left to finish the assignments for the internship and for my DMin before the deadlines. I felt relieved, although I did not do very well in those assignments. I felt I had made the right decision by not quitting. God allowed the pandemic to help me grow deep as I learned to trust him more. He also helped me grow high as I learned to remain steadfast despite struggles and weaknesses.

Suffering and Brokenness

God blessed me with a good number of spiritual directees and an experienced spiritual direction supervisor upon graduating from the internship. Through the DMin program, he also equipped me further by helping me learn more about suffering and brokenness. He even allowed me to experience some woundedness myself. Due to my cultural background, I had been avoiding the

topics of death and dying until I took the course *Journey Through Suffering and Dying*. Death and dying are usually associated with misfortune and bad luck in my culture. They are unwelcomed topics for conversation and thoughts. In short, my culture had taught me to avoid thinking and talking about death and dying until it was absolutely necessary. However, through the course, God was able to shape my views on death and dying.

At the beginning of the course, I was not sure if I could handle the course content emotionally, because it appeared to be depressing at the first glance. In fact, I avoided the course materials for the first few weeks as I found them quite intense emotionally. However, my avoidance was quickly pushed aside by the assignment deadlines, and gradually subsided as I dived deeper into the course materials, which turned out to be full of hope and direction. As shared by Dr. David Sherbino in his lectures, death is painful for human beings but sacred for God. Death means separation from fellow humans but reunion with God. Moreover, a good death can be a blessing to the dying and the living. Not only did the course prepare me for the caring of the dying, but it also allowed me to explore different perspectives of death and dying through the experiential learning component. I interviewed medical professionals, counsellors, and family members, who experienced multiple deaths. As I listened to their views and experiences in caring for the dying, I gradually came to terms with this harsh reality. My fear was gradually replaced by the hope given in God's Word about death and dying. I look forward to meeting God and to unveiling the mysteries that I long to understand. I started to ask God to bless me with a good death. I

grew high as God made me feel contented by showing me that every new day is a gift from him. I grew wide as I prayed for my death to enhance the faith and hope of others. Rob Moll, in *The Art of Dying*, reminded me that it is only by facing and accepting the reality of one's coming death that one can become authentically alive (Moll 2010, 26). If we want to live well, we need to accept the reality of death. I began to see the importance of living each day well with God, and in God. All in all, I learned that I needed to live well so that I could die well.

"Journey Through Suffering and Dying" was bitter in the beginning but sweet in the end. The journey helped me become a better spiritual director as my avoidance of the topic of death and dying receded. I needed to overcome my avoidance before I could help my directees manage the topic. I praise God for shaping my views on death and dying through the DMin program.

God also shaped my views on grief and brokenness through the DMin program as he continued to equip me as a spiritual director. Grief is a harsh reality for humanity. It often makes us wonder "Where is God?" (Carson 2006, 15). Unfortunately, we can be trapped by grief and possessed by its reoccurrence, as C. S. Lewis states in *A Grief Observed* that "you don't merely suffer but have to keep on thinking about the fact that you suffer. I don't only live each endless day in grief but live each day thinking about living each day in grief" (Lewis 2015, 8). Grief can trap the bereaved by not allowing them to see or to feel anything except grief. The bereaved can be paralyzed by grief and may not be able to free themselves from the miseries of suffering. However, we can find hope in formational prayer, which is an inner healing process. As illustrated by Dr. R.

Neal Siler in the lecture notes for the course *Formational Prayer: The Journey to Wholeness*, formational prayer is a process to help people identify their core longings, to dismantle false beliefs, to address dysfunctional behaviours and to experience healing for deep wounds. It is rooted in the redemptive work of Jesus Christ and founded upon his ministry on earth. Jesus suffered and died on the cross to complete God's redemptive plan for humanity. Jesus suffered for us in the past and is suffering with us now. Jesus can deliver us from the bondage with suffering as he has delivered us from the bondage with sin before. He cares for the wounded now as he had cared for them before. It is only through Jesus that the healing of the wounded can happen. The goal of formational prayer is to provide ongoing transformation to the lives of the wounded through the experience of encountering Jesus Christ. Through formational prayer, the wounded bring their pain to Jesus, who will lay his healing hands upon them. The Holy Spirit helps the wounded identify the life situations, dysfunctional behaviours, emotional upheaval, false beliefs, and deep wounds, and bring them all to Jesus for healing (Wardle 2001, 137). As the healing progresses, the wounded will rediscover the truth, regain peace and comfort, and will be empowered to return to the life situations. Formational prayer is particularly helpful in preparing the wounded to cope with unchangeable life situations. A transformed soul can manage the life situations that the wounded soul could not manage before as God heals the wounded soul.

I praise God for healing my woundedness through the course *Formational Prayer: The Journey to Wholeness*. "It affirms God's grace is greater the human

sins,” which are my dysfunctional behaviours (Reed, Osmer, Smucker, 2015, 8). During the process, the Holy Spirit helped me address my dysfunctional behaviours, which used to be the coping strategies for my woundedness. With the guidance of the Spirit, I confessed, repented, and prayed for deliverance from my sinful behaviour in Christ Jesus. As I grew deeper into the healing process, the Spirit guided me to bring these deep wounds to God. Through a close encounter with God in deep sorrow, I felt his compassion, which healed my brokenness, and made me feel content again. It was in the deep love of God that I was healed and renewed. I was shattered into pieces, but God lovingly and tenderly put the pieces together and made me whole again. In the end, I was strengthened with new power from God to cope with my unchangeable life situations. It was through the process of formational prayer that I grew deep as my true self was allowed to be seen, grew high as I reflected on myself, and grew wide as I served others as a wounded healer.

The Loss

In addition to working on my MDiv, family responsibilities were another reason I decided to retire. My father, who passed away a few years ago, was sick for several years. He was diagnosed with a terminal disease a few years before his passing. My mother, who was also a senior, was gradually losing her abilities to care for my father. On a gloomy fall evening during a family dinner, I got a phone call from the senior home where my dad lived. I was given the shocking news that my father could probably not make it to the next morning. We dropped everything and rushed there immediately. We had not expected my father’s condition to

deteriorate so rapidly. When we got to the home, my father was no longer conscious. However, he was not in any pain, and it seemed like he was sleeping peacefully. It was comforting to see that he was not struggling. My mother seemed quite calm and composed. Knowing that my father could still hear, we took turns thanking him and telling him how much we loved him. We also said goodbye to him. We knew he could hear us as he was trying to move his eyes. As the night progressed, the pastor came by to bless my father and to pray for my family. It was a painful and emotional night for all of us. After everyone was gone, my mother and I sat beside my father's bed. I took the opportunity to take a good last look at him. He had aged so much. Memories flared up as I noticed the wrinkles on his face.

It was a hot and hazy summer afternoon at the Hong Kong International Airport. I was bidding my family and friends farewell as I embarked on my journey to Canada. My mom was sad, but my dad was calm and composed. In his eyes I could see how proud he was of me as his daughter. He was confident that I would do well in school. My dad operated a small business in Hong Kong and my mom was a teacher. My parents believed in the value of education, and they invested ample resources in their children's education. Since I was not allowed to have a job as an international student in Canada, my dad worked very hard to pay for my high school and university tuition. Canadian tuition was always expensive for foreign students from developing countries due to the high exchange rate. It was almost seven Hong Kong dollars to one Canadian dollar back in those days. My dad had to make seven Hong Kong dollars in exchange for one Canadian

dollar to support my life in Canada. My studies in Canada had taken a toll on my parents. During my second year of university, my father's business was not doing well. In order to pay for my expensive tuition, he had to sell his one and only car so that I could continue to study in Canada. He did not tell me this until I went home that summer. He did not want to distract me from my studies or to make me feel guilty. When I returned to Hong Kong after my university graduation, I could see the relief on his face. A huge burden had been lifted from him, and I could feel his pride.

My father came to Canada to join me when he was in his early sixties. Soon after my parents arrived, they kindly offered to help babysit my younger child. As an overwhelmed working mom, at that moment, I felt like I had won the lottery. It was the best gift from God to me at that time. My father was a good driver, and we placed a baby car seat in his car. He usually picked up my little one early in the morning before we left for work. My parents enjoyed spending time with their little grandchild and drove the little one home to us after we returned from work in the evening. I was so thankful for the loving care that my parents provided for my family throughout the years. The little grandchildren that my parents cared for grew into lovely young people by the time my father passed. They were able to be with my father during the sacred moment.

As I was wondering how many wrinkles on my father's face were related to my past, the footsteps of the nurse brought me back to that sacred moment. She checked my father's pulse and changed his diaper for the last time. At around one o'clock in the morning, we noticed a peculiar silence in the room. My father had

stopped breathing. The Lord took him away lovingly, tenderly, and peacefully. My father suffered no pain until the end. He looked so peaceful, as if he were sleeping. Not only was the scene comforting to my mother and to my family, but it was also a testimonial of God's grace. Witnessing my father's last hours was one of the most profound spiritual experiences of my life. I could feel the presence of the Holy Spirit in the room. His holy presence filled the entire room during that sacred moment. I felt like I was wrapped in a bubble of love and peace. I was sad but not scared. I felt the pain, but my hope was in God. It was a traumatic and yet a peaceful night. God's presence had never been as real to me as that moment when I experienced it with my father. It was a sad but profound spiritual experience, and I was deeply touched by God during my father's last hours. It was one of the deepest moments that my soul had with God, and no words could ever describe it.

My father accepted Christ Jesus as his personal saviour just a year before his passing. He did not have the privilege of worshipping or serving God at the church, since he was bedridden. However, God's abundant love and grace was with my father until the very end. My father's faith journey reminded me of the fact that God loves us because of who we are (being) and not because of what we do (doing). God loves my father's family too. During that sacred moment, my mother was calm, and all my family members had the opportunity to bid my father farewell. There was a sense of closure for everybody. My father was not in any pain and did not struggle at all until his last breath. There was a strong presence of the Holy Spirit in the room that night as God cared for everybody. He

was in charge. He lovingly and tenderly ushered my father into eternity. He solemnly declared that He is the Lord of life and death. His majesty was proclaimed amid a painful situation.

The Healing

My spiritual director played an important role in helping me cope with the grief caused by the passing of my father. It hit me hard since it happened sooner than expected. I began to experience a strong sense of emptiness in my life, and it was like there was a huge vacuum inside me that had to be filled. My spiritual director helped me reflect on my relationship with my father, and how God had used him to shape me as a person. Through prayers and contemplation, I found comfort in realizing that my father had a huge impact on the shaping of my personality. He is part of who I am today. I inherited his courage, his intelligence, and his fun-loving character. I reflected on a hot summer day when I was ten years old. My father came home with a sling on his arm. He looked pale and was in a lot of pain. He had just had an accident on his motorcycle. My dad was an excellent driver. When we were little, he supported our family as a taxi driver. He worked in his father's factory during the day and drove a taxi at night in order to purchase a decent home for his family. After he inherited the business from his father, he decided to deliver the products with his motorcycle. The roads in Hong Kong were narrow and very busy back then. Trucks, buses, and private cars fought for space on the roads all the time. On a hot summer afternoon, my father was riding his motorcycle as usual, on one of the busiest roads. He was on his way to deliver the products. A minivan beside his motorcycle suddenly made a

sharp turn and hit the motorcycle. My father fell to the ground instantly and was dragged by his arm for a distance. Not only did the accident break his arm, but it also tore off a good portion of the skin. It took my father a few months to recover from the injury. However, he did not avoid driving after the accident. Although he did not drive any motorcycles again, he bought a truck for his company and became a truck driver. He always reminded his children, "It is not safe to ride a motorcycle because your body is outside of the vehicle. It is safer to drive a car, which keeps your body inside." My father was courageous and bounced back from the accident quickly. He obtained his truck driver's licence in order to continue to run his business to support his family. In fact, he continued to drive in Canada until he turned eighty-four, just two years before his passing. My dad was also quite intelligent in solving problems. He bought a truck for his company as soon as he got the trucker's licence. He felt so proud of himself as he reminded us that a truck was much safer and more spacious for him. He learned from the accident and came up with a creative solution to improve his lifestyle and the operation of his business. My father was also fun loving and he was an excellent ping pong player. He won many awards in ping pong competitions when he was young, and began teaching me the basic techniques of playing ping pong when I was a little child. He was a master of ping pong skills. He played so well with the racket that it seemed like an extension of his arm. He was able to play ping pong with great ease until his late sixties. He gave my children a standard ping pong table and took delight in watching them play. I had a lot of fun playing ping pong with my father until I came to Canada for school. This love of having fun is

another characteristic that I inherited from my father. I still occasionally play ping pong with my sisters, and we have a lot of fun, but it is different without our father.

Without the courage that I inherited from my father; I would not have been able to perform the duties of a high school principal. As a female Asian immigrant principal with an accent, I would not have been able to supervise a hundred staff members, who were native English speakers without this courage. The intelligence that I inherited from my dad was an asset as I pursued my MDiv and DMin degrees, which required me to think critically and analyze data thoroughly. Last but not least, my father taught us that age is only a number, and that being young at heart is what mattered most. He reminded us to enjoy life to its fullest regardless of the age. As I desire to age gracefully, I look forward to driving my car and playing ping pong in my eighties like my father did. I praise God for shaping me through my father. Much of my visible character reflects what my father showed me. God used my father to help me grow high. The father that he gave me on earth was the best father for me, as he created my inmost being and knitted me in my mother's womb (Ps. 139:13). He "saw my unformed body; all the days ordained for me were written in his book before one of them came to be" (Ps. 139:14). God used my father to shape me into a courageous follower of God, an intelligent student for God, and a fun-loving child of God. I look forward to seeing my father again in heaven.

My Mother

I cherished my mother even more than I used to after the passing of my father. She is my only parent on earth besides my mother-in-law. God brought me to this world through my mother. Not only is it my desire to honor my mother, but it is also God's commandment as he says, "Honour your father and your mother so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you" (Ex. 20:12). It is my desire to care for my mother and to ensure that she lives well in her senior years. I want to honour her for being my loving mother. It was she who taught me how to pray when I was a child. My mother was once a Christian and my first contact with God was through her. She knelt with me in my bed and showed me how to form the praying hands as she gently held my little hands and put them together. I could feel the warmth of her hands as she caressed my little palms. I felt love running through her fingers into my heart. It was a precious experience as "I have calmed and quieted myself, I am like a weaned child with its mother, like a weaned child I am content" (Ps. 131:2). I felt my mother's love, which made me feel contented, as she taught me how to pray. Only me, my mother and God were in the room. Although I could not remember what my mother taught me to say in my prayers, I knew that I was talking to God, and I knew that it was a good thing to talk to him. It was also something that my mother wanted me to do well. She planted the seed of praying in my heart at a young age. The seed sprouted and continued to grow into my adulthood. It is still my prayer each day for my soul and my heart to be calmed by God so that I can be content like a weaned child with its mother (Ps. 131:1-2). It is also my desire to reconnect

with the long-forgotten experience of praying with my mother. I praise God for my first encounter with him through my mother, which was precious.

