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Intentionality in the Practice of Spiritual Disciplines:

A Case Study

A Research Portfolio

submitted in partial fulfilment

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by

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Toronto, Canada

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ABSTRACT

In this research portfolio, the author will answer the following questions: What place should spiritual disciplines have in the life of a Christian and how does the Christian need to be intentional in the practice of them? The author grew up in a Christian home and found Jesus at seventeen years old, and his spiritual growth was slow and steady for many years, but then stagnation set in. It was in this period that he was introduced to spiritual disciplines, which answered his personal questions about spiritual growth, as their practice was the path to continuous, long-term spiritual growth. Every disciple of Christ has the privilege of becoming spiritually mature, and when the proper path is taken, growth will happen. “Speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of Him who is the head, that is, Christ” (Eph 4:15 [New International Version]). The author also stresses how intentionality in the practice of spiritual disciplines is necessary for growth, which this paper will demonstrate is accessible and applicable to all Christians.

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to both of my parents, who died many years ago when I was just a little boy. I know they would have desired to spend many more years with their children. I wish they could be here to see how their children have grown up and are now in the position to honor them as parents. They died too young and left us too early. Our hope, though, is to see them in heaven and reconnect with them.

I also dedicate this work to the One, who started His good work in me. To the One, who saved me by His grace, and started the process of spiritual formation in me. The journey that God has led me on has been amazing. God has always proven faithful in my life, especially when I was running from Him.

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Uriah Pond deserves a special thank you. He had to work hard in helping me as my advisor. I came to respect him, and I enjoyed the Zoom discussions we had. We often talked about life in general and, in this way, Uriah also became my spiritual advisor. Uriah often would encourage me to continue, for which I am very grateful.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

APA: American Psychological Association

CMB: Canadian Mission Board

DMin: Doctor of Ministry

MACU: Mid-America Christian University

NIV: New International Version

REB: Research Ethics Board

GLOSSARY

Active Listening: Being aware that God wants to speak, asking God to speak, and focusing on the voice of God. According to Murray (1923, 15), “When a man in his littleness and God in His glory meet, we all understand that what God says has infinitely more worth than what man [*sic*] says.”

Christian Spiritual Formation: Christian spiritual formation is “an interactive process by which God the Father fashions believers into the image of His Son, Jesus, through the empowerment of the Holy Spirit” (Chandler 2014, 19). This process is life-long, in which God speaks into the life of the believer or uses many of life’s situations to fashion the believer into the likeness of His Son, Jesus.

Confession: Sharing with God and others a person’s own deepest weaknesses and failures. “Confession is a discipline that functions within fellowship” (Willard 1988, 187).

Contemplative reading of Scripture: Reading Scripture in a quiet and thoughtful way, allowing Scripture to speak into the reader’s life. Mulholland (1985, 68) summarizes the practice of contemplative Scripture reading in this way: “In Scripture we encounter God coming to us, addressing us, penetrating our degraded word, seeking to speak us forth as God’s word into the world.”

Enabling disciplines: Practices that enable the believer to engage in spiritual disciplines and practices. This may include taking some quiet time to allow God to speak or going for a walk to have some prayer time.

Intentionality: Putting in the time and effort needed to allow the follower of Jesus to practise spiritual and enabling disciplines with a clear focus. Paul emphasized effort and clear focus when he told the Corinthian church to “run in such a way as to get the prize” (1 Cor 9:24b NIV).

Intimate Prayer: Praying in a way that provides a connection with God. In this prayer, the person praying both speaks and listens to God. To pray intimately takes time, discipline, and vision.

Life-Long Learning: Life-long learning is an enabling discipline. Effort and time are used to facilitate new learning. “A devoted disciple is a life-long learner” (Helland 2017, 16).

Sabbath-keeping: To spend one day per week resting from everyday tasks and to take time to rest physically and spiritually; as Allender states, “The Sabbath is far more than a diversion; it is meant to be an encounter with God’s delight” (Allender 2009, 12).

Self-Control: A part of how the fruit of the Spirit is defined in a person, and an enabling discipline that is necessary in the life of a follower of Jesus. It is an inner control mechanism, that allows the person to say “yes” or “no” as needed to situations that present themselves in daily life. Paul reminds the Corinthian church of this by saying that “Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training” (1 Cor 9:25a).

Self-Examination: The awareness that there could be blind spots, weaknesses, or failures in one’s own life, and the effort taken to see and improve on or to eliminate these issues. “Examine yourselves to see whether you are in

the faith” (2 Cor 13:5), as Paul wrote to the Corinthian church. Self-examination also enables the Christian to see how God is working in the person’s life and, in this way, self-examination strengthens the faith of the Christian.

Spiritual Disciplines: Specific practices that, when done, allow the person to be in a place where God can develop spiritual growth in that individual. Calhoun explains, “From its beginning the church linked the desire for more of God to intentional practices, relationships and experiences that gave people space in their lives to ‘keep company’ with Jesus. These intentional practices, relationships, and experiences we know as spiritual disciplines” (Calhoun 2015, 19).

Spiritual Growth: Becoming more spiritually mature and more like Jesus Christ. As Willard suggests, it is moving a person toward the point that “the first words out of their mouth would be, ‘I am an apprentice of Jesus Christ’” (Willard 2002, 244).

Spiritual Person: A person who seeks to become more like Jesus and practises spiritual disciplines. Willard states, “In the person with a well-kept heart, the soul will be itself properly ordered by God and in harmony with reality” (Willard 2002, 199).

Time Management: An enabling discipline, necessary for the follower of Jesus, who knows that time must be used wisely and carefully, as time is a precious and priceless commodity. Peterson writes that “I live in a society in which crowded schedules and harassed conditions are evidence of importance,

so I develop a crowded schedule and harassed conditions” (Peterson 1989, 18).