Unfortunately, due to all kinds of life challenges, my mother lost her faith through the years. I pleaded to God each day for her return to Christ. Praying for my senior mother and caring for her helped me to grow deep and wide. I longed to hold my mothers' hands and to pray with her again one day.

My mother was a teacher at several Christian schools throughout her career. She took me with her to her schools when I was little because there was no one available at home to take me to school at that time. As a result, I ended up attending my mother's schools in my formative years. At times it felt special to be a teacher's kid. I liked the teachers and the schools. They were Christian schools and most of the teachers were Christians. We started the school days with morning worship through the public announcement system. We sang hymns and recited the Lord's prayer each morning. It was here that I was first introduced to the Lord's prayer, and I have been praying it ever since. Although the prayer did not mean much to me when I was little, it moved from my head to my heart throughout the years. The prayer was no longer just biblical knowledge in my head as it began to touch my heart at different stages of my life. For instance, the prayer helped me forgive those who trespassed against me as God had forgiven those, who trespassed against him (Mt. 6:12). Who am I not to forgive since God had forgiven me first? My favourite hymn was *This is My Father's World*, which we sang almost every week at the schools' morning worship. Although I did not know much about God back then, I knew that he made the world, the trees, the

flowers, and the mountains. I could see them in my little head when I sang the hymn. I also learned that I had a father in heaven through the hymn. I knew he was good and kind, although I did not have any relationship with him yet as a child. Through the Christian schools, I came to know that there was a God, and he was nice to me. The seed of faith was planted in me in my formative years. It took years for it to grow and to be ready for harvest at high school when I accepted Christ Jesus in my teenage years.

My mother was also the person who introduced me to church worship, and I remember going to church with her on Sundays. My father was not a Christian, so just my mother and I would attend the adult worship service. I did not know why my mother did not send me to the children's Sunday school instead. I found the worship boring, but I remembered my mother's beautiful voice when she was singing the hymns. It was a sweet and lingering voice, and I can still hear it. Although I did not enjoy the worship, the atmosphere and the colours of the worship stayed in my mind. The atmosphere was mystic and solemn. The colours of the pastor's robe were usually red and white. The candles were white, and I could still smell them. The ceiling was high, and the sanctuary was airy. It was not hot and stuffy, even during the summer days. I could still see the procession of pastors and choir entering and leaving the sanctuary. I could still hear them singing along the way. All in all, it was a mystical and solemn experience for a child. I could not understand the rites and the hymns, but I knew something sacred was going on. I also noticed that the adults were all serious looking and respectfully quiet. It was through these worship experiences during my childhood

that I began to notice the mysterious and respectable aspects of God, in addition to his love and kindness. The worship made me feel more curious about God as I found him intriguing.

God planted the seed of faith in me through my mother teaching me how to pray, through my mother sending me to Christian schools, and through my mother worshipping with me when I was a child. I also noticed that my mother role modelled a loving mom for me. Unlike most Chinese parents, my mother was very expressive in her love for her children. She would say, “Mommy loves you” regardless of our age, and still says it now to her grown children. She was never shy of reminding us how much she loved us by getting us food, reminding us to dress warmly and to drive safely, and to take good care of ourselves. Family time with her children was the happiest time for her. God shaped me into a loving mother through my mother, who taught me how to love and how to care for my children. It is my desire for my children to experience God’s love through my love for them. May God continue to pour his abundant love upon my family.

The Student Ministry

Although I majored in Pastoral Ministry for my MDiv, I was not called to be a pastor. However, my passion for international students grew after my retirement. I tutored a group of international students at the Christian school that God called me to serve. I also volunteered at a local church as a project leader for their international student ministry after I retired. My role was to liaise with the school officials, to recruit volunteers, and to offer support to the international students at the Christian school where I served. The school had several hundred

students including fifty international students, a majority of whom were from China. In addition to the homework club that we offered on weekdays, we organized Chinese dinners and Parents Night presentations for the staff and the parents of the school. God had blessed us with more than a dozen international students who attended the homework club regularly and we started to develop trusting relationships with these students. My long-term goal was to develop a Christian community among them. However, recruiting volunteers from the church was challenging. It was very difficult to have volunteers available to tutor the students after school, as most people were still at work in the afternoon, and the traffic was usually busy.

By the end of the first semester, I felt exhausted about the ministry, and I also felt stuck, as I did not see much potential for further development with only one volunteer to help. God showed his mercy at this point by leading me to a newly formed small group, where I found a lot of support for the ministry. I was invited to the new small group at the beginning of the year, and to my surprise, I was asked to share the needs of the international student ministry at the very first meeting. In the end, the small group adopted the student ministry as their mission event for the year. With the support of the church, the small group organized an Easter celebration and dinner for the international students, so we could share the Gospel with them. The small group also adopted the students for Grandparents Day, when the local students celebrated the event with their grandparents. As a group, we look forward to further supporting the academic and social well-being of the international students from China. God sent me help when I felt desperate.

God loves the international students, and Christ Jesus died for them too. The international student ministry is Christ's Ministry. Last but not least, I made some new friends in Christ through the small group. The support of these new friends for the ministry was much more than what I could have expected. God never forgets about His ministry. He never leaves us alone in his ministry and he continues to provide when we are in need.

In addition to the wonderful support, God created new opportunities for the ministry. The international student coordinator of the Christian school invited me to be the guardian of thirty Chinese international students for the following school year. The opportunity was a result of the growing responsibilities of the current guardian at the school. The school principal was looking for a caring person, who also needed to be a Christian and an educator, to be the guardian for these students. He thought of me and asked if I was interested in the job. I had never expected the ministry to turn into a potential job opportunity and I was in awe when the principal approached me. I was suddenly the legal guardian for 30 students! They were gifts from God. This job was another blessing from God, and the timing was perfect. I remembered praying to God a little while ago regarding the possibility of having a part-time job. I completely forgot about this request soon after I prayed. I was amazed that God answered a prayer request that I had completely forgotten about. He loves me so much that he attended to all my needs, big and small. I had never expected that a volunteer ministry would evolve into a job opportunity. God's plan is often beyond human comprehension. Serving these international students with God and for God helped me grow wide. It was

my desire for these students to experience God's love and to come to know Christ through my care for them.

God's will for me to serve the international students did not stop at the Christian school. He gave me the privilege of hosting an international student as a homestay parent this coming school year. My husband had also been an international student, and we were both passionate about being homestay parents. We had been asking God to send an international student to our home for a few years, but it did not happen due to our family responsibilities and career commitments. God waited until our children were grown and independent to send us an international student, so that we could be homestay parents. My husband and I prayed hard for discernment when we were first offered the opportunity. We were not sure if we should change our current lifestyle, as I was enjoying my retirement and studying for my DMin. We were not sure if we should give up some of our privacy and freedom. Should we raise another teenager now that our children were grown? Would we like being parents again? Did we have enough space in our lives to do a good job? As my mind was filled with questions about myself, I heard God say, "Would you like to minister to this student with me? Would you like to parent this student with me? Would you like to partner with me?" God was inviting my husband and I to be his partners in serving this student! My husband and I felt closer to God as we tried to discern his will. We felt peaceful about our decision. We also felt quite happy and excited as we looked forward to receiving the student and becoming her homestay parents in the summer. There was peace and joy in our decision. We also planned to renovate

the room we were going to give to the student. The room was empty, but I could feel the excitement and anticipation every time I walked into it. God would continue to shape my husband and me as we partnered with him to minister to this student.

The University Years

As I was about to finish flipping through my photo album, which was my spiritual autobiography, I needed to highlight some snapshots of my university years, which was a significant period of my life. I attended York University at Toronto for my undergraduate studies. As an international student, the York Chinese Christian Fellowship (YCCF) was my spiritual home on campus, in addition to the church where I got baptized. My university years with YCCF were the most enjoyable years of my life. If I were allowed to re-live a part of my life, I would choose to re-live those years. I was young, energetic, and curious. University education was a humbling experience for me as I was introduced to an unfathomable depth of knowledge. I came to realize that there were so many things that I did not know and did not understand. The more I studied, the more inadequate I felt. This inadequacy heightened my desire to learn. It was during my university years that I started to enjoy learning, and YCCF was instrumental in shaping my spiritual experience. For my parents' peace of mind, I stayed in a student residence throughout my university years. Thus, the campus became my home, and YCCF became my sanctuary. I was invited to YCCF when I first arrived at the university.

On a sunny September afternoon, I was having lunch by myself at the student centre. A couple of Chinese students saw me and noticed that I was a new student. They walked up to me and asked if we could have lunch together. I was surprised by their friendliness. As they introduced themselves, I realized that they were also international students from Hong Kong. They shared their faith with me and invited me to the orientation meeting of YCCF. I was impressed by their sincerity and accepted the invitation. The orientation meeting took place in a common room in one of the student residence buildings. As soon as I entered the room, I saw a large circle of approximately thirty students sitting on the carpet. I quickly sat beside one of the girls and began listening as the senior students shared their university experiences, their coping strategies, and their faith. I was touched by their openness and sincerity. We were divided into small groups in order to get to know each other better. I made friends with a lot of international students during this orientation. Many of them were living on campus too. In fact, our student residences were very close to each other. We began meeting on campus for lunch and dinner, and very soon became close friends. They were my brothers and sisters in Christ and in Canada. They were my family members on campus. We shared our joy and our pain throughout the university years. We met for YCCF activities on Wednesdays and usually had dinner afterwards. We grew deep together as we studied God's word regularly in YCCF. We grew high together as our character was shaped in this crucial influential time. We grew wide together as we shared the Gospel with other students on campus. We were a homogeneous group that shared the same faith, the same culture, and the same

language, and we trusted and supported each other. We faced similar challenges as international students and therefore, understood one another very well. We shared home sickness together, and we also shared the joy of graduation together. I praised God for these most enjoyable years of my life. YCCF was another beautiful orchard that God had provided for me. God shaped me and pruned me in that orchard. As brothers and sisters, we shaped one another during our university years as we learned to love God, to love one another, and to share the Gospel on campus.

Conclusion

It was in my YCCF years being a small group leader that I started to realize that a small group could be an orchard for God. Each member of the small group was like a tree tenderly pruned by God in his orchard. The tree described in Psalm 1 grows deep into the source of its nutrients, grows high to bear fruit in season and grows wide as its leaves do not wither. How can we prosper like the tree in Psalm 1? The psalmist tells us that those who delight themselves “in the law of the Lord, and who meditate on his law day and night” will prosper like the tree described by him. The psalmist reminded us to grow deep into God’s Word so that we can grow high and grow wide. How can we grow deep into God’s Word? I am finding the answer in the practice of *Lectio Divina*. I was attracted to *Lectio Divina* when I was introduced to it by one of my professors at Tyndale. The spiritual direction internship at the university helped me refine the practice. *Lectio Divina* has become one of my spiritual disciplines. I was healed and restored by God’s Word through *Lectio Divina*, and my experience with it has

been rich and rewarding. Therefore, I took the field research project, which will be discussed in the next chapter, as an opportunity to share the use of *Lectio Divina* with my small group members. It was also an opportunity to explore if *Lectio Divina* could impact the spiritual development of these Chinese seniors in the context of my spiritual formation model of Grow Deep, Grow High, Grow Wide.

CHAPTER 4:

FIELD RESEARCH PROJECT: FOSTERING BIBLICAL VIEWS ON SOCIAL JUSTICE AMONG SENIOR CHINESE IMMIGRANT BELIEVERS AND SEEKERS FROM HONG KONG

This research project explored how senior Chinese Christian immigrant believers and seekers from Hong Kong, who live in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) renewed their biblical perspectives of social justice through participating in *Lectio Divina* in a small group setting. Since the Covid-19 global pandemic, the voice for social justice has been louder than it used to be at global and local levels. Concern for the lack of social justice have caused the members of my small group, a ministry of a Chinese Christian church, to turn to the teaching of God on social justice. They expressed an interest in returning to God's word to clarify their views on social justice so that they can react and respond to social injustice in a way that is pleasing to God and to people. A small group made up of seven members, including myself as the researcher, participated in a five-week facilitated program of *Lectio Divina* for approximately one hour per week. The program involved five sessions of *Lectio Divina* on six biblical texts related to social justice. In addition to completing a brief quantitative questionnaire regarding some data, the participants took part in pre- and post-*Lectio Divina* interviews so that data regarding their views and perspectives on social justice could be collected and compared. This research project explored how *Lectio*

Divina shaped the views of the participants on social justice, resulting in the participants growing deeper in their understanding of God's values, reaching higher to become more Christ-like, and stretching wider to be better servants for God and for his people on earth. Most of the participants were able to renew their knowledge of God, strengthen their dependence on God, and develop a stronger desire to love God and others.

Opportunity or Problem

People are confronted with social justice issues all the time. Some people choose to advocate for social justice while others choose to remain silent. In my experience of serving senior Chinese immigrant believers and seekers from Hong Kong, I have noticed that most of them, including myself, chose to remain quiet. However, our silence was neither a reflection of our approval, nor our negligence of the issue since we were and are concerned with the lack of social justice. Why did God allow an innocent Asian woman to be beaten up on a street in New York? Will I be next? Do I feel safe walking alone in my city? Why were hundreds of Indigenous children killed in their residential schools? Will my grandchildren, who belong to a visible minority, be treated unfairly in this land of Canada? These were some of the concerns that I noticed among my small group members. These questions are real and relevant to those of us who live in Canada. They are my own pressing concerns too. Although we may feel a bit confused regarding the issue, we firmly believe that God's Word can renew and shape our views on social justice. We trust in the power of God's Word, which can transform us by renewing our minds. Then we "will be able to test and approve what God's will is

– his good, pleasing and perfect will” (Rom. 12:2). The small group needed to develop a deeper understanding of God’s view on social justice in order to deal with our concerns about the lack of social justice in society. The small group members believed that they could find guidance, direction, and comfort in God by spending time in his Word. *Lectio Divina* allowed the group members to read (*lectio*), to meditate (*meditatio*), to respond to (*oratio*), and to rest in (*contemplatio*) God’s Word as it related to social justice (Phillips 2015, 226). Not only did *Lectio Divina* help the participants hear God’s teaching on social justice, but it also required them to respond to the teaching. It fostered mutual communication between the participants and God, which was crucial for the spiritual formation of the participants.

Response and Intervention

As the researcher, I observed a need and planned a response for the small group, conducted the intervention program, and reflected on the outcome of the research project. Together with the participants, my view on social justice was also shaped, resulting in a formation experience of renewing my mission of caring for others. As the participants sought clarification regarding their views on social justice, they noticed that the term “social justice” did not appear in the Bible. However, they learned that Christians are commanded to be doers of justice, and to administer justice to the poor and the needy in this fallen world (Prov. 31:9 and Isa. 1:17). They were reminded that God is perfect and without iniquity, “just and upright is he” (Deut. 32:4). However, the Bible also depicted social injustices such as the mistreatment of Jacob by his uncle (Gen. 28-30), and the injustices of

the wicked kings in the Old Testament. Jesus exemplified God's justice as he cared for the hungry, the poor, and the sick, when he was living on earth. Since we were fallen people living in a fallen world, Christ Jesus proclaimed God's righteousness by dying for us on the cross to redeem us from the curse of eternal death so that "whoever believes in the Son will have eternal life" (John 3:36). God intended to redeem humanity through the crucifixion and the resurrection of Christ Jesus. Jesus died for us all, and not just for a few. Not only was salvation inclusive, but it was also the result of God's unconditional love for humanity. Therefore, the focus of the intervention was on God's love and his justice in this fallen world. I trusted that God would speak to the participants through his Word by the power of the Holy Spirit through *Lectio Divina*. God would shape the participants' views about fallen people, and about God's expectations, so that in the end, we could live out social justice by loving one another. I also believed that the interaction between God's Word, the Holy Spirit and the participants would shape the souls of the participants as their minds were renewed. The research project managed to clarify the participants' views on God's expectations, wisdom, and love to various degrees. It also gave the participants some guiding biblical principles about living out social justice and helping the victims of social injustice, as they increased their knowledge of God, rebuilt their relationship with God, and renewed their commitment to God.

Descriptions of Key Concepts

Lectio Divina refers to holy reading which connects the reader to the heart and mind of God. It is a spiritual practice that is composed of three key elements:

scriptures, the Holy Spirit, and the reader. It is an encounter between the reader and the Holy Spirit through the act of engaging with Scripture. It is a transformational process, through which we can often hear God's voice (Wilhoit and Howard, 2012, 45). The five *Lectio Divina* sessions in this research project involved the researcher reading the selected text(s) slowly three times in both Cantonese and English at each session. The first reading was for listening, the second reading was to identify a word or a phrase that stood out to the listener, and the third reading was to relate the word or the phrase that stood out to the theme of social justice. The reading ended with an invitation to contemplation so the participants could continue to contemplate the word or the phrase that caught their attention until the next meeting. The participants took turns sharing what they had learned, experienced, or reflected on throughout the process.

Small group refers to a small group of believers and seekers, usually fewer than 12 people, who meet regularly for Bible study and fellowship. It was organized by a Chinese Christian church as part of its core ministry. The purpose of the small group was to enhance the spiritual development of believers, and to share the Gospel with seekers. This small group had eight members, including myself as the researcher, and my husband as the technical support for the project but did not participate in it. Thus, there were six participants in the research. The small group had been meeting for more than ten years before the study began. The group members knew and trusted each other well. My husband and I had been leading the small group for many years.

Social justice “is grounded in the idea that every human being deserves the full spectrum of political, economic and social rights, and opportunities” (World Vision Canada, 2021). For the purpose of this research project, it focuses on the contextual understanding of social justice among the small group members. It generally refers to access, participation, and equity. It also refers to what the population at large perceives as fair treatment to others (especially the marginalized), such as feeding the hungry, helping the homeless, and caring for the aging. Social justice is also about the distribution of wealth, opportunities, and privileges within a society. It is about removing barriers for social mobility and creating safety nets for the marginalized.

Supervision, Permission, and Access

This research project followed the guidelines and restrictions of the Research and Ethics Board of Tyndale University (Appendix A), and the administration and the faculty of Tyndale University and Seminary. As the researcher, not only did I report to the professors at Tyndale, but I also connected with the team leader of the small group ministry of my church. Informed consent was obtained from all the participants, who also had access to the findings and reports. All the participants, findings, and reports were anonymous. Participation in this research project was voluntary and had no impact on future participation and involvement in the small group after the completion of the research. An orientation session was held during a regular small group meeting to review the issues of confidentiality, potential risks, and expected commitment. The

participants could choose to withdraw from the research project at any time during the study without consequence.

This chapter summarizes a research project report, which explores the influence of *Lectio Divina* on the shaping of the participants' views on social justice, through data collection, findings, and interpretation. It was an opportunity to reflect on my spiritual formation model as shown through the experiences of the participants.

Context

This research project was conducted in a small group setting virtually via Zoom, due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Written consent was obtained from the small group members before they could voluntarily participate in the project. The participants were all retirees in their mid-sixties and early seventies. Their backgrounds were diverse due to their differing ages and their life experiences. Their educational backgrounds ranged from high school graduates to college graduates. The five sessions of *Lectio Divina* were conducted in Cantonese, which was the first language of the participants. It was also the language the participants used to read the Bible. The participants, both believers and seekers, were eager to learn more about God and to develop a stronger relationship with him. They were also very supportive of the research project. They enjoyed Bible study and fellowship within the small group, which involved the sharing of ideas and experiences. They also enjoyed spending time together as they shared dim sum lunches and dinners. Confidentiality had always been observed among the small group members. Although I was the researcher, I learned with them throughout

the project. I also had the role of facilitator and supported the participants during the research.

During Bible study, due to the unfortunate incidents of mistreatment of long-term care residents, and the attack on Asians in North America, the participants expressed some concerns regarding social justice in Canada. These concerns created an opportunity for the group to return to God's Word to renew their biblical views on social justice. What were the causes of social injustice? How should we respond to social injustice? How could we live out social justice? These were just a few of the questions that the participants and the researcher had in mind. Although each of us may see our life experiences and world situations differently, we need to clarify our views on social justice in the knowledge of the image of God (Col. 3:10) because he encompasses all truth. In the face of social injustice, we need to live in God and with God, built up and rooted in God, strengthened in faith, and overflowing with thankfulness so we can live our senior years well (Col. 2: 6-7). Through the exposure and the use of *Lectio Divina*, it was my hope that our views on social justice would be clarified by reading, meditating, and responding to God's Word by the power of the Holy Spirit. Our interaction with God's Word through the power of the Holy Spirit would shape our understanding of social justice, help us live out social justice, and ultimately address our concerns regarding social injustice. Finally, the researcher herself would continue to learn and grow with the participants as she led and supported them through this project. This project was also a spiritual formation experience

for the researcher, as her perspectives on social justice were shaped through God's Word by the power of the Spirit.

***Lectio Divina* & Spiritual Formation Model**

As mentioned in Chapter 2, *Lectio Divina* is one of the many essential practices for spiritual formation. The fundamental biblical basis for *Lectio Divina* is that Scripture is God's Word. Not only is Scripture inspired by God, but it also communicates God's message to us when we read it. In *Reading with God: Lectio Divina*, David Foster explains:

This is absolutely fundamental - not only that the scriptures have been inspired by God, but also that they express for us, when we read them in faith, God's personal word of salvation. Only when we listen to the scriptures in faith, hope and love can we expect to hear God addressing us. (Foster 2012, 5)

As a matter of fact, God intends to speak to us through Scripture. *Lectio Divina* helps us tune in to a "divine wavelength" so that we can hear God's voice through the biblical texts (Wilhoit 2012, 6). The scriptures are written documents of intentional communication from God to human beings. In 2 Timothy 3:16 Paul proclaimed that "All Scripture is God-breathed ..." The word "God-breathed" means inspired by God. God, through the Holy Spirit, "inspires/breathes himself to humankind through the scriptures" (Wilhoit 2012, 35). God reveals himself to us through the scriptures. The Holy Spirit inspired the writers to communicate what God wanted to say, naturally and authentically. The Holy Spirit who inspired the writing of God's Word, is the same Holy Spirit who helps the reader to hear God's Word. The Holy Spirit, who inspired the writers back then, is the same Holy Spirit, who helps the us to hear God's voice as we read God's Word.

As we take part in *Lectio Divina*, we grow deeper in God. It is my hope for us to grow high and wide like the trees “planted by streams of water, which yields its fruits in season and whose leaf does not wither – whatever they do prospers” (Ps.1:3). It is also my hope for us to grow high when we yield the fruit of the Holy Spirit and become more Christ-like. I also pray for us to grow wide as we disciple believers and serve the church and communities. As we gain knowledge of social justice by meditating on God’s Word, I trust that we will gain the wisdom and strength to take better care of ourselves and others, especially our loved ones, in the face of social injustice. The comfort that we find in God will help us to encourage the oppressed. The strength that we find in God will help us to advocate for the needy. The wisdom that we discover in God will help us to react to social injustices in a way that is pleasing to God and to people. *Lectio Divina* is a spiritual discipline that can renew our minds through the holy reading of God’s Word led by the Holy Spirit. We will be drawn closer to God as we develop our world views in God and with God.

Because of my experience with *Lectio Divina*, I as the researcher intended to explore the benefits of it with my small group. This research project integrated the learning experiences of the Doctor of Ministry program with reference to my spiritual formation model of Grow Deep, Grow High, Grow Wide, as described in the Chapter 2. It was the hope of the researcher to explore if and how the research participants’ experiences might reflect the spiritual formation model.

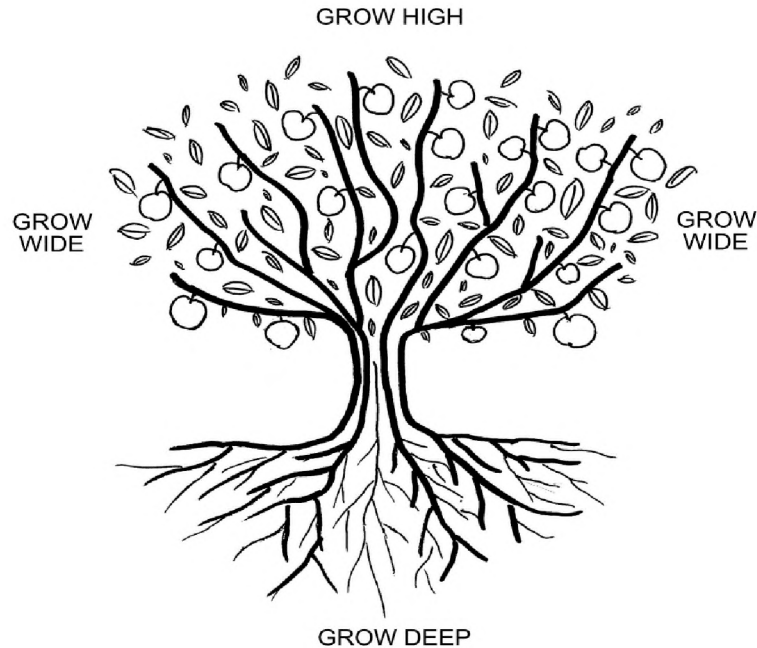


Figure 2: Spiritual Formation Model: Grow Deep, Grow High, Grow Wide

The model of Grow Deep, Grow High, Grow Wide involves three movements, and *Lectio Divina* has a role to play in the development of each. *Lectio Divina* can help us grow deep as we contemplate God's Word, which reveals our true identity. *Lectio Divina* can also help us grow high as God's Word depicts the character of Christ. Thus, we need to meditate on God's Word to grow the image of Christ in us. Last but not least, *Lectio Divina* can help us grow wide as God's Word communicates Christ mission on earth, which is also our mission. It was the intention of this research project to help the senior participants to grow deep, grow high and grow wide through the use of *Lectio Divina*.

Project, Methodology, and Methods

This section describes the setting of the research project and how the five sessions of *Lectio Divina* were conducted. It also briefly explains how the data was collected. It closes with the phases and the timetables of the project.

Field

This research project took place in a small group setting virtually via Zoom due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The six participants were Chinese Christian immigrants originally from Hong Kong. They had been living in the GTA for more than twenty years when the research took place. The six participants included five believers and one seeker. The five believers came to know Christ Jesus after they came to Canada. Most of them attended the Chinese church regularly. The seeker participant started to attend the small group about eight years ago. Two married couples, who attended the Chinese church, made up the four believers. The other believer attended another Chinese church in the GTA. The seeker was not attending any church. The participants' ages ranged from the mid-sixties to the early seventies. All the participants were retirees. The small group had been meeting for more than ten years at the time of the research. Before Covid-19, the small group met at my home every other week for Bible study and fellowship. Since the participants had limited English skills, the five sessions of *Lectio Divina* were conducted in Cantonese. However, at the request of the participants, I read the texts for *Lectio Divina* aloud slowly in Cantonese first and then English. The data collected and the notes taken were translated into English for the purpose of this research. The five sessions of *Lectio Divina* took place between December 4, 2021, and February 17, 2022. Each session was approximately one hour long, which was the same duration as our regular small group meetings.

Scope

This research project exposed the participants to *Lectio Divina*, as they read, meditated, and responded to the scriptures related to social justice. Their interaction with God's Word by the power of the Spirit was intended to help the participants grow deeper to love God more, grow higher to become more Christ-like, and grow wider as they cared for the needy. The five sessions of *Lectio Divina* were conducted in a regular small group setting, which the participants were very familiar with. A five-session program was decided on because it was not too lengthy for the senior participants but was substantial enough to cover the topic. The texts and topics selected for each session were informed by the group conversation at the DMin residency, and Chapters 1 and 2 of *The Bible and Social Justice: Old Testament and New Testament Foundations for the Church's Urgent Call* by Cynthia Long Westfall. The texts for the five *Lectio Divina* sessions focused on the justice of God in this fallen world, the expectations and wisdom of God, and the mission of Christ Jesus (Appendix E). This research intended to strengthen the participants' relationship with God through the shaping of their views on social justice. It also tried to encourage the participants to live out social justice by loving God with all their hearts, all their souls, all their minds and all their strength, and by loving their neighbours as themselves (Mark 12: 30-31). I firmly believe that God will continue to transform us as we desire to love God and people more. Although the research project was done in a small group setting, participation in the project was completely voluntary. Those group members who chose not to participate in the research project were still able to participate in the small group. The participants could choose to withdraw at any time throughout

the course of the research. The findings of the research did not represent the opinion of the Chinese church, which supervised the small group.

Methodology

This project assessed the participants' views on social justice before participating in *Lectio Divina*, involved the participants in *Lectio Divina* to explore the biblical views on social justice, and assessed their views on social justice after participating in *Lectio Divina*. Six small group members took part in five sessions of *Lectio Divina* from December 4, 2021, to February 19, 2022. Each session lasted about 60 minutes. Each participant was interviewed individually before and after the five sessions of *Lectio Divina* to collect data on their views on social justice (Appendix B). A brief questionnaire was also used to collect some basic quantitative data from each participant. In addition, notes regarding the responses of the participants were taken during each session. I, as the researcher, applied the action learning process of observation, plan, action, and reflection, throughout the course of the research as illustrated by Dr. Mark Chapman in the course "Spiritual Formation Action Research Project." The data collected through the interviews and the questionnaire were categorized for analysis and interpretation with a focus on the spiritual formation model of Grow Deep, Grow Wide, Grow High.