To avoid this issue of busyness, balanced time management is required.

CHAPTER ONE:

INTRODUCTION

Everyone's life is a story, but some are longer than others, with finer details. In some life stories, many details have been washed away by old age and forgetfulness, which may be very unfortunate or fortunate. What follows is the story of my life. My story began in a German village in western Ukraine, where my parents were born. They later moved to Germany and then, after the Second World War, they moved to Canada, hoping to start a new life in a new country with a totally different language and culture. In my life story there are many blanks, as I do not remember much from my first ten years of life. There are enough memories though, to present my life story.

In this portfolio, I will present my life story, which I discuss at length in Chapter Two. The story will explain how I got to where I am right now. Each person is a product of their own life story and sees life and spiritual values through the eyes of their own experiences, which is certainly the case with me. I have been formed by what I have experienced, and I also have been formed through the battles of life. H. H. Horne uses the term "apperception," which he defines as "the interpretation of the new in terms of the old" (Horne 1978, 111). Humans see things through the lens of their own experiences. The old experiences, to a point, shape the new experiences, and often the new experiences

need to be learned and relearned before they are properly lived out. In my life, that is certainly the case.

Much of who I was in my teen years, and much of who I am today is the product of my being orphaned at ten years old. For me, becoming an orphan caused me to carry a grudge during much of my childhood. I often felt that people were against me and hated me, that the world was unfair, and that I had to fight to get what I wanted and to get to where I was going. As I wrote my life story, I realized that as I got older, that fighter in me began to decrease as my surrender to God increased.

At a critical fork in the road in my life path, when I was in my fifties, I was introduced to the term “spiritual disciplines.” After this, I was—and still am—consumed with defining and exploring what spiritual disciplines are and what they do in the lives of those who practise them. I came to realize that the disciplines are an important facet in the life of a Christian. I realize now that, as Foster states, “the disciplines allow us to place ourselves before God so that He can transform us” (Foster 1980, 7). This was an important piece in the puzzle that had been missing from my life. As I learned about and practised the spiritual disciplines, my life changed.

As you read through my story, the word “intentional” will show up in various places. As I grew up and faced the many challenges in life, I realized that I needed to be intentional in so many aspects of my life. Even to this day, I need to be intentional about my health, about relationships, and especially about the practice of spiritual disciplines. A person can have a “whatever” attitude in life

and things will happen and life will go on, but they will be spiritually stunted. However, I have learned that being intentional is healthy for the person who is desiring long-term spiritual growth.

In Chapter Three, I present my model of spiritual formation. This model of spiritual formation is based on the spiritual disciplines that I have learned about and personally practised, and my understanding of spiritual disciplines has grown and changed over the last few years. It was my desire to do an in-depth study of spiritual disciplines during my years at Tyndale, which I was able to do for this chapter. I read and studied specific writers and their thoughts on spiritual disciplines, and I was able to dig deeper into the reasons that spiritual disciplines are important in the life of a Christian. It was my desire to have a greater understanding of spiritual disciplines and their effects upon men and women who practise them in order to be able to take what I have been taught and to then teach spiritual disciplines in an effective way through sharing what I learned, researched, and practised here at Tyndale.

Having learned and written about spiritual disciplines (and having practised them), I turned to research how spiritual disciplines assist in the maturing process of other Christians. This prompted me to ask the question: Does the practice of spiritual disciplines promote spiritual growth? I took this question and built a complete research project around it. In Chapter Four, I show how spiritual disciplines assist in positioning the participant in such a way that God can fashion a person into the likeness of His Son, Jesus. The research project showed me that there is a great value in spiritual disciplines, but I also learned

that the fine-tuning of definitions and teaching methods equally as important to the practice of spiritual discipline as well. Through the completed project and the data that I collected, I was able to show the benefits that come to the followers of Christ as they practise spiritual disciplines. I was able to collect data through pre-workshop and post-workshop questionnaires, where each participant filled out the questionnaires and, through their responses, I was able to collect data to answer my research question. The result of the research project and the workshop showed that practicing spiritual disciplines does result in spiritual growth. The participants in the workshop were challenged in their spiritual lives and the overall data showed that there was spiritual growth.

Finally, in Chapter Five, I write about where I am today and how the practice of spiritual disciplines has changed me. The journey has been rough at times, as I am often my own worst enemy: I tend to get in God's way as He works in my life. Through the writing of this portfolio, I have learned much about myself and about God and how God loves His people so much. As Tozer writes, "How good it would be if we could learn that God is easy to live with" (Tozer 1955, 16). Had I only known this many years ago, my life would have been much easier. In my life's journey, I have often worked on the issues that faced me on my own strength and wisdom. Now, as I am older and wiser, I have realized how much I need God to assist me daily. As Tozer explains, "For true faith, it is either God or total collapse" (Tozer 1955, 50). If only I had learned this many years ago, instead of trying so much on my own.

I now give you this portfolio to read. As you read this, my prayer is that you will be blessed, and I trust you will be assisted on your own journey of life and learning. You will see that though in my life many mistakes were made, God, because He is loving and good, helped me and is patiently conforming me into His image. I am still on the journey of spiritual formation, but it is my belief that this journey should never end. I hope to be intentional about my relationship with God and with others until I slip away from this world and wake up in heaven.

CHAPTER TWO: SPIRITUAL AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Intentional! How can one word be so important? How can one word be the thread that runs throughout a person's life? How can one word prod a person throughout their lifetime? Intentional is the most appropriate word to describe my life story, my growth as a follower of Jesus Christ, and my appreciation for spiritual disciplines. The word intentional wakes me up in the morning, gets me going and assists me when I fulfill my duties as a husband, father, grandfather, and pastor. When I feel lazy and tired and have little interest in the things I need to do, this word appears and prods me on. In fact, this word gives me focus and refocuses me in many areas of my life.