Methods

This research project explored the impact of *Lectio Divina* in shaping the views of believers and seekers on social justice in a small group setting. The five sessions of *Lectio Divina* took place at regular small group meetings. I conducted

an orientation session followed by five sessions of *Lectio Divina*. Some basic quantitative data, such as the age, gender, and education levels of the participants were collected at the beginning of the study through a brief questionnaire.

Qualitative data regarding the participants' view on social justice was collected on an individual basis through the pre- and post-*Lectio Divina* interviews. The same questions were used for both sets of interviews to explore the impact of *Lectio Divina* in shaping the social justice views of the participants. The data collected and the notes taken throughout the five-week program, were coded, categorized, analyzed, and interpreted, and will be discussed later in this report.

During each of the *Lectio Divina* sessions, I read the text aloud slowly in Cantonese and then in English (*lectio*). The participants listened and referred to their Bibles at the same time. Then, I read the text aloud slowly the second time in Cantonese and English (*meditatio*). The participants were asked to notice any words or phrases that caught their attention, and they took turns sharing these with the group. Each participant invited another participant to share at the end of his/her turn. I slowly read the text aloud in Cantonese and English for the third time (*oratio*). The participants were asked to focus on the words that they noticed and see if these words reminded them of anything or said anything about social justice. They were given some time to write down their thoughts on a piece of paper, if necessary. Then they took turns sharing their thoughts and inviting the next participant to share when they were finished. I need to acknowledge that I was stepping away from the traditional practice of *Lectio Divina* by asking a leading question. When I was introduced to *Lectio Divina* through my professors

and spiritual direction instructors, I found that the guiding questions used by some of them for *oratio* helped me reflect deeper on the words or the phrases that caught my attention. I extended the use of guiding questions in this research to help the participants focus on social justice. I also added a little bit of informal teaching to wrap up each session. As a follow up activity, I encouraged the participants to rest in the words or the phrases (*contemplation*) for the rest of the week. I trusted that God would shape them through the Spirit as they contemplated his Word.

Phases and Timetables

Planning Phase (August to November 2021)

- Draft research proposal submitted to supervising professor for feedback.
- Final research proposal submitted to supervising professor for approval.
- Application submitted to Tyndale Research Ethics Board (REB) for approval.
- The set of questions for the pre- and post-*Lectio Divina* interviews revised by the researcher in consultation with the supervising professor and REB.
- The set of questions for the pre- and post-*Lectio Divina* interviews (Appendix B) reviewed and approved by the supervising professor and REB.
- The brief questionnaire (Appendix C) for collecting quantitative data revised by the researcher and reviewed and approved by the supervising professor and REB.

- Research proposal approved by REB.
- Information session conducted during a regular small group meeting.
- Consent forms translated into Chinese.
- Consent forms (Appendix D) emailed to the small group members who were also the potential participants.
- Answered participants' questions and concerns about the project.
- All active group members, who continued to be involved in the small group since the outbreak of Covid-19 in March 2020, agreed to participate in the research project.

Implementation Phase (November 2021 to February 2022)

- Collected completed questionnaire from the participants.
- Collected signed consent forms from the participants.
- Conducted an orientation session focusing on the risks, benefits, and confidentiality of the program during a regular small group meeting.
- Answered questions and concerns raised by the participants.
- Conducted the pre *Lectio Divina* interviews individually with each of the participants.
- Conducted five sessions of *Lectio Divina* with a focus on social justice at five regular small group meetings. Each meeting lasted approximately one hour, which is the same as the regular small group meetings. The five sessions are as follows:

Table 2: Outline of Sessions

Dates	Topics	Texts
Dec 4, 2021	Session 1: The Fallen People	Genesis 3: 14-19
Dec 18, 2021	Session 2: The Expectations of God	Exodus 23:1-9
Jan 9, 2022	Session 3: The Wisdom of God	Proverbs 2:1-11
Jan 22, 2022	Session 4: The Mission of Christ	Luke 4:16-20
Feb 6, 2022	Session 5: What Can We Do?	Romans 8:38-39 Matthew 22: 36-40

- Took notes regarding the responses of each participant during the five sessions of *Lectio Divina*.
- Regularly reviewed the content and materials for the *Lectio Divina* sessions based on the responses and needs of the participants.
- Conducted the post-*Lectio Divina* interviews individually with each participant.

Data Analysis and Reporting Phase (February to April, 2022)

- Translated the interviews and notes into English.
- Coded, categorized, analyzed, and interpreted the data collected through the questionnaire, individual interviews, and notes.
- Revised and submitted research report to supervising professor for review.

Ethics in Ministry Based Research

Since “DMin students are ambassadors of God and servants of the Gospel of Christ,” the researcher’s voice subsequently reminds the participants of the gospel (Sensing 2011, 31). Thus, the researcher is expected to reflect “a virtuous

life of kindness, compassion, generosity, peace, joy, faithfulness, holiness, gentleness, humility, meekness, longsuffering, and above all else, love” in the research process (Sensing 2011, 31). As a result, ethics is the “logical consequence of your having died with Christ, being raised with him, and looking forward to being made manifest with him” in all aspects of the researcher’s life including the research process (Sensing 2011, 31). The researcher should live out the love of Christ Jesus by fulfilling their ethical obligation to the participants.

There were many benefits that the participants received from taking part in the study. The participants renewed their views on social justice through *Lectio Divina*, resulting in spiritual transformation as their views were shaped by God. In the end, they would be able “to test and approve what God’s will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will” (Rom. 12:2). The renewal of the mind is an integral part of spiritual formation for the believers, and conversion for the seeker. Not only did participation in this study come with many benefits, but it also did not present any greater risks than what the participants might have expected to encounter in any regular small group meetings. However, the risks associated with the imbalance of power and dual relationships were addressed as the participants could choose not to participate in or to leave the research project without consequence. To fulfill the ethical obligations to the participants, it was necessary to ensure that the vulnerability of the senior participants was protected, the benefits were enhanced, and the risk of harm was minimized. For this research project, I, as the researcher, identified three potential ethical issues of power imbalance and risk. The first issue was that the participants might feel pressured

by me to participate in the research project because I was already the leader of the small group, and therefore, in a dual relationship with them. The second issue was that the participants might feel stress or discomfort as they reflected on their experiences with social injustice during the interviews. The interviews and *Lectio Divina* might trigger traumatic memories and cause distress. The participants might also feel uncomfortable sharing their experiences of social injustice with the researcher and other small group members. The third issue was that participation in the study might disrupt previously established relationships within the small group and might result in social harm.

In view of the potential ethical issues, I had taken some steps to lessen the risk or stress. Information and orientation sessions were held before the commencement of the *Lectio Divina* program to introduce the participants to the objectives, process, content, and potential risks of the study. These sessions also clarified any concerns that the participants might have had about their involvement. These information and orientation sessions took place during two regular cell group meetings, so there was no extra time commitment required from the participants. The consent form was emailed to each potential participant individually (Appendix D). I ensured that any discussion regarding participation would not take place during the small group meetings. Each participant emailed the consent form back to the researcher indicating whether or not he/she had decided to participate. The participants were given a week to make their decision and I did not contact them during that week in order to maximize their personal space for decision-making. I made sure that the participants understood that

participation in the research was totally voluntary and would have no impact on their future participation or involvement in the small group. The participants could choose to withdraw their participation at any time during the study without consequence. I also ensured that they understood that the same set of questions was used for each participant during the pre- and post-*Lectio Divina* individual interviews, so that none of them would feel excluded or being treated differently. This sense of inclusiveness was important to them.

I was also a trained spiritual director. As a result, I was able to apply spiritual direction and formational prayer for healing during the individual interviews, or as a follow-up measure, if any of the participants were to feel distress or being harmed by the interviews or by reflecting on experiences related to social injustice. Spiritual direction on individual basis, which I was trained for, was in place to mitigate any potential risks/stressors. Finally, the five *Lectio Divina* sessions took place as five regular small group meetings. The small group had previous experience in *Lectio Divina*, and as such, this study did not intend to introduce something that was brand new for the participants. It was something that the participants were already doing in their regular small group meetings, and therefore did not present any greater risks than the participants had come to expect they would encounter in previous small group meetings. None of the potential risk factors surfaced during the research project.

Findings, Interpretations, and Outcomes

This section summarizes the process of data collection and its analysis. It also discusses the findings, interpretation, and outcomes to explore the influence

of *Lectio Divina* in shaping the participants’ understanding of social justice in the context of Grow Deep, Grow High, Grow Wide.

Data Collection and Analysis

For the purpose of this research and as discussed before, Grow Deep generally refers to the development of our invisible relationship with God, which involves practicing spiritual disciplines as we meet with God, denying our false self and uncovering our true self. Grow High generally refers to the development of our visible relationship with God, which involves bearing the fruit of the Spirit and becoming Christ-like. Grow Wide generally refers to our visible relationship with others by extending Christ mission on earth through making disciples and reaching out to communities.

Table 3: Quantitative Data Collection Methods and Purpose

Quantitative Data	Method of Collection	Purpose
Background Questionnaire	The participants completed a questionnaire to provide information regarding their age, education, and faith background	To collect the necessary personal information of the participants of this research

The participants were asked to complete a brief questionnaire designed by myself to collect background data including age, gender, faith, education, and the number of years residing in Canada (Appendix C). The question on the number of years residing in Canada was asked to indicate that the participants were not newcomers to Canada. The question on the number of years being a Christian were asked to indicate that the participants were not new believers. A quantitative questionnaire is a common and effective tool for collecting background data.

This research project involved a total of six Cantonese speaking Chinese participants with three males and three females, giving each gender equal representation in this research. This was, however, not an intentional arrangement. The participants did not include myself as the researcher and my husband as the technology support person. The participants were made up of two couples, one female and one male. They were all between the ages of sixty-one and seventy-five, which validated the fact that they were seniors. The participants were evenly distributed among three age categories. There were two participants between the ages of sixty-one and sixty-five, two participants between the ages of sixty-six and seventy, and two participants between the ages of seventy-one and seventy-five. Thus, this research involved the views of seniors with an age span of more than 10 years from the mid-sixties to the mid-seventies. The participants were not newcomers to Canada. They had been residing in Canada for at least twenty years at the time of research, with four of them residing in Canada for more than twenty years. Based on my prior knowledge of the participants, they had been living in the GTA since they arrived in Canada. Regarding their faith, five of them were believers, and one was a seeker at the time of the research. The seeker was not part of the two couples but had been attending the small group for eight years at the time of research. The five Christian participants were not new believers. They had been Christians for at least eleven years, with three of them for more than twenty years at the time of research. Regarding their educational background, three of the participants were high school graduates and three were college graduates. Thus, there was an equal representation from two educational levels in

the research project. The participants were given pseudonyms for the purpose of the research report. They were called Abby, Amy, Eliza, Mat, Pan, and Yan.

Table 4: Qualitative Data Collection Methods and Purpose

Qualitative Data	Method of Collection	Purpose
Pre- <i>Lectio Divina</i> Interviews	The researcher interviewed each participant individually with the same set of questions via telephone. Notes were taken in both Cantonese and English to capture the participants' responses as accurately as possible. The notes were later translated into English for the purpose of this study	To collect data regarding the participants' views/perspectives on social justice and social injustice before the commencement of the <i>Lectio Divina</i> sessions
Post- <i>Lectio Divina</i> Interviews	The researcher interviewed each participant individually via telephone with the same set of questions. Notes were taken in both Cantonese and English to capture the participants' responses as accurately as possible. The notes were later translated into English for the purpose of this study	To collect data regarding the participants' views/perspectives on social justice and social injustice after the completion of the <i>Lectio Divina</i> sessions
Session Notes	The researcher took notes to capture the responses and sharing of the participants during each session of <i>Lectio Divina</i>	To collect data to explore the impact of the biblical texts on shaping the participants' views on social justice and social injustice

This research project collected qualitative data in order to answer the big question “Can *Lectio Divina* with a focus on social justice shape the world views of the participants?” The research was grounded in the social world experiences

of the participants and attempted to make sense of their lived experience (Sensing 2011, 57). The intervention for this research was five sessions of *Lectio Divina* with a focus on social justice. To explore the impact of the intervention, I collected and analyzed the pre- and post-intervention data. This data was collected through the pre- and post-intervention interviews of the participants by me. Each participant was interviewed individually before and after the intervention, with the same set of questions that had been developed by me, as shown in Appendix B. The set of interview questions was approved by REB and the supervising professor. The main objective of the questions was to collect data on social justice and social injustice based on the personal experiences and the biblical views of the participants before and after the intervention. Each pre- and post-intervention interview took about 30 to 45 minutes to complete on the phone without being recorded, which was the most comfortable and unthreatening way of communicating with these senior participants. I used a headset and was able to take notes in both English and Cantonese to capture the answers of each participant as accurately as possible. The notes were translated into English for the purpose of this research. I also took notes during the five sessions of *Lectio Divina*. The notes recorded the words or the phrases that stood out to the participants during *meditatio* and captured the content of the participants' responses during *oratio*. Most of the notes were taken in Chinese. There were few notes taken in English for the content so that I could translate into English simultaneously while the participants were speaking. The notes were taken in chronological order reflecting the flow of discussion in each section. They were

then translated into English for the purpose of this research. The data collected through the pre- and post-intervention interviews and the five sessions of *Lectio Divina* was coded, categorized, and analyzed, mainly based on the most frequently used words in each session and in the answers to the interview questions.

Although coding is just one way, and not the only way, of analyzing qualitative data, it was the primary methodology used for this research project (Saldana 2014, 3). Data analysis usually begins with collecting and identifying themes. According to Sensing, coding can sometimes be called “indexing”, “tagging” or “labelling” (Sensing 2011, 203). It is a way to prepare and to organize the raw data for interpretation. Coding is a process to assign units of meaning to the data collected to facilitate its use in answering the big question. I started the coding process with a systematic review of my data to better understand its scope and coverage. I first attempted to create the codes based on the big question presented by this research. As I re-read my data, I applied the codes in the appropriate places. The codes primarily emerged from my data, which was the primary source for my coding. I also grouped the words or the phrases that are similar to create the main categories. I then assembled the data material belonging to each category for a preliminary analysis. I recoded and re-categorized my data a few times through the analysis as some items were found in multiple locations, which required me to look deeper into the meaning of the words in a specific context.

Findings, Interpretations, and Outcomes

This section summarizes the interpretation of the data and discusses its findings and outcomes. Can *Lectio Divina* on biblical texts, with a focus on social justice, shape the world views of believers and seekers? It also interprets the data in the context of the three components of my spiritual formation model, namely Grow Deep, Grow High, Grow Wide.