I would like to explain how this word drives me, but I do not know where this word came from and when it suddenly appeared in my life. My best guess is that it was woven into my DNA, as God was "knit[ting] me together in my mother's womb" and creating "my inmost being ... I praise [Him] because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; [His] works are wonderful; I know that full well" (Psalm 139:13-14). I cannot say that I understand how God knits humans together, or how certain elements of their "inmost being" are designed, but I am grateful for the dose of intentionality with which God has blessed me. Here is my

story, my coming to understand intentional spiritual disciplines, and my overwhelming desire to teach intentional spiritual disciplines to others.

The Blizzard

It was a cold day in Winnipeg, though the blizzard was over and the snow had stopped falling. The old car sat in the backyard with its windshield full of snow. The five-year old boy was outside playing in the snow when he noticed that the windshield needed cleaning. He climbed onto the bumper, onto the fender, and then onto the hood of the car and cleaned the windshield. This was not something easy for the boy to do, yet he felt it needed to be done. When the job was done to his satisfaction, he went inside. Later, when his father noticed that the windshield was clean, he also noticed the scratches on the fender and hood of his car, and strictly reprimanded the boy for the scratches. For the boy, this job was difficult and intentional: he did not give up until finished. He did not know the details of cleaning a windshield, yet he saw what needed to be done, and he did it. The job was tough, and it was cold outside, but if an outsider had observed the boy in that moment, they would have seen his intentional drive to get this job done.

The story of intentionality has continued since that little boy cleaned the windshield, and other stories have been added over the years. The word intentional has followed this boy into manhood, past middle age and into old age. The word intentional followed him as he found, grew, and matured in Christ. The word intentional found the greatest meaning in this man's life when, in his fifties,

he learned about spiritual disciplines. At that time, this man was a pastor but meandering in his spiritual life. He learned about the disciplines and started practicing several spiritual disciplines intentionally. So here is that man's story: my story, including much of the work that I have done and still would like to do. I will show how the word intentional weaves through my story.

Intentional

The fire truck raced down the street in Winnipeg and stopped at 442 McGee Street as smoke poured out of the back of the home. The firefighters did an amazing job and, to everyone's relief, the house did not burn down. There was, however, extensive damage to the kitchen area. Another time, the fire department was called to put out a fire in the garage beside 442 McGee Street, which was damaged but could be repaired. Both fires were started by a little boy. In the kitchen fire, the little boy had taken a piece of paper and turned on the stove. As the paper started burning, the little boy, not knowing what to do with the burning paper, threw it in the garbage and ran out of the house. When the little boy started the neighbor's garage on fire, with paper and matches, he ran into his home and up the stairs into his bedroom. There he hid in his bed, pretending to be sleeping. Both fires were started on purpose: they were done intentionally, because this little boy enjoyed starting fires but knew little about the possible consequences. At about the same period of life, lady fingers were purchased by the boy's parents at the corner store, but not for eating: these cookies were miniature firecrackers that could then be used to blow up Hot Wheels cars. Perhaps there may have been a

certain amount of danger involved, but for this little boy it was about having fun; danger was not on the radar.

Some years later this same boy, while attending Sunday school, became bored and wanted some fun. As his classmates began sitting down after prayer, he intentionally pulled the chair away from the boy beside him. The other boy fell onto the floor and the chair made a loud clanging sound which, at the very least, provided some excitement in the Sunday school class. Due to actions like this and others, there was talk that he would be suspended from coming to Sunday school.

Later in life, when he was living in Benton Harbor, Michigan, the boy's uncle wanted him home at a certain time as it would be getting dark. The boy would be out playing baseball with friends and would come home much too late. When asked why he was late, he would answer that he "did not have a watch," which seemed to him to be a reasonable answer, though it was not true. Yes, he knew it was getting dark and he should go home, but he was having fun playing baseball, so why disrupt the fun to go home? This boy would take things apart, like valuable antiques, without being able to put them back together again. He once found a bullet and decided to take a hammer to it. Soon there was an explosion, and his ears were ringing, but no long-term damage was done to the boy. He took a hammer to his mother's watch, curious to see how a watch worked. The boy would often speak out without thinking and get into trouble with people because of his unwise and uncalled-for words. On his report cards throughout his early school years there was one consistent comment: "He talks too much, and he is a disturbance in class." This little boy was called "out of

control” or even “wild” by some people. However, in the heart of this little boy there was no desire to be disobedient. He desired to be loved and complimented. However, he did things on impulse, and often when things were done on impulse he was deemed “out of control.” Often things were done for fun, but many times things were done intentionally, without the boy thinking about the possible consequences.

I am this boy, Sieg Schuler, and the above stories are just a few from my early life. It wasn't that I wanted to be bad; in fact, I liked being obedient. But due to some quick impulses and other forces at work in my life, it would seem as if I was out of control. On one occasion, I was asked why I did a certain thing. In complete innocence I replied: “I do not know why I did that; I think Satan made me do it.” I had a great heart and was very sorry when things went wrong; when corrected, I apologized for my wrongdoings. I enjoyed having fun in life and I enjoyed laughing and teasing others, but I did not know when to quit teasing. I was the one who would throw eggs at the transit buses and run off and enjoy myself. I was the one who imitated others, just for laughs. One of my classmates remembers me as the one “who had a funny smile.” A long list of incidences could be added that would just reinforce my “out of control” reputation. I caused a lot of trouble, but my intention was to have a good time. Yet, as a young boy I missed the mark.

That boy has now passed his sixtieth year. The word intentional has followed me throughout my whole life. I was intentional as I cleaned the snow off the car, just as I was intentional as I started the fires, and I was intentional in the

years since. I have come to appreciate David's declaration that "I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made" (Psalm 139:14). Every life and every person is wondrously made, for their creator God fashioned each person in a different way, so each has their unique story, which means to me that each life has its own story and value and purpose.