The Pre- and Post-Intervention Interviews

This section discusses the findings by comparing the data collected in the pre- and post-intervention interviews with the participants. Questions 1 to 4, as shown in Appendix B, were designed to explore the personal views, while Questions 5 to 9 explored the understanding of the biblical views. The data collected was coded and categorized based on the methods discussed previously. Table 5 shows the words most frequently used by the participants regarding their personal views on social justice. Table 6 shows the words most frequently used by the participants regarding their understanding of the biblical views on social justice. The most frequently used words were categorized into themes as listed in Tables 5 & 6. The themes were developed based on the context in which the most frequently used words appeared. For example, below are the responses of some of the participants with reference to the questions regarding their views on social injustice in the pre-intervention interviews:

Eliza: “Greediness and selfishness ... a lack of love and don’t care about the benefits of others.”

“The worst is to have hate in your heart.”

Abby: “Greediness, immorality, jealousy. and hatred ...”

“Don’t be greedy. Be blameless and caring ...”

Pan: “Selfishness is usually a blind spot.”

Yan: “Social injustice can also be ego centred.”

The words that appeared most frequently were used by the participants to point out the shortfalls of humans. Thus, the words associated with the shortfalls were categorized into the theme of “human flaws.”

The words “Hong Kong”, “Canada” and “government” were used by the participants multiple times in the context of their previous experiences in Hong Kong. They used the words to describe how the Hong Kong government managed people and situations, and their experiences in Canada. Therefore, the theme of reference to previous experiences was developed based on the context in which the codes were used. In addition, the words “fair”, “equality”, “equity” and “inequity” were used by the participants multiple times in response to questions 1 to 4 in Appendix B. I consider the codes as a few of the commonly used words by people in general when the participants talk about social justice or injustice.

Table 5: Most Frequently Used Words by Participants for Personal Views on Social Justice

Words	Themes	Pre-intervention Frequency	Post-intervention Frequency
Selfishness, hate, bitterness, ego, greediness, jealousy,	Human flaws	21	9
Power, benefits	Powerful vs Powerless	9	16
Hong Kong, Canada, government	Reference to previous experiences	18	12

Words	Themes	Pre-intervention Frequency	Post-intervention Frequency
Fair, equality, equity, inequality	Reference to commonly used words	19	9

The participants' responses to Questions 1 to 4 in the pre- and post-intervention interviews showed that the use of *Lectio Divina* on biblical texts, with a focus on social justice, could shape the thinking of the participants. The pre-intervention data on the causes of social injustice suggested the relationship between human flaws and social injustice. For instance, in the pre-intervention interviews, Amy said, "Social injustice is demonstrated by those who just get benefits without any contributions." Pan also said, "Men hurt others to benefit themselves." Eliza said, "The use of power to satisfy self-fulfilling desires..." The post-intervention data, however, showed a significant decline in this relationship, as the participants started to reflect on themselves, through *Lectio Divina*. For example, in the post-intervention interviews, Amy was reflecting more on the information she got from the media about the Winter Olympics in Beijing, as she said, "Like what I shared in one of the sessions, we need to discern between the truth and the rumours. Some athletes are reporting that the meals served during the Olympics are bad while others are saying they were ok ... I need to discern what is right and what is wrong. What is happening actually and if the athletes are fairly treated ..."

The pre-intervention data also reflected the participants' concerns about the manipulation of the powerful when they gave examples of social injustice, such as "... the powerful uses their power to hide the truth ... and to make the

wrong into the right,” said Pan. The post-intervention data showed an increased awareness of this concern.

The pre-intervention data also reflected the participants’ dependence on their previous experiences in Hong Kong and Canada, when they were asked to define social justice and injustice, and to give examples for each. For instance, Yan said, “The quietness of Jesus when he was being tried made me think of the many Hong Kong people, who sat quietly in public to advocate for the needs of their city ...” Abby referred to Hong Kong when she said, “The poor people there needs more support ... I know it takes time to improve their conditions ...” The post-intervention data, however, reflected a decline in the dependence of the participants on their previous experience to describe social justice and injustice.

Finally, the pre- and post-intervention data also indicated a difference in the references made to commonly used words within the small group, when the participants were asked to share their views on social justice and injustice. For example, in the pre-intervention interviews, the words, “equity”, “equal” and “inequality,” were the most frequently used words by four participants. For instance, Yan said, “Equality is needed to reduce the gap.” He also said, “Social justice in a democratic society is equal opportunities for everyone ... Social justice also means equity such as the support for students with special needs.” However, the post-intervention interviews show a decline in the frequency of the participants using these words as the participants could relate to God more when they thought about social justice and injustice after the intervention. The shifts in the participants’ views presented in the pre- and post-intervention data supports

the claim that *Lectio Divina* can shape the views of believers and seekers on social justice. Figure 3 shows the distribution of themes for the personal views in response to questions 1 to 4 of the pre- and post-intervention interviews (Appendix B).

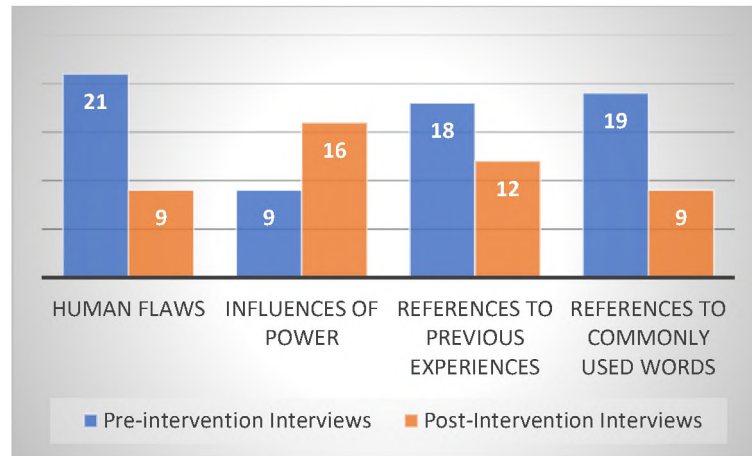


Figure 3: Theme Distribution of Participants' Personal Views

Table 6: Most Frequently Used Words /Phrases by Participants for Biblical Views on Social Justice

Words	Themes	Pre-intervention Frequency	Post-intervention Frequency
Curse, fallen world, sin	Cause of social injustice	0	10
Jesus, salvation, gift, grace, mercy, return, repent, God's love, John 3:16	Salvation through Christ	13	29
Love God, peace, trust, obey, follow, God's Word, closer, transform, commandments, wisdom, dependence, God's will	Relationship with God	5	19
Love people, empathy, nicer, understanding, neighbours, caring, kind, positive, respect	Relationship with people	10	23
Lesson, learn, teaches, best effort	Working progress	3	10
Cannot answer the question	Questions not answered	5	2

The pre-intervention interview data showed no knowledge of the relationship between the curse and the fallen people with respect to social justice. The post-intervention data however, showed evidence of the relationship between the two. The intervention shaped the participants' views on the cause of social injustice. Through *Lectio Divina*, the participants acquired the new perspective that the curse was the fundamental reason for social injustice. The pre-intervention data also reflected the participants' understanding of salvation. The post-intervention data, however, reflected a deeper understanding of salvation, such as the balance between mercy and grace. In addition, the post-intervention data reflected a stronger desire to develop a closer relationship with God, in comparison with the pre-intervention data. Through *Lectio Divina* on the biblical texts, with a focus on social justice, the participants expressed stronger desires for God as they wanted to follow his will and to follow his guidance. They also shared more about their willingness to rely on God, and to be guided by him. In addition, the post-intervention data reflected a stronger desire to love others, in comparison with the pre-intervention data. Most of the participants wanted to be nicer, more empathetic, and more understanding, as they learned how to love their neighbours as themselves.

Regarding the participants' attitude in loving God and in loving people, the post-intervention data showed an increased awareness of it being a learning process, in comparison with the pre-intervention data. Through *Lectio Divina*, especially on Matthew 22:36-40, the participants began to realize that living out the two great commandments was a lifelong learning process, which deserved

their best effort. For instance, in the post-intervention interview, Eliza said, “After these five sessions, I will give my best effort to God. To love requires our effort, dependence on God, wisdom from God and giving God our best effort.” Amy said, “Love your neighbour as yourself was learned in session 5; to help others, to get to know one another, to talk to and to reach out to people; to be nicer to others.” Yan said, “Session 5 taught us to trust and obey. Follow God’s word.”

Pan summarized the sessions as he said:

As discussed in the sessions, social justice is about the two great commandments. If we live out the two great commandments of loving God with all our hearts, all our souls, all our mind and all our strength, and loving our neighbours as ourselves, we will live out social justice eventually. It is a working progress and may take years and years.

Finally, the total number of questions that the participants could not

answer went down from five in the pre-intervention interviews to two in the post-intervention interviews. Perhaps the participants were more ready to answer the questions in the post-intervention interviews. *Lectio Divina*, with a focus on social justice, helped the participants to a little grow deeper, higher and wider, as their world views were shaped by God’s Word in a small group setting with a trained leader. The data collected were influenced by the biblical texts, which were selected by me as the researcher, to cover the causes of social injustice, God’s wisdom and his expectations, the mission of Jesus, and the great commandments. The data collected were also influenced by my relationship with the participants, as I had been their group leader for many years before the study began. Since there was substantial trust and respect in our relationship, their views may have been shaped by my sharing and teaching. In addition, the data collected

could also have been influenced by the group conversation as this was a close-knit small group, which had been meeting for more than a decade. Figure 4 shows the distribution of themes of participants' biblical views in response to questions 5 to 8 in the pre- and post-intervention interviews (Appendix B).

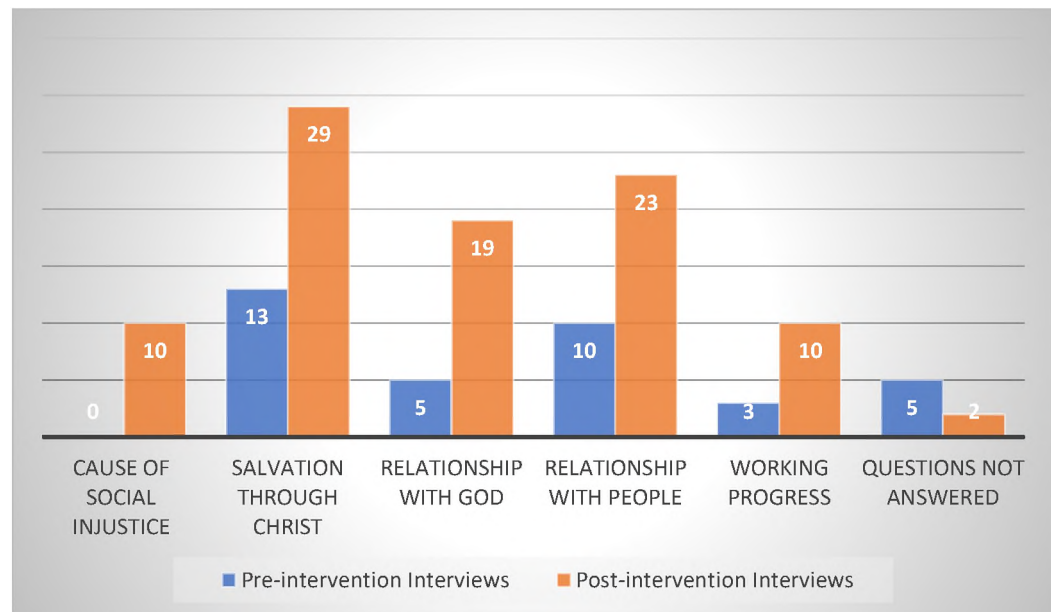


Figure 4: Theme Distribution of Participants' Biblical Views

Intervention: *Lectio Divina* Sessions 1 to 5

This section intends to walk through, with the reader, the intervention process. It gives the reader an overview of the changes that were noticed through the process. It is my hope that this overview will prepare the reader for the analysis and interpretation regarding the impact of *Lectio Divina* on the small group and on the participants presented later in this report. The data was interpreted, and the outcomes were categorized using the themes of Grow Deep, Grow High and Grow Wide.

Session 1: The Fallen People

Lectio Divina on Genesis 3:14-19 (Appendix E)

Meditatio: Below is the list of words that stood out to each participant.

Abby: “painful labour” (Verse 16)

Yan, Eliza & Amy: “curse” (Verses 14 & 17)

Pan & Mat: “dust” (Verse 19)

Oratio: The three major themes brought up during the sharing time were: the consequences of the fall, the reconciliation, and death. Yan and Abby focused on the consequences of the fall, which were the curse and the punishment of hard labour. Amy and Eliza shared about the curse and the need to repent to reconcile with God. Pan and Mat both believed that death is the return to dust. This session planted the seed in Yan to contemplate the curse and helped him discover that salvation is the perfect balance between the curse and God’s mercy, which he shared in latter sessions and in the post-intervention interview. Abby’s focus on hard labour was also reflected in her practical view of social justice during her pre-intervention interview, when she mentioned that social justice meant people could live well and enjoy their jobs. Amy and Eliza repeated the need to return to God and to rely on him as they strived to love others more. I wrapped up the session by saying that social injustice is a consequence of the fall of our ancestors as illustrated in Genesis. Social injustice is a result of our fallen nature and an unfortunate reality of the fallen world. This session ended with the participants responding to the sharing with a closing prayer. I also encouraged the participants to continue to savour the word that they had noticed throughout the week, which

is called *contemplatio*. In summary, the *meditatio* and *oratio* attempted to account for the unfortunate reality of social injustice and set the stage for the participants to continue to contemplate the curse and the reconciliation. It planted the seed to grow deep, grow high and grow wide in the following sessions.

Session 2: The Expectations of God

Lectio Divina on Exodus 23:1-9 (Appendix E)

I followed up on *Contemplatio* with the word that caught the participants' attention in Session 1. Yan shared that he continued to savour the "curse" from God. Throughout the contemplation, he noticed the ambiguity between God's curse and God's love. He was wondering how a curse and love could come from the same God. He started to understand why salvation was the solution to the curse as he said, "God is just and faithful." The journey of Grow Deep was first noticed in Yan as his view on salvation started to be shaped by *contemplatio* on the word "curse." Eliza also shared that the word "curse" had made her see returning to God as more of a blessing now than it used to be before. Her journey of Grow Deep seemed to be stirred, as she could now appreciate the return more because of the "curse."