In this autobiography chapter, I will share my life journey up until the present time. Some of the memories are good while other memories caused me to think back with tears. The overall experience of writing and sharing this autobiography was beneficial as I see clearly how my life is defined and kept in its meaningful track by this one word, intentional. I look forward to seeing what life will still bring me. I feel that I am still in the prime of life, and I am excited to see how God will work in me and through me. I will try to explain how being intentional has formed me over the years.

Early Childhood to Seven Years Old

My life's pilgrimage started in Winnipeg, Manitoba, on the 13th of December 1959. I was born as the fifth child to my parents and was the first boy. Having four older sisters certainly made for some lively fights in our home. As I remember, some of my sisters would fight me to make me angry (which was a common thing) and then they would enjoy watching this angry little boy. Once, I called the police on them but, when the phone was answered at the police department, I hung up. In retrospect, it would have been interesting if the police had come to our home and checked up on my sisters. Perhaps the police would

have given my sisters some pointers on how to treat their younger brother. In our home there was a lot of energy, as we were rambunctious young children.

When I was a little boy, our family would attend the church services at the German Church of God in our home city of Winnipeg. My father did not always attend church, so an older friend from the congregation would pick up my mom and the rest of us and bring us to church. This meant that we would get a ride to church in a VW Bug with three people in the front, me sitting on the lap of an older man, and my mom and five siblings in the back. As we drove to church, I would hold on to that little bar on the dashboard of the Bug for dear life. Back then, we did not worry about seat belts with all of us in that little car because we were so excited to go to church. There, we would see our church friends and our cousins again. I do not remember this man ever complaining about picking us up for church. I went to Sunday school as a child, and my teachers loved me, and taught me about Jesus, who loves me.

Our home life was difficult as my mother was often sick and could not properly take care of us. We would roam the streets in our neighborhood and enjoyed the freedom of doing our own thing. Because our mom was often sick, our daily diet was not the healthiest. One of my favorite sandwiches back then was the ketchup sandwich, which consisted of two pieces of Wonder bread and a lot of ketchup, which tasted delicious to me. My mom worked at a restaurant in the evenings and sometimes brought some food home for us. My dad was often absent during this time, as he often went to the bar to drink. My father's drinking left behind some sad memories for me. For example, when I was about three years

old, my dad came home drunk and for whatever reason decided that I needed to be spanked. I remember hiding behind my mother and she was able to protect me. This one incident impacted me for life as I do not drink a drop of alcohol, partially due to what I experienced as a child. I just do not want to take a chance and ever do something like that to the ones I care for the most.

As I already mentioned, as a five-year old boy I took a piece of paper and lit it on fire with the stove element. My younger brother noticed the fire and smartly alerted my parents, but by the time the fire was out, our kitchen was heavily damaged. When I came home, my dad whipped me with the charging cord of his electric razor, and I think this was the worst beating I ever received. I may have deserved a punishment, but I think this punishment was severely overdone. Looking back, I am saddened by this situation: how did beating me help?

When I was seven years old, my mom was in the hospital for months dealing with breast cancer. During this period, we wandered the streets of Winnipeg and took care of ourselves. On December 2, 1967, just days before my eighth birthday, my mom died. I do not remember much of my mother and her death. I have just a few memories of this early period in my life; it is mostly a blur, and there are times when I wish I had more memories of my mother. When we are together as siblings, I often ask my older sisters about our mother and what she was like, and they kindly fill in some of my many memory gaps with their stories and experiences.

Late Childhood

Having only our dad at home was difficult for him and for us. We had a homemaker come to our home to assist us, yet we really felt lost. My dad gave us into the care of Family Services before he died, possibly due to his realizing how serious his own health issues were at that point. It was the fall of 1969. This was the last time we lived together as siblings. Family Services found a home for five of us children where we lived for about ten months. A young couple, Corny and Susan Funk, took us in and were our foster parents for these months. For me, living in this foster home provided some stability, structure, and a listening ear. I enjoyed living with the Funks. When issues arose, Corny would sit down with me and talk with me about what had happened.

It was during this time that my dad died. I remember that I wanted to see him, but our social worker did not allow it. It was the very night that I asked to see him that he died. Perhaps the best memory I have of my dad was told to me by a friend. This friend, our pastor at the time, visited my dad days before he died and asked my dad if his spiritual house was in order. My dad requested a piece of paper and on that piece of paper he indicated that he was ready to die. We still have that piece of paper, which is one of our great family heirlooms. At my dad's funeral, many parishioners questioned how God could allow this to happen, as we were six very needy orphan children. What was the best thing for these six orphan children? Or better yet, what could be done for these six children? I think that the best option would have been to keep us together, but how would that work, and who would take us in?

Our relatives made the decision that we siblings would be separated and that five of us would be sent to the United States to live with four different uncles and aunts. It was decided that I would be sent to an uncle living in Benton Harbor, Michigan, so I moved there in July of 1970. I felt very lost and lonely even though my uncle and aunt tried their best to assist me. It was because of this move that I had my first real experience with Jesus Christ, an experience that would have consequences for the rest of my life and my eternity. Often, one does not know how small decisions in life will affect the whole life of a person, and this certainly was the case in my life. How can a person know what life will bring or how a life will turn out if they only have a small sample of years? The decision was made for me that I would move to Benton Harbor, Michigan, and in many ways this decision changed the direction of my life.

I Found Jesus

At the beginning of summer in 1970, I was moved with five of my siblings to the United States. My brother went to a farm close to Benton Harbor, Michigan; two of my sisters moved to the Flint, Michigan area; and one sister was taken to Ohio. This was a great and difficult transition for me. Coming from a home where there was a lot of action, the home that I now lived in had only three other people: my uncle, my aunt, and one of my cousins, none of whom were really that interested in dealing with this high-energy little child. I arrived in Benton Harbor on June 29th, 1970.