Meditatio: Below is the list of phrases that caught the attention of the participants:

Pan: "Having nothing to do with a false charge" (Verse 7)

Amy: "Do not spread false report" (Verse 1)

Eliza: "Siding with the crowd" (Verse 2)

Abby: "Do not pervert justice" (Verse 2)

Mat: "Do not accept a bribe: (Verse 8)

Yan: “Do not deny justice to the poor” (Verse 6)

Oratio: The question I asked was “As I read the text for the third time, let us see if the phrases that caught your attention say anything, or remind you of anything about social justice.” There were signs of Grow Deep as Yan shared that the text reminded him that judgement should be based on facts. He was touched by the mercy and love of God as he shared that God’s justice demonstrated the perfect balance between judgement and mercy. Yan began to see salvation as the perfect balance between judgement and mercy. He began to recognize the curse and the judgment that he deserved to have through *Lectio Divina* in Session 1. He was touched by God’s love and mercy again through *Lectio Divina* in Session 2. His perspective on salvation was shaped through his new understanding that salvation is a perfect balance between love and judgement. He also reiterated this new understanding in the post-intervention interview. There were also signs of Grow Wide and Grow High for Amy. The text reminded her to stay away from rumours, and to stop spreading them on-line to her “neighbours.” As she started to reflect on her words, she was becoming more cautious of false reports in the media. She also recognized that she could not rely on her own wisdom but needed to rely on God’s wisdom to discern the false reports as she said, “God hates false reports.” The text also reminded her to guard her tongue and not to share false reports by relying on God’s wisdom. This is an example that Grow Wide and Grow High can happen at the same time. There were also some signs of Grow High in Eliza in regard to developing her character. The text reminded her not to be a wicked person, for God’s justice has no wickedness, and “siding with the crowd” was not

acceptable to him. Pan wanted “nothing to do with false charges,” and started to reflect on God’s character too, which was a sign of Grow High. Mat shared that bribery could upset God’s justice, and this made him think about the corruption of some government officials. Abby shared that God’s justice is truth and perverting justice could hurt others. All in all, *Lectio Divina* on Exodus 23:1-9 spoke to the participants regarding the absolute standards of God’s justice.

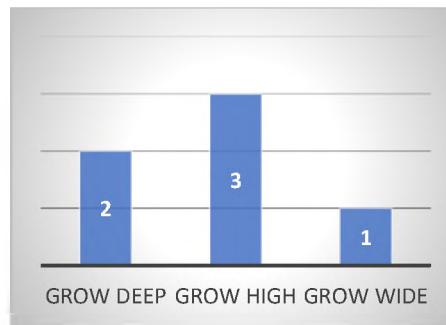


Figure 5: Noticeable Signs After Session 2

Session 3: The Wisdom of God

Lectio Divina on Proverbs 2:1-11 (Appendix E)

I followed up with the *contemplatio* on the words that caught the participants’ attention in Session 2. Unfortunately, there was no feedback regarding the *contemplatio*, possibly due to the longer than usual break of three weeks due to Christmas and the New Year.

Meditatio: Below is the list of phrases that stood out to each participant.

Pan: “For the Lord gives wisdom” (Verse 6)

Mat: “Understand what is right and just and fair – every good path” (Verse 9)

Abby: “Returning the ear to wisdom” (Verse 2)

Eliza: “Understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God” (Verse 5)

Amy: “Discretion will protect you” (Verse 11)

Yan: “Wisdom will enter your heart and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul”
(Verse 10)

Pan, Abby, and Yan focused more on God being the source of wisdom and on wisdom being a gift from God. Eliza and Mat were more interested in the knowledge and understanding aspects of wisdom. Amy was more focused on the result of wisdom, which brings protection.

Oratio: The question I asked was “As I read the text for the third time, let us see if the phrases that caught your attention say anything, or remind you of anything about social justice.” There were signs of Grow Deep and Grow High in all the participants. Regarding Grow Deep, Yan started his sharing with Psalm 111:10, which says, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.” He shared how the fear of God had made him surrender his selfish desires. He also recognized that he had to empty himself to allow God’s wisdom to enter his heart. These were signs of self denial in Grow Deep. Yan desired to listen to God with open-mindedness, and to seek his wisdom. Pan’s sharing corresponded to his focus on the source of wisdom during lectio. Amy expressed her need to discern between right and wrong, and her desire for God’s wisdom to help her to have this discernment. She trusted that God would alert her when she was being taken advantage of, which corresponded to the word “protection” that caught her attention in lectio. Amy showed signs of Grow Deep as she prayed to grow in God’s wisdom and to trust in God’s protection. In Session 2, Amy shared her concern in controlling her tongue. In Session 3, she came to realize that God’s

wisdom could help her do so, which was a sign of progress. Eliza realized that God’s wisdom would guard her heart from the wicked path, which was also a sign of progress since Session 2, during which she had only noticed that God’s justice did not allow wickedness. Abby expressed her desire to pray for wisdom from God to lead her life. Pan wanted to use God’s wisdom to understand more about justice. Mat expressed his need to rely on God to understand his goodness and perfection. I wrapped up the session with a reminder that we need to return to the wisdom of God to discern social justice. Social justice is neither dictated by our wisdom nor by social norms as Romans 12:2 says, “Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is – his good, pleasing, and perfect will.” Through Lectio Divina in Proverbs 2:1-11, the participants showed signs of Grow Deep and Grow High at the end of Session 3 as they desired to seek God’s wisdom to develop their character.

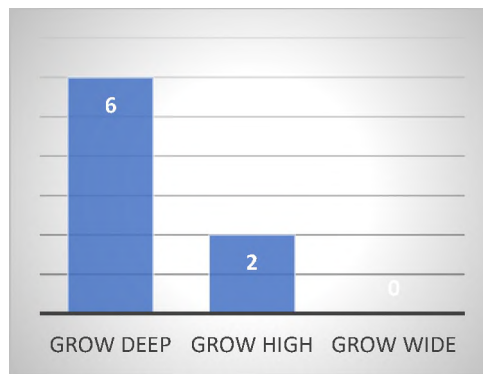


Figure 6: Noticeable Signs After Session 3

Session 4: The Mission of Jesus

Lectio Divina on Luke 4:16-20 (Appendix E)

I followed up with the contemplatio on the words that caught the participants' attention in Session 3. Unfortunately, there was no feedback regarding contemplatio, perhaps due to another longer than usual break of three weeks due to the Chinese New Year. Mat was absent from this session due to an unforeseen situation. As a result, there were five participants in this session.

Meditatio: Below is the list of words that stood out to each participant.

Abby: "As was his custom" (Verse 16)

Eliza: "To proclaim the year of the Lord's favour" (Verse 19)

Pan: "Today this scripture is fulfilled" (Verse 21) (He went beyond the text.)

Yan: "To proclaim the year of the Lord's favour" (Verse 19)

Amy: "Recovery of sight for the blind" (Verse 18)

Pan and Eliza were touched by God's grace and mercy as they recognized that God is willing to wait for us to repent in "the year of the Lord's favour."

Abby noticed Jesus' routine of visiting the synagogue regularly. Amy's attention was caught by the healing power of Jesus. Pan also noticed that Jesus' mission on earth fulfilled God's promises. I started to notice some changes, which reflected my model Grow Deep, Grow High, Grow Wide, as the session progressed.

Oratio: The question I asked was "As I read the text for the third time, let us see if the phrases that caught your attention say anything, or remind you of anything about social justice." There were signs of Grow Deep in Pan as he recognized that

only Jesus could exemplify social justice. He equated Jesus to social justice, which was a concept that he believed the world could neither understand nor exemplify. Moreover, Yan continued to grow deep as he was touched again by the love and the mercy of a God who was waiting for us to repent and to return to him. Yan was praying for the purity of his heart to receive the kingdom of God as “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God” (Mat. 5:8). He realized that he had to reach out to God for the faith to repent, because he could not do this by his own power. There were also signs of Grow Deep in Eliza as she expressed the need to repent and to return to God in order to become his child. In addition, Abby showed some signs of Grow Deep as she expressed her desire to attend church regularly as a spiritual discipline. She prayed for her mind to be renewed by the teaching, which would help her grow the image of Christ and serve the needy, as she became part of the church community. Finally, Amy also showed signs of Grow Deep when she expressed her dependence on Jesus to open her eyes to get to know him more. Figure 7 illustrates the noticeable signs after Session 4. I wrapped up the session by mentioning that Jesus’ mission on earth was to fulfill God’s salvation plan for us, which was the only resolution for the curse. Not only did salvation save us from the eternal curse, but it was also a solution for social injustice as it helped the blind to see, the oppressed to be delivered, and the sick to be healed. It was God’s love through Christ Jesus that healed the suffering and the woundedness caused by social injustice.

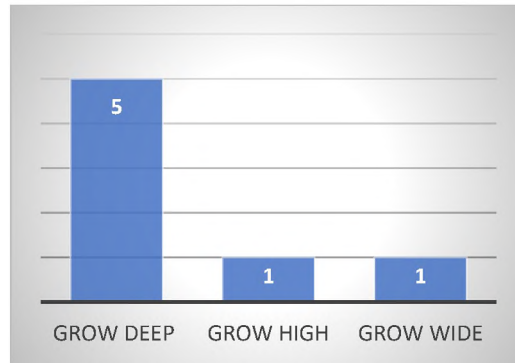


Figure 7: Noticeable Signs After Session 4

Session 5: What Can We Do?

Lectio Divina on Romans 8:38-39 and Matthew 22:36-40 (Appendix E)

I followed up with the *contemplatio* on the words that caught the participants' attention in Session 4. There was no feedback regarding the *contemplatio*. I conducted *Lectio* on the text following the steps of Session 1. *Meditatio* (Text 1): The phrases that caught the attention of the participants are listed below:

Abby: "neither life nor death" (Verse 38)

Eliza: "all creation" (Verse 39)

Amy: "separate us from the love of God" (Verse 39)

Mat: "separate us from the love of God" (Verse 39)

Pan: "separate us from the love of God" (Verse 39)

Yan: "love of God in Christ Jesus" (Verse 39)

The phrase "love of God in Christ Jesus" caught Yan's attention. It corresponded to what he had shared in previous sessions about the idea that salvation is a perfect balance between judgement and love. The other participants seemed to focus more on the fact that nothing can separate us from the love of God.

Oratio (Text 1): The question I asked was “As I read the text for the third time, let us see if the phrases that caught your attention say anything or remind you of anything about living out social justice.” There were signs of Grow Deep, Grow High, and Grow Wide among the participants. Yan showed signs of Grow Deep as he reiterated that the intervention of Christ Jesus to save us from the curse was a perfect balance between love and judgement. He shared that he had been touched by this new awareness throughout the sessions of *Lectio Divina*. Abby also showed some signs of Grow Deep. A close relative of hers had just passed away recently. The text reminded her that death could not separate her from God’s love as she continued to trust in God. She said, “I used to have a lot of fear about death, but less now ...” Amy also showed some signs of Grow Deep when she shared that the text had strengthened her faith. She said, “Nothing can stop God from living with us. He is always with us ...” There were signs of Grow High in Abby’s response as well, as she expressed her desire to become righteous as she followed Jesus. Signs of Grow Deep and Grow Wide were also found in Eliza’s response as she expressed her desire to learn more from God, and to connect more with God in order to gain a deeper understanding of justice and how to live it out. Last but not least, there were signs of Grow Deep and Grow Wide in Mat’s response as he recognized that love involved justice, and that we had to love God’s Word in order to live out social justice. He noticed that God’s Word was like electricity and that we were like the light bulbs. The light bulbs needed to connect to the electricity in order to shine for God. It was a good reminder of the relationship between the three elements of my spiritual formation model.

Regarding Grow High, Eliza recognized that social justice involved humility, which involved not self seeking and living for the benefit of others. This was supported by her responses in the post-intervention interview. I summarized the discussion by mentioning that nothing, including social injustice, could separate us from the love of God.

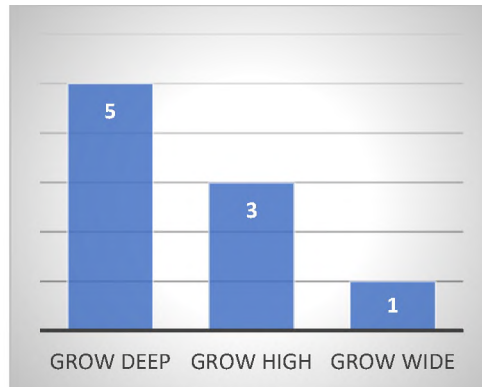


Figure 8: Noticeable Signs After Session 5 Text 1

Meditatio Text 2: Mat experienced some technical difficulties and was unable to participate in the *Lectio Divina* for Text 2. As a result, there were five participants for this text. The phrases that caught the participants' attention are listed below:

Yan: "commandment" (Verse 36)

Pan: "love your neighbour as yourself" (Verse 39)

Abby: "all your heart" (Verse 37)

Eliza; "all your heart" (Verse 37)

Amy: "love your neighbour as yourself" (Verse 39)

Yan's focus on the word "commandment" corresponded with his previous sharing about surrendering to God, since following the commandment was an act of surrender. Abby and Eliza both focused on "all your heart," echoing a dependence on God, which they shared in the post-intervention interviews. Pan

and Amy both focused on “love your neighbour as yourself,” which also corresponded to their responses in the post-intervention interviews.

Oratio Text 2: The question I asked was “As I read the text for the third time, let us see if the phrases that caught your attention say anything or remind you of anything about living out social justice.” The participants showed signs of Grow Deep and Grow Wide in their responses. Yan’s response continued to show signs of Grow Deep as he reiterated the fact that God demonstrated how to live out justice by balancing love and judgement. He also recognized that the commandments reflected God’s loving nature, which had been touching him through the sessions. Amy’s response showed signs of Grow Deep and Grow Wide as she realized that she needed to experience God’s love more as she learned to love others. Pan’s response also indicated signs of Grow Deep and Grow Wide as he discovered that he needed to obey both commandments. He could not love God and not love his neighbours. He now realized that he needed to love God and his neighbours at the same time, which he reiterated in the post-intervention interview. Regarding Grow Wide, Eliza expressed her desire to live out social justice by putting God’s love into action. She noticed that she needed much reflection and patience to love her neighbours, which were signs of Grow High. She could grow the fruit of the Spirit through loving others. Abby’s responses also show signs of Grow Wide as she expressed her desire to live out justice by caring for the needy. Finally, Amy’s responses also indicated some signs of Grow Wide as she shared that she needed to understand the thoughts of others more in order to love others as herself. Figure 9 shows the distribution of

the signs of growth in the three areas of my spiritual formation model. I wrapped up the session by reminding the participants that the great commandments could help us live out social justice by loving God “with all our heart and with all our soul and with all our mind,” and by loving others as ourselves.

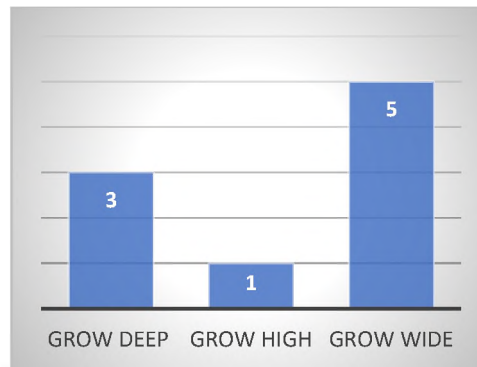


Figure 9: Noticeable Signs After Session 5 Text 2

The Impact on the Small Group

Through the five sessions of *Lectio Divina* on six biblical texts, with a focus on social justice, I noticed changes among the participants with reference to the three movements of the spiritual formation model of Grow Deep, Grow High, Grow Wide. God spoke to these senior Chinese immigrant believers and to the seeker through his Word. Figure 10 below summarizes the noticeable signs between sessions 2 to 5, which covered a period of two months. The signs related to Grow Deep were the most noticeable through Session 3 to Session 5 Text 1. The signs related to Grow Wide were most noticeable in Session 5 Text 2 due to the choice of scripture, which was about the Great Commandment. These noticeable signs reflected the strong interest of this small group in growing deeper in their relationship with God and in their knowledge of God. For instance, the participants expressed their desire to follow God and to seek his wisdom in order

to live out the great commandments. There was also a strong sense of not being able to discern properly, to live righteously, and to love fully without God’s help. However, the strong interest in Grow Deep could have been the outcome of the influence of the texts selected, or the influence of the group conversation. Nevertheless, the small group was like an orchard. God was the pruner of the orchard as he shaped each of the participants. The participants could also be God’s tools and pruners for each other. As the participants grew deep, they also grew high and grow wide as their roots dug deeper into the soil. In the end, the participants supported each another to grow deeper, higher, and wider. The participants would continue to shape the small group, which in return would shape the participants, as spiritual formation takes place. Thus, the pattern for the noticeable signs would shift as spiritual formation is an evolving process. The sign patterns we saw now could be different a few days later, as the participants were constantly shaped by God. The truth is that the participants would continue to grow deep, grow high and grow wide in their senior years as spiritual formation is a lifelong process to become more like Christ.

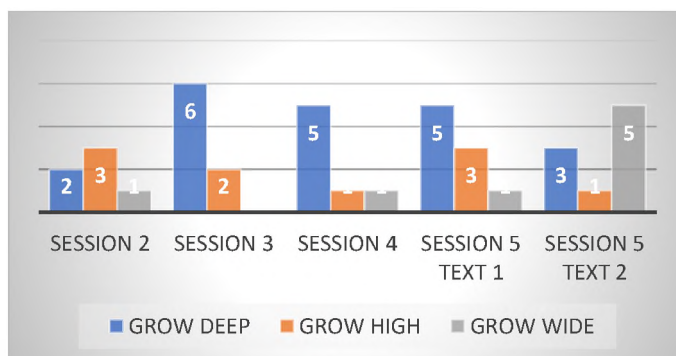


Figure 10: Noticeable Signs Sessions 2 to 5

The Impact on the Participants

Though the intervention, I noticed signs of changes in the participants in the context of the formation model of Grow Deep, Grow High, Grow Wide. For instance, the participants showed signs of Grow Wide as they expressed their desire to live out social justice by loving others more. Abby and Amy were most interested in strengthening their dependence on God to lead their lives. Abby desired to pray for God's wisdom to guide her, and Amy desired for God's wisdom to help her discern rumours. All the believers talked about their invisible relationship with God, which related to Grow Deep. The seeker also showed additional signs in Grow Deep as his sharing reflected praying to God for help.

Yan shared most about Grow Deep throughout the intervention. As discussed previously, his signs of changes were mainly related to Grow Deep as he contemplated God's perfect balance between judgement and love through salvation. He was so touched by this awareness that he said the following in the post-intervention interview:

God is the fairest. He turned a curse into salvation. Jesus died for us, and it is God's grace, which is a gift. All we need to do is to repent and to return to him. Salvation is a perfect balance between love and justice. I have been thinking about love and justice in the past few weeks. God created a perfect balance between love and justice through salvation.

Yan's sharing reflected the changes of his mindset as his perspective on salvation was shaped by God's Word through *Lectio Divina*.

Eliza is the participant that shared a strong desire to Grow Wide, which was echoed by her thoughts on living out social justice as she said:

I think of Session 5 and Romans 12:2. Let God transform us

through the renewing of our minds. Learn to live out the great commandments to love God and to love others as discussed in Session 5 so that we can have a positive impact on the world. The 5 sessions are very helpful. At first, it was easy for me to point my fingers at others. Now I started pointing the fingers at myself. I need to learn to love others more ...

Eliza's sharing reflected a shift in her mindset through *Lectio Divina*. She was starting to become a more reflective person, which was a marker for Grow High. She tried "to point the fingers at herself first" as she desired to love God and others more.

Pan also shared with reference to Grow Deep and Grow Wide. His view on living out social justice was shaped through exposure to *Lectio Divina*, and he said in the post-intervention interview:

I thought only Jesus could live out social justice and human beings could not. However, after the 5 sessions, I realize that we, the followers of God, can live out social justice too. We are fallen people living in a fallen world. God saved us through his love. We need to do what is right and not to do what is wrong.

Pan's sharing also reflected a shift in his mindset that he now recognized. He could live out social justice by living out the two great commandments. He no longer believed that Jesus was the only person who could live out social justice on earth. He realized that he could also live out social justice because God loved him and saved him. All in all, the sharing of the participants reflected the shaping of their minds through the use of *Lectio Divina* on biblical texts with a focus on social justice.

God speaks to believers and seekers through *Lectio Divina* by the power of the Spirit. As illustrated by the data collected in this research, God spoke to the believer participants and seeker Mat through *Lectio Divina*. During the pre-

intervention interview, Mat mentioned the word “equality” when he was asked to name a word or a phrase regarding social justice. When Mat was asked the same question during the post-intervention interview, he answered, “God’s love would come to my mind. John 3:16 talks about God’s love. God sent his son to this world and people saw it. God’s love can change social injustices.” In his post-intervention interview, Mat acknowledged the impact of God’s love despite being a seeker. When Mat was asked how to live out social justice in the pre-intervention interview, he said, “It is about how to live and interact with others. We need to forgive and let go.” He did not refer to God in his answer. When Mat was asked the same question in the post-intervention interview, there were signs related to the formation model as he said:

Follow the teaching of the Bible and the will of God. Everyone lives out a bit more love, and it will add up. The impact will be huge. Love is the key connection. God loves us. We need to hold onto his love and accept his love... We are like the light bulbs. We need to connect to the electricity so that we can shine. We need to connect to the source to shine bright ...

Mat’s response in the post-intervention interview was significantly different from his response in the pre-intervention interview. He did not refer to God at all in his answer to the same question in the pre-intervention interview. In the post-intervention interview, however, he acknowledged God’s love and recognized the need to depend on his love in order to love others, which reflects the movements of the model. Through *Lectio Divina*, seeker Mat’s view on social justice was shaped.

Limitations

This research project applied the process of observation, plan, action, and reflection. I as the researcher, observed a need in the small group, planned a response for the group, conducted the intervention program, and reflected on the outcomes of the research project. Together with the participants, my view on social justice was also shaped and renewed, resulting in the formation experience of Grow Deep, Grow High, Grow Wide. Although the findings in this research project show that *Lectio Divina* on biblical texts, with a focus on social justice, can shape the participants' world views and help them grow spiritually, there are some limitations. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the pre- and post-intervention interviews were conducted via the phone, which seemed to be the most comfortable and the least intimidating means of communication for the senior participants. The intervention, which was five sessions of *Lectio Divina*, was conducted via Zoom. Thus, the data collected was mainly taken from the verbal responses of the participants, with little input from their body language or facial expressions. For instance, when a couple shared the same electronic device during a session, I was not able to see both faces of the participants at times during the session. As a result, I was unable to get any clues from the facial expressions most of the time. Although I am proficient in Cantonese and English, and tried my best to translate everything as accurately as possible, the impact of colloquialisms and cultural differences on the translation cannot be ignored. For instance, the word "justice" has different connotations in English and Cantonese and this could have affected the translation of the participants' responses.

The timing of the intervention also created some limitations for this research project. The intervention spanned over a period of two months from December 4, 2011, to February 6, 2012. It was a longer period of time than I would have expected, due to Christmas, New Year and the Chinese New Year all falling into the same time span. As a result, the flow of the intervention was affected as the small group was unable to meet bi-weekly due to the festive seasons. It seems that December and January were not the best months to conduct *Lectio Divina* in small group settings because of these types of events. In fact, the bi-weekly sessions might not have been the most effective frequency for *contemplatio* of the words/phrases, which caught the participants' attention, since a lot of distractions could happen during the time span of two weeks. As the researcher, going forward, I will work on providing support and guidelines for *contemplatio* for the participants in order to sustain their focus between meetings. A more effective frequency for *Lectio Divina* in small group settings could have been weekly sessions for a span of four to six weeks, depending on the topic. The weekly frequency, perhaps with the support of homework, could have helped the participants' sustain their focus on *contemplatio*. In short, I have learned that December and January were not the best months to conduct *Lectio Divina* in small group settings. A weekly frequency over a time span of four to six weeks would likely be more effective for participants to notice spiritual development and to sustain commitment. However, these are just some of my recommendations, which can be subjective, based on my experience in this particular research project. It would be best for the small group leader and the members to discern

together in God, with the guidance of the Spirit, to develop a fitting time span, a workable frequency, and a desirable topic for the use of *Lectio Divina*.

Conclusion and Implications

Lectio Divina is an essential spiritual discipline not only for the small group setting but also for individual purposes. I have been practicing *Lectio Divina* for a couple of years. I was first introduced to the practice during a course named “Engaging Scriptures” in the DMin program at Tyndale. I had my first taste of *Lectio Divina* in a small group setting during that course. The first text that exposed me to *Lectio Divina* was Matthew 11:28-30, which says, “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble at heart, and you will find rest for your soul. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light”. I felt peaceful during *lectio* and the power of embracing God’s Word during *meditatio*. I was prompted by the Spirit to share my feelings during *oratio* and continued to savour the experience for a few days during *contemplatio*. As I continued to contemplate the phrase “gentle and humble,” that stood out to me in *lectio*, I started to see the pride and arrogance in myself. I confessed this to God and asked for forgiveness. The repentance was followed by a sense of joy and relief. I began to notice that God’s Word could shape my heart through the use of *Lectio Divina*. I also began to realize that the four steps of *Lectio Divina* could help me grow deeper in God’s Word, which subsequently could renew and restore me. I realized that I could hear God speak to me through his Word with the use of *Lectio Divina*, especially when I needed to discern his will. I was so attracted to *Lectio Divina*

that I have been trying to consolidate and refine the practice ever since. Not only did it shape my leadership skills, but it also enhanced my spiritual direction practice. I now often incorporate the exposure of *Lectio Divina* in spiritual direction meetings in order to lead directees to God. *Lectio Divina* is an effective practice to help believers grow deep in God's Word, grow high to become more like Christ, and grow wide to be better servant of God. It is a good tool for the workers in God's orchard.

In this research project, the small group is God's orchard. The group members will continue to grow deep, grow high and grow wide as they live their lives in God, "rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith ... and overflowing with thankfulness" (Col. 2:2-7). After the research project was completed, the small group continued meeting regularly twice a month for Bible study, as we used to. Since the group members are more familiar with *Lectio Divina* after the research, I plan to help them sustain the use of *Lectio Divina* by practicing it regularly at the small group meetings. The plan is for them to use *Lectio Divina* in one of the two monthly meetings. I will focus more on sustaining the element of *contemplatio* by helping the group members to focus on the word or the phrase that caught their attention during *meditatio*. I also plan to introduce an initiative called "A word a week" to encourage the group members to contemplate the words or the phrases that stood out to them. They will also be asked to share their thoughts in the meeting after. I believe that they will grow deep, grow high, and grow wide as they contemplate God's Word. It is my hope that they will adopt *Lectio Divina* as a spiritual discipline.

Regarding Grow Wide, I have joined a church group that supports an Afghanistan refugee, and will be hosting an international student at my home. I will also encourage the group members to extend their support to refugees, in order to live out social justice. It is also my hope that the group members will grow deep and grow high as they grow wide by living out social justice. I pray that the group members will become “pruners” for each other in God’s orchard as we continue to share our spiritual journey together. Joan Chittister, in *The Gift of Years: Growing Old Gracefully*, reminds us that “old age is the only age when we can possibly be so important to the world at large because it is the first time in life when we ourselves are free enough to give much thought to a world broader than our own” (Chittister 2010, 200). The senior years come with new freedom for the group members and me to grow deep, grow high and grow wide as we support one another and those in need. It is God’s blessing that we can journey together as a small group. We will continue to be transformed by God as we grow in age together.

I saw small changes in Grow Deep, Grow High and Grow Wide among the participants throughout this research process. As I am wrapping up this portfolio one year later after the research was done, I noticed that there are more love and harmony in the small group. The participants are slower to criticize and more accommodating to the different points of view within the group. There are more discussion and less argument about social issues. The participants continue to share their spiritual journeys with one another through regular Bible study and *Lectio Divina*. We look forward to having in person group meetings soon again

and to becoming more involved in hospitality ministry as the new normal of Covid-19 unfolds.

CHAPTER 5:

CONCLUSION: GOD IS NOT DONE WITH ME YET

The writing of this portfolio was a spiritual formation experience in itself. It was very different from any other writing experiences that I had at Tyndale in that it was reflective, creative and unique. It was a spiritual formation experience for me as “I was like a weaned child with its mother; like a weaned child I am content” throughout the writing process (Ps. 131:2). I was content as God calmed my heart and quieted my soul each time I wrote (Ps. 131:2). The Holy Spirit reminded me that “I do not concern myself with great matters or things too wonderful for me” (Ps. 131:1). This portfolio was not about my graduation but it was about God’s work in my life and his work in the lives of others. When I was writing my spiritual autobiography, I saw myself sitting quietly beside Jesus flipping through the album of my life together with him. As we were looking at the pictures, Jesus gently reminded me to be thankful for the people in my life, as they made me who I am today. When I was writing the spiritual formation model, I saw myself resting quietly with Jesus under the full and lush maple tree in front of my house. The tree was tall and wide, and it was cool and comfortable underneath it. I was wondering how deep the roots would grow if the tree continued to grow tall and wide. During the writing of my research report, Jesus was my companion and navigator. It was uncharted territory for me as I had never written a research report before. Jesus was holding my hands throughout the

research process. This was a totally unfamiliar process for me. It was the first research project I had ever done in my life and I did not know what I was getting into. It was so stressful at the beginning that I was sick to my stomach. This research report is a witness to God's grace and the power of the Holy Spirit, who made another impossible possible for me. All in all, the creating of this portfolio was a spiritual formation experience in itself.