At the beginning of July, our church in Flint, Michigan, a sister church to the one I had attended in Winnipeg, held a camp meeting. These camp meetings would normally extend over several days and included preaching, singing, food, and fellowship. One evening, several boys whom I had met at this camp-meeting went “to the front” during an altar call. The next day, which happened to be the fourth of July, I asked them what they did up front. The answer given to me was one of those life-changing moments. They said, “Why don’t you go and find out?” That same evening, during the altar call, I went to the front of the church, knelt in prayer, and there I found Jesus. I cannot remember why I did this, but I think that I was pulled to the front, as there was something that I needed to find. And I found Jesus! This little ten-year-old boy who felt so alone in life found Jesus! I do not remember what I prayed or with whom I prayed, yet this was a moment in my life that I will never forget. In fact, I have walked the grounds where this camp meeting used to be and I have often driven by the area where this meeting took place, the place where God revealed his great love to me. I still thank God to this very day that He drew me to Himself on that evening. I do not remember even knowing the way to Jesus, but Jesus found me that evening.

That night, as I was falling asleep, I prayed that Jesus would take me to heaven, for I felt that I had no reason for living as I was alone and so misunderstood. I cried that night and asked to go to heaven right then. I certainly felt no need to live anymore for now I had peace, I had a friend, I had comfort, and I had all I needed. It was in this moment that I experienced that true longing, or “Sehnsucht” that C.S. Lewis writes about (Lewis 1955, 7). This experience was

so real and authentic that years later, when I was running from Jesus as hard and as fast as I could, this experience caught up to me and did not let me go. Over the next months in my new home in Benton Harbor, I would go to school, learn how to pick cherries, and learn about how a normal home should be.

I Lost Jesus

How would a ten-year-old orphan boy know how to follow Jesus? What kind of mentoring would be necessary for him to continue to walk with Jesus? I certainly did not know what to do after having given my heart to Jesus, and my uncle and aunt did not understand how to spiritually nurture me. I remember laying in bed at night, weeping; hearing me, my aunt opened my bedroom door and told me to be quiet. Perhaps she wasn't aware that the noise she was hearing came from my sobbing, but her response really did hurt me. I longed to be with my siblings, even though it was impossible because of the way that Family Services operated. But how was a little boy to know that? So, I cried, and tried to cover up my crying by hiding under the blankets so that no one would hear my sobbing.

As a member of this new home, I would be taken to church, I would learn how to read the German Bible, and I would be taught how to live properly. I am sure that the motivation behind this upbringing included a form of love, but it certainly was not the kind of love that I needed. There was little or no nurturing for a little boy who wanted to be good. There was little understanding for a boy who had had very little early childhood instruction but still had a lot of energy.

Soon, it felt like a warzone between me and my uncle: it seemed to me that I could do very little that was right in his eyes. For example, I came in late one evening from playing and I got into trouble with my uncle. Then, in Sunday school, wanting to break the monotony with some fun, I pulled the chair from under the person next to me as they were about to sit down, which promptly got me into trouble with my uncle. Later, I would be late for our Vacation Bible School program because I was with a group of students exploring the woods behind the church, and I got into trouble with my uncle again. Another time, I got into a fistfight in school with another student, who knocked me out, and I got into trouble with my uncle once more. In fact, on one of these occasions, he slapped me on the face and I ran away.

I ran to my other aunt and uncle's farm where my brother lived, which was about ten kilometers away. I tried to hide there for a while, but I needed food. So, I spoke with my brother, and soon my uncle came from Benton Harbor to bring me home. It was during this time that I decided that this living arrangement was not going to work. Thus, at the age of twelve, I moved back to Winnipeg.

I do wish to say, though, that even with some troubled times in Benton Harbor, there were many very good and special things about living there. During this time, I learned the value of structure and family and other lessons that would serve me well in the future. I lived beside my paternal grandparents, and my grandmother was very gracious to me, showering me with much love and compassion. I am sure that she knew my uncle and I did not get along, and she probably sensed the warzone at times. She attempted to soothe some of the

wounds that I received by telling others that “He is a good boy.” I would hear those words and they were so encouraging to me. My Oma is one of those special people in my life, and I will be excited to meet her in heaven where I will give her a big hug for what she did for me. I used to go fishing with my grandfather, which was also very special. I would get up early in the morning to find the worms and off we would go. My grandfather also taught me how to play the trumpet, and I was amazed by how well he played at his age. During this period, I also learned how to play the violin, which I still play to this very day. It was during those two years in Benton Harbor that I worked picking fruit. It is hard work and I learned that work was necessary in order to get by, since I had just played a lot in my childhood.

Once back in Winnipeg, I moved into a foster home with two of my sisters who had also returned from the United States. We had a great foster home where I had enough freedom, and I enjoyed it there. During this period, we attended the same church (German Church of God) that we had previously attended.

Unfortunately, I got into a fair amount of trouble in school, as I found it to be rather tedious, and this boredom created problems. My friends and I came across some stink bombs, so we sat at the back of the class and dropped these bombs. Soon, the class was dismissed because it stank so badly in class that it was unbearable. Our music teacher, a very nice lady, suffered much because of us boys. We certainly made life difficult for her; I remember her crying because she did not know what to do with us. I had a well-worn seat in the principal’s office where I would spend time and he would strap me. My friends and I would joke

about the principal and laugh at him, and I wonder if he heard some of our jokes and laughter. Other incidents happened with me in school and outside of school, and it became obvious to my foster parents, who did not wish for trouble, that I would have to leave their home.