God has shaped me through many events in my life, and working on my DMin was definitely one of those. I pursued my DMin because I was looking for an anchor as I embarked on my retirement. The DMin program turned out to be a solid anchor for me, and allowed me not to feel so lost in the midst of all the new freedom. It made me become more reflective of God's work, more focused on God's will, and more dependent on God's power. My soul was shaped as my mind was renewed by God's Word through *Lectio Divina*. Moreover, my faith was strengthened as I reflected on God's work in my life and in the lives of my directees. God also taught me how to live every day well through the DMin program by focusing more on him and less on myself through the courses "Space for God," and "Listening to God." He was becoming the centre of my life as my ego was shrinking. I also learned to let go more through various life situations. I was healed, renewed and restored by God through formational prayers. My avoidance of suffering and death was alleviated by the course "Journey Through Suffering and Dying" as I learned to put my hope in God. Finally, through the DMin program, I learned how to care for my soul, which is an integral part of spiritual formation. I have learned to listen to my soul, to rest my soul, and to

attend to its needs. I need to take good care of my soul before I can care for the souls of others. All in all, I grew deep through the DMin program as God helped me to deny myself. I grew high through the DMin program as it developed my humility and perseverance. I grew wide through the DMin program as it made me a spiritual director and a better small group leader. Throughout the program, God spoke to me through the books that I read and the lectures that I attended. He shaped my soul through the essays that I wrote. God did not take me on cruises or trips as I began my retirement. He gently took me back to his orchard, where I was pruned and trimmed in order to become a better follower of Christ and a better servant for him. As I move forward, I will continue to delight myself in God's Word, and his desires will gradually become my desires. I trust that he will give me the desires of my heart (Ps. 37:4).

The anchor that I was looking for turned out to be an everlasting one. I need to anchor in God as I strive "toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus" (Phil.3:14). Spiritual formation does not end with the DMin program. Graduation is a new beginning for me. It is a new beginning for my spiritual direction ministry, as I will be certified soon after the completion of my DMin. God has blessed me with enough practice hours to get certified. I plan to spend more time on spiritual direction after graduation. God has given me the passion and gifting to be a spiritual director. I trust that he will send me directees if it is his will for me to expand my ministry. It is also a new beginning for my small group. We will spend more time on *Lectio Divina* and will continue to meditate on God's Word on a regular basis. It is also a new

beginning for my international student ministry, as my husband and I will welcome an international student to our home soon as her homestay parents. God has blessed me with the experience of parenting with him again! I trust that God will continue to shape my husband and me through hospitality. Last but not least, God will continue to shape my soul since he work in me is not finished yet. He will continue to use the people and the life situations around me to tranform me to become more like Christ. Although I do not know what lies ahead of me in the years to come, I do know that the God of hope will fill me with all joy and peace as I trust in him, so that I may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 15:13).

APPENDICES

Appendix A



Certificate of Ethics Review Clearance for Research Involving Human Subjects

Primary Investigator:	Anita Wong
Faculty Supervisor:	Doctor of Ministry
REB File Number:	2021-00016
Title of Project:	Fostering the Biblical View on Social Justice among Senior Chinese Believers and Seeker from Hong Kong

Status of Approval

- Approved
- Revisions Required
- Denied

11/16/2021

Chair, Research Ethics Board

Date

Appendix B

Questions for Pre- and Post-*Lectio Divina* Individual Interviews

The questions were translated into Chinese to support the language needs of the participants.

1. What do you think social justice is? Please give an example of social justice.
2. What do you think social injustice is? Please give an example of social injustice.
3. When you hear or think of the word social justice, what are some words that come to your mind? If I ask you to focus on one of the words, which one would you pick and why?
4. When you hear or think of the word social injustice, what are some words that come to your mind? If I ask you to focus on one of the words, which one would you pick and why?
5. When you hear or think of the word social justice, which bible verse/story would you think of? Why?
6. When you hear or think of the word social injustice, which bible verse/story would you think of? Why?
7. What does the Bible say about social justice?
8. What does the Bible say about social injustice?
9. How can we live a life of social justice?

Appendix C

Demographic & Background Questionnaire

The information provided will be kept confidential and can only be accessed by the researcher. The names of the participants will remain anonymous and will be replaced by pseudo names.

Name of participant: _____ Gender: M F

Age of participant: 61- 65 66 -70 71-75

Number of years residing in Canada: 5 – 10 years
 11 – 15 years
 16 – 20 years
 21 – 25 years
 over 25 years

Have you accepted Jesus Christ as your saviour? Yes No

If yes, number of years being a Christian: 0 – 5 years
 6 – 10 years
 11 – 15 years
 16 – 20 years
 over 20 years

Do you attend XXXXXXXX Church? Yes No

Education background: high school diploma college diploma
 university degree

Appendix D

Consent Form for the Field Research Project

Fostering Biblical View on Social Justice among Senior Chinese Immigrant Believers and Seekers from Hong Kong

This form was translated into Chinese to support the language needs of the participants.

Research Ethics Board (REB): This action research project has been reviewed and received ethics approval through the REB.

Introduction: My name is Anita Wong, and I am a student at Tyndale University College and Seminary conducting an field research project for the Doctor of Ministry program. My telephone number is XXX-XXX-XXXX. My professor is Mark Chapman and his email is mchapmab@tyndale.ca. You may contact either of us or the REB (reb@tyndale.ca) at any time if you have any questions or concerns about this study.

Purpose: This research intends to meet a felt need of the small group and aims to benefit the small group. The purpose of this action research project is to explore how senior Chinese immigrant believers and seekers from Hong Kong living in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) develop/refine their perspectives on social justice through participating in *lectio divina* in a small group setting. I am trying to learn how *Lectio Divina* can shape these senior immigrant believers' and seekers' understanding of social justice and their relationship with God.

Procedure: If you consent, you will be participating in this research project, which will involve completing a brief questionnaire survey, a pre- and post-*Lectio Divina* individual oral interview on the phone, which I will be taking notes, and 5 sessions of *Lectio Divina*, which will occur as regular small group meetings during regular small group time. The expected duration of the participants' involvement will be about 10 to 12 weeks. The 5 regular small group meetings from December 2021 to February 2022 will cover most of the time for the expected duration. I will also be an observer taking notes on the participants' responses during and after the sessions.

Time required: The brief questionnaire survey will take approximately 15 minutes of your time, the pre- and post-*Lectio Divina* oral interview will take about 30 minutes each, and each session of *Lectio Divina* will take approximately an hour, which is more or less the duration of a regular small group meeting.

Voluntary participation: Your participation in the research project is completely voluntary. If you choose to participate, you can still refuse to answer any questions that you do not wish or feel comfortable to answer. You can also withdraw from the study at any time by informing me verbally. There is no impact on future involvement in the small group should a current group member chooses not to participate in the study or should a participant choose to end his/her participation during the study.

Risks: There are no known risks associated with this field research project. However, it is possible that some unpleasant memories or feelings may be triggered during the course of the study. If this happens, please inform me promptly.

Benefits: You may enjoy taking part in *Lectio Divina* and develop/refine your view of social justice with your small group. This research project intends to shape your relationship with God through the practice of meditating on his word.

Confidentiality/Anonymity: The records identifying the participants will be maintained with the strictest confidentiality. Your name will be kept confidential in all the reporting/and or writing associated with this field research project. I will be the only person present in the telephone interviews, and the only person who have access to the notes. I will use pseudonyms (made up names) for all participants, unless it is your wish to be identified by name. The participants also agree to observe the confidentiality agreement of not sharing information about other participants during the research specifically.

Sharing the results: The outcome of this action research project is a Research Portfolio. To meet the course and graduation requirements for Doctor of Ministry, I need to present the portfolio at the Spiritual Formation Research Presentation. The participants will be invited to attend the presentation, but participation is completely voluntary. In the end the Research Portfolio will be submitted to hearing for revision. All revisions as instructed that arise from the hearing must be completed before graduation can be granted.

Publication: This study will be published and accessible to the public. The participants will be informed of the results of the research and of the publication through a regular small group meeting. I will continue to use pseudonyms (as described above). I may also alter some identifying details to further protect your anonymity. Consent will be sought from the participants again if there are needs of recontacting the participants for follow up sessions or for subsequent related studies or for the data to be used in secondary use of data studies.

Before you begin: By signing below, you are indicating that you have read and understood the relevant information, agreeing to participating in this research project and not waiving any legal rights. Be sure that any questions you may have answered to your satisfaction. Please feel free to ask any questions throughout the course of this study.

Participant's signature: _____ **Date:** _____

Print name: _____

Researcher's signature: _____ **Date:** _____

Print name: _____

Appendix E

Lectio Divina Sessions

Session 1: The Fallen People: *Lectio Divina* on Genesis 3:14-19

Background

“And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers, he will crush your head and you will strike his heel” (Gen. 3:15). These words were spoken “just after the sin came in, and innocence was gone and man had become a guilty creature before God” (Law N.D., 15). Our parents failed and fell, and our destiny was ruined. We are born with a sinful and wicked nature, which pulls us away from the path of godliness (Law N.D., 16). “We look around us, and we see the world full of sin. We look within us, and we find hearts full of the same sad plague” (Law N.D., 19). We look around us and we see the world full of social injustice caused by the greediness and selfishness of our wicked nature. We see the powerful preying on the powerless, and the rich exploiting the poor. As we start to explore the biblical view on social justice through *Lectio Divina*, we need to go back to the fallen people who are the cause of all social injustice. Session 1 also included a brief PowerPoint presentation as an introduction to *Lectio Divina*. The purpose of the presentation was to introduce the steps of *Lectio Divina* to the participants, and to authenticate it as a spiritual practice.

Biblical Text

¹⁴ So the LORD God said to the serpent, “Because you have done this, “Cursed are you above all livestock and all wild animals! You will crawl on your belly and you will eat dust all the days of your life. ¹⁵ And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring^[a] and

hers; he will crush¹⁶ your head, and you will strike his heel.”¹⁶ To the woman he said, “I will make your pains in childbearing very severe; with painful labor you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.”¹⁷ To Adam he said, “Because you listened to your wife and ate fruit from the tree about which I commanded you, ‘You must not eat from it,’ “Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat food from it all the days of your life.¹⁸ It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. ¹⁹ By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return.” (Gen. 3:14-19)

Session 2: The Expectations of God - *Lectio Divina* on Exodus 23:1-9

Background

In spite of the fall of humanity that ruined God’s plan, he had never given up on them. Throughout the Bible, he made his expectations loud and clear, and provided guiding principles by which the Israelites could lead their lives and build their communities. Not only did the Covenant Code lay down the law for the Israelites to follow, but it also taught “the principles behind legislative laws,” which usually serve as the guiding principles for social justice (Long Westfall 2016, ebook Ch. 1). For instance, Exodus 23:6 exemplifies social justice as it instructs us not to put an innocent or an honest person to death. The Covenant Code still provides guiding principles for legislative laws such as this. One of the fundamental purposes of legislative law is to promote social justice. Although the Covenant Code is a set of ancient laws, it still provides us with timeless principles about God’s view on social justice.

Biblical Text

¹Do not spread false reports. Do not help a guilty person by being a malicious witness. ²Do not follow the crowd in doing wrong. When you give testimony in a lawsuit, do not pervert justice by siding with the crowd, ³and do not show favoritism to a poor person in a lawsuit. ⁴If you come across your enemy’s ox or donkey wandering off, be sure to

return it. ⁵ If you see the donkey of someone who hates you fallen down under its load, do not leave it there; be sure you help them with it. ⁶ Do not deny justice to your poor people in their lawsuits. ⁷ Have nothing to do with a false charge and do not put an innocent or honest person to death, for I will not acquit the guilty. ⁸ Do not accept a bribe, for a bribe blinds those who see and twists the words of the innocent. ⁹ Do not oppress a foreigner; you yourselves know how it feels to be foreigners, because you were foreigners in Egypt. (Ex. 23:1-9)

Session 3: The Wisdom of God - *Lectio Divina* on Proverbs 2:1-11

Background

Since a couple of participants shared that they needed to rely on God to discern false reports and rumours in Session 2, this session intended to return to wisdom literature for discernment regarding social justice. Concerns for social justice can be found in Proverbs and wisdom literature, which offer insights on how to thrive and prosper on earth with integrity. Not only can Proverbs shape the participants' views on social justice, but it can also provide some guiding principles for discernment between truth and fallacies as "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path" (Ps. 119:105)

Biblical Text

² My son, if you accept my words and store up my commands within you, turning your ear to wisdom and applying your heart to understanding—³ indeed, if you call out for insight and cry aloud for understanding ⁴ and if you look for it as for silver and search for it as for hidden treasure ⁵ then you will understand the fear of the LORD and find the knowledge of God. ⁶ For the LORD gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding. ⁷ He holds success in store for the upright, he is a shield to those whose walk is blameless, ⁸ for he guards the course of the just and protects the way of his faithful ones. ⁹ Then you will understand what is right and just and fair—every good path. ¹⁰ For wisdom will enter your heart, and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul. ¹¹ Discretion will protect you, and understanding will guard you. (Prov. 2:1-11).

Session 4: The Mission of Jesus - *Lectio Divina* on Luke 4:16-20

Background

It was my intention to include texts from the Old Testament and New Testament in order to enhance the integrity of this research project. The Book of Luke is “among the riches in the New Testament regarding issues of social justice – concerns for the poor and marginalized, an emphasis on equality and solidarity, and putting rights to wrong” (Long Westfall 2016, ebook Ch. 5). Luke has been referred to as the “Gospel of the Good News for the Poor” (Long Westfall 2016, ebook Ch. 5). Luke 4:16-20 summarizes the mission of Jesus on earth. It was my hope that *Lectio Divina* on this text could help the participants to reflect on their life purposes, as they meditated on the mission of Jesus on earth.

Biblical Text

¹⁶He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. He stood up to read, ¹⁷and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written: ¹⁸“The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, ¹⁹to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”²⁰ Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him. (Luke 4:16-20).

Session 5: What Can We Do? - *Lectio Divina* on Romans 8:38-39 and Matthew 22:36-40

Background

We live in a fallen world, a sinful world, and a tearful world (Law N.D., 31). “Wherever we stand, our shadow is sorrow. It is so before the flood. It is so now. In all climates and ranks, the head is weary, and the heart is sick” (Law N.D., 32). It is a world that is devoured by all kinds of social injustice. However,

God promised salvation and consolation as proclaimed in John 3:16, which says, “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” It is through salvation that we can find healing, comfort, and consolation in God. “All is mockery, except it can tell of God reconciled – sin pardoned – the soul safe” (Law N.D., 32). The first text in this session, Romans 8:38-39 reminded us that nothing, including social injustice, can separate us from the love of God. The second text in this session, Matthew 22:36-40, informed us how we should respond to God’s love. As we respond to God’s love by living out the two great commandments, we can live out social justice as we love our neighbours as ourselves. As we live out God’s love, injustice will be lifted, the wounded will be healed, and the oppressed will be delivered. God’s love is the remedy for social injustice.

Biblical Texts

³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, ³⁹ neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom. 8:38-39).

³⁶ “Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?”³⁷ Jesus replied: “ ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ ³⁸ This is the first and greatest commandment. ³⁹ And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’⁴⁰ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.” (Matt. 22:36-40).

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