Family Services found another home for me soon after that, and I was sent to a foster home on a farm. This farm was within the city limits of Winnipeg, which turned out to be very convenient for me, because I could go to school by bus and I was only about forty-five minutes away from my siblings.

This was a large farm, with plenty of work to be done and I got paid for working. For a 14-year-old, this was great! My foster parents were bootleggers, and there were also other drugs besides alcohol available on the farm. It was a three-generational family farm with the older parents and two of their sons running the farm and my foster parents were the old couple, who were the bootleggers. Often, in the evening and on weekends, men would come and buy alcohol there. Some of the men would sit at the kitchen table and drink and chat and play cribbage. I learned how to play the game and would sit with them and play, but I would not drink. I desired to be an Olympic athlete and run the marathon, and I knew enough that drinking and running did not mix. I was on my high school's track team, and I trained intentionally to be a good runner. I had a lot of freedom in this home, which I appreciated. My foster mother cooked well, and I loved working on the farm. When I look back over these years on the farm, I am grateful for God's protection, as I was often working with machinery.

I worked long hours and used up a lot of energy. I enjoyed much of the work on the farm such as driving the farm machinery and working with the cows, and yes, even cleaning the barns. I started saving the money I earned so that when I turned sixteen, I was able to buy my first car—a 1969 Pontiac Firebird! I worked hard intentionally, saved hard intentionally, and trained hard intentionally. My busyness protected me from much of the environment in which I lived.

Sadly, it was during those years that I developed an intentional and extreme hatred for Jesus. I would get off my farm machinery and point to heaven and swear at Jesus. I never wanted to talk to Him again and I wished that He would just leave me alone. Exactly how this hatred came about is hard to explain, but it may have been some of the issues with rejection that I felt as an orphan in my childhood, and perhaps these feelings were now coming to the surface. C.S. Lewis describes what I was feeling very aptly when he writes “Meanwhile, where is God? But go to Him when your need is desperate, when all other help is vain, and what do you find? A door slammed in your face, and a sound of bolting and double bolting on the inside” (Lewis 1961, 7). I was an orphan boy who felt very alone in the situation I was in. The farm where I was living was quite a distance from my siblings, and I would see them only occasionally. My hatred and anger towards God knew no limits at that time. Perhaps the influence of living in a bootlegger’s home, and most of all being an orphan, prodded me in this hatred for God. I felt that life was unfair, because others would take advantage of me, and there was no one who would stand up for me and protect me. I knew something

about sin against the Holy Spirit, and I thought if I swore at God enough and hated God enough, he would leave me alone for the rest of my life.

It was also during this time that I experimented with being a criminal. I stole things from stores and from parked cars and other businesses. I would intentionally damage vehicles and the possessions of others. I became a destructive vandal, and I enjoyed it. One weekend, when I was together with some friends, we stole several vehicles and broke into a home. After committing these crimes, I told my friends that the police were going to catch us, so I left my friends on that Sunday afternoon and returned home. Early the next day, on Monday morning as I was feeding the cows, I saw a Winnipeg Police Department cruiser pull up to the field where I was working. They asked if I was Sieg Schuler, as they wanted to speak with him. As we were driving away from the farm, I told them that I was glad they had come. Somewhere deep in my heart I was becoming a person I did not want to become. I was frightened, because the line between having fun and becoming a criminal is very fine. I was vandalizing cars, damaging buildings, damaging stores, and doing other things and, in the process, I was becoming someone I feared. I feared the serious consequences that could arise as security guards would chase us. What if something happened to a guard? What if we pushed the guard and they were injured or died? What would happen to me in a situation like that?

Hearing and Responding to the Voice of Jesus

As a sixteen-year-old, I enjoyed driving my Firebird and, since I had some money saved up, I was able to make some modifications to the car. I had wide tires installed and I modified the exhaust by installing “Big Daddy” straight pipes. Because of these modifications, I drove a car that was extremely loud but was a lot of fun to drive. As I look back of this period in my life, I see cars, crime, sports, and work. I would be up early in the morning to get to school to train. During the summer months I worked long hours to earn money. I would work on Saturdays and Sundays during the winter to earn money. Yes, I can see an intentional young man who had a lot of energy and was working to have his own car, and then perhaps go to university.

Then suddenly, without warning, during this period in my life, a soft voice spoke to me and said, “Years ago you were truly happy. Yes, years ago you had more.” This voice showed up uninvited into my life and reminded me that as a ten-year-old boy I had had peace with God. I hated that voice, but I could not argue against it; when the soft voice spoke, I would shout back with anger and oaths, but I had no other response. I ignored this voice for several years, but eventually when I did hit rock bottom, this soft voice would speak again. It was during the time where was starting to fear that I would cross the line somewhere and become a real criminal, and that was when I strongly sensed the “transcendental Interferer” (Lewis 1955, 172). What a great term for the God who loves us! The God who goes out and searches for us! I often felt that God was interfering in my life, and yet from God’s perspective he was showing me His

love. This love-hate relationship would continue for some time, as I had some deep-rooted issues I needed to deal with. Looking back, I needed to hit rock bottom before I would look up. Again, I quote Lewis, because his analogy of God the Angler applies so well to my situation; “[a]nd so the great Angler played His fish and I never dreamed that the hook was in my tongue” (Lewis 1955, 211). God was starting to reel me in through His love and patience, and through allowing me to hit rock bottom. Again and again, this soft voice of God would speak, telling me how I had had peace and joy years ago. I hated this voice and what it said, and I ignored the voice as best I could, but I could not deny its claim, and in this way “[m]y Adversary began to make His final moves” (Lewis 1955, 216). I realized, once I saw how far I’d gone, that I needed to find what I once had, and thus my journey back to God began.

I decided to start reading my Bible again. In May 1977, I went to a church convention and there gave my life to Jesus once again. This was a process of months and, if I remember correctly, it was in December 1976 that I made the decision to begin to pray and read the Bible. By May 1977, I could hardly wait for the Sunday evening of the church convention to come, and I could hardly wait for the altar call. As soon as the singing started, I went forward and, as a sobbing, broken-hearted seventeen-year-old, I recommitted my life to Jesus. Once again, I had found Jesus.

Like the prodigal son, I came home and what did I find? Luke so perfectly describes the moment of reunion, that “[w]hile [the son] was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to His son,

threw his arms around him and kissed him” (Luke 15:20). In Luke’s telling of this parable, the son was not worthy of what he received from his father, and I certainly was not worthy of what I received from my heavenly Father. When I came home, He was waiting for me, and He gave me a new heart, a new ring of ownership, and a big hug and welcomed me back. This experience with Jesus is the greatest moment of my life, and this moment has affected my life like no other moment. To this very day, I am still amazed that God had so much patience and love for me. I am still amazed that He did not walk away from me and let me rot, because I certainly deserved such a response from Him, given my earlier hatred and shouted insults towards Him, not to mention my actions. Thus, when I preach about God’s love and patience, I speak from experience: the love that God extended to me when I came back to him has affected my whole theology of God, as I see Him as a loving Father, who cares for His creation and whose patience and forgiveness cannot be measured. I truly believe that this is the greatest experience a human being can have, of confessing and of being forgiven and starting a new life in a new direction with a Father in heaven, who promised to take care of the orphans and widows. This is now my personal experience.

Over the next weeks and months many things changed in my life, and I was intentional about taking care of my past. To begin with, I moved off of the farm and moved in with my sister and her husband, but I also began a process of going back to many places where I had committed a crime and paying restitution. I went to the Winnipeg Police Department and confessed my crimes, knowing that they could arrest me and charge me. As the police listened to my confession,

I also asked them how I could make reparations for some of the crimes committed, as I did not know of a way of making up for many of the things that I had done. One policeman suggested that I donate some money to a charitable organization, and that the amount I donate should be appropriate to the crime committed, so I did that, and I felt good about doing so. I also knew that I could be charged for the crimes to which I confessed, but this was what I had to do. The judge who presided over my case was very gracious to me and only ordered that I pay restitution. I did not lose my driver's license, which could have happened since I had been driving around the city of Winnipeg in stolen vehicles as an underaged driver without a driver's license.

Now that I was walking with Jesus once again, I was excited to be back in church and to be involved in my local congregation. I had some family in the church, and I had some friends who still knew me from years before. My pastor was very gracious to me and allowed me to be active in the church even though I was a very young and immature Christian. He was one of the men along my path who really gave me a chance and helped me along the path of life. He did not criticize many of my decisions, but carefully gave me advice where he could. This man nurtured me along and soon I was able to teach a Sunday school class, which I loved doing.

I lived with my sister and her husband for about one year, and then I started my official bachelor program by living on my own for the next four years. I graduated from high school and had hoped to go to university, but something had gone wrong with my course selection in high school, and because of that I

was one course short to get into the University of Manitoba. This was a blow to me, as I really wanted to be a physical education teacher. Since I did not know the system, I gave up my university dream and found a job; now, looking back, I do wonder what would have happened to me had I become a gym teacher. Looking back over these years, I do see that there was a certain amount of growth and maturing, yet I now realize that I really did need a mentor, a friend who would be able to guide and correct me. For myself as an orphan, I became a fighter. I felt that the world was out to take things from me, that some things in life were just not fair, and that I often needed to make decisions on my own. This “fighter” attitude had its place, it could often be used at the wrong time. As a young Christian man, I found that this aspect of my character was still there: I was still a fighter. I would fight for what I thought was right and I would fight against things that I thought were unjust. But, unfortunately, I often pushed people away with this attitude. Even today, as an older Christian, I tend to come on too strong when voicing my opinion. The word intentional certainly can be a strength of mine but, as with many things in life, our strengths can also be our weaknesses. I am learning to be careful with the intentional drive within me. I am so glad that during this season of my life I was in a restored relationship with Jesus and was learning to walk with Him.

My Spiritual Life in My Twenties and Early Thirties

I had given my life to Jesus at the age of seventeen when I was finishing grade eleven, and I graduated high school when I was eighteen years old. After I

finished high school and started working, I decided that it was time that I lived on my own. I was working in a kitchen manufacturing plant at the time and knew that there were things in my life that needed to be worked on, and I felt the need for my own space.

In my early twenties, I started dating a girl from church, Irma, whom I would eventually marry. However, for me, the thought of marriage was frightening, and I had great fears and doubts about this girl. During this time, I often longed for a father to talk to, but I did not have one. One day while we were doing some renovations at a certain location where our Winnipeg congregation had initiated a church plant, I was watching Irma as we were working together, and I heard a voice telling me that she was the one and, though I was fearful, this was what this prodded me to start a relationship with her. During these years, I was very involved in our local church: I sang in the youth choir, men's choir, and adult choir; I played in the church orchestra; I was involved in a church plant in the town of Steinbach, where Irma and I would go on Thursday evenings; I taught Sunday school. At this time, my life was good: I had a job, I lived alone, and I was busy in church.

When I was twenty-one, I desired to go to our mission field in Mexico. I spoke with one of our leading pastors about this. He asked me a life-changing question: "How often have you read your Bible from beginning to end?" If I was going to teach in Mexico, I certainly needed to know my Bible. I answered that I had never read the Bible from the beginning to the end. I had never really thought of a systematic Bible-reading program, but I started right then with a reading plan.

Since that day I have read the Bible from cover to cover once a year. It was here that the word ‘intentional’ became an even greater part in my life. I would get up early in the morning to read Scripture and pray. There were times when I did not feel like getting up, or even liking reading Scripture, but the word intentional was there. This has been a part of my spiritual formation and part of my spiritual structure since then, and it has helped me greatly. I am in love with the Bible and it seems as if I read it for the first time every time that I go through it. There are new and exciting things that I learn, and God certainly speaks to me through the Word on the pages. This spiritual structure has been part of my life since then, so I have re-read the Bible many times over the years that I have been a Christian.

When I was twenty-two and newly engaged, I was asked to go to Mexico and assist in our church and school there; I was tasked to be involved in another church plant at a second location. Our church and school were close to Cuauhtémoc, Chihuahua, Mexico, but the new church plant, where I lived, was about forty-five minutes away from any phone access, and the roads were unpaved, dusty, and full of potholes. For electricity, we had a generator that ran during the day. I had to adapt to a totally different culture of people, though I had started learning the language as soon as I had moved to Mexico in order to reach out to the people there. I lived in a one-room hut, which served as my bedroom and my study. I had bought an old rusty GMC Jimmy before going to Mexico, thinking that the vehicle would help me to fit in with the people I would be working with. I soon realized that having this vehicle in rural Mexico was a big mistake because, when driving the gravel roads, dust would swirl all over the

inside of the vehicle, as the body was so rusted out. There were times when I arrived at my destination and had to clean my glasses because they were so dusty from the dust swirling inside of the vehicle. If I ever took people along for a ride, they would experience a ride like none other, complete with the dust-storm that originated from inside of my vehicle. I can honestly say that not only have I seen Mexico and have been in Mexico, but I have also *tasted* Mexico: a lot of Mexican dust entered my lungs as I drove those dusty, pothole-filled roads.

After being in Mexico for about nine months, I returned to Canada and I married Irma. And yes, we did buy a different vehicle in Canada: I drove the Jimmy back to Canada and got rid of it. My new wife would not have tolerated that old Jimmy with all the dust swirling in it. Together with my young wife, we travelled back to Mexico for our honeymoon, and lived there for about two-and-a-half years. The years in Mexico brought about many learning experiences, as we were just married, and we lived in a one-room hut for several months before we could move into a larger space. In this hut, we had a bed, a stove, a fridge, some storage, my desk, and a bookshelf, because I needed to study and prepare sermons. We had no running water in this room, however, so when we needed a bathroom for showering or other reasons, we would either have to go to our landlord's house next door, or we would have to brave the outhouse. Using the outhouse at night was scary because one of the hinges was broken and the door just hung on one hinge.

This was very hard for my wife because we had so little privacy. Because our hut was small, we really did not have guests, though my wife would cook

meals for the workers, and they would eat with us. I also remember having an unwanted guest in our hut: my wife noticed that a mouse had decided to visit us, and she is extremely scared of mice, so a grand search began. We could not rest until we were rid of the guest, of course. I am not sure how long the search lasted, with my wife standing on the bed in mortal fear, but eventually the guest was found and evicted. Life could continue, again. A new multipurpose building was being constructed for our church plant during this time, so we spent a lot of time working at the building site. After living in our hut for about five months, we moved into our new building, which was a school, a church, and a home under one roof, which was a relief for us.

Coming from Canada and now living in this area was challenging for us, and there were times when I just wanted to quit and return to Canada. However, I was committed to serving God and others, and I was intentional in assisting these people.

There were new languages that needed to be learned as we worked and served the people in this area. There was a need to know Low German (a German dialect) as we were missionaries to the Old Colony Mennonite community. We also needed to speak Spanish when we were in the neighbouring towns. It was difficult working with the people who lived in the area, as we were viewed as false prophets, so many of them they would threaten us and vandalize our building. During one heated exchange, a young man held a knife to my throat but, since there was no security force around, we were quite helpless to do anything. In the area where we lived, we attempted to befriend the local people; since we

had a school, some of the local children attended our school. It was our desire to teach the children in a more thorough manner, hoping that through a better education they would become committed followers of Jesus Christ. The word “intentional” assisted me throughout this period.

When we returned to Canada, we decided that we would live in the area of Steinbach, Manitoba, as Irma’s parents and siblings lived there. What I did not know at the time was that the next thirteen years were to be a tough school for me. Returning to Canada, I had to find another job, and we also needed a home, as my wife was expecting our first child. I was desperate to find a job, as we were living with Irma’s parents when we returned from Mexico. I applied wherever I could and finally found a job at a window manufacturing plant called Loewen Windows where I would be making five dollars and twenty cents an hour.

We soon bought our first home, which was a very old house, but we were able to afford it and make payments to our mortgage on time. I was used to pastoring a church in Mexico, but now in Steinbach I became part of the congregation; we were involved in our local church, just at a different level. Our first daughter was born, and we felt so blessed. Though we were young and poor, we had each other, our daughter, and family living nearby. In our church, however, our pastor started straying to the extreme right wing. He had found a group (Church of God, Restoration) that dressed plainly, did not go to doctors, and believed they and they alone had the truth. Soon, his preaching changed, which created much conflict in the congregation, as well as between myself and him. Going to church on Sundays was tough yet, because of our responsibilities to

the church and to our children (we had welcomed our second daughter two years after our first daughter was born), we felt that we needed to stay and support and help. For me, having been an orphan and a fighter, this was a tough time. There came a point in this conflict where we were not allowed to sing in the choirs anymore and I was not allowed to teach Sunday school. And where was God? Why did I have to feel so worthless in church? Looking back, I can see how God was working in my heart.

During this time, I learned that intentionally spending time with the Lord in Scripture and prayer was necessary for my spiritual nourishment, as I did not get the necessary spiritual nourishment at church. I experienced the longing of the Psalmist: “As a deer longs for flowing streams, so I long for you, God. I thirst for God, the living God” (Psalm 42:1-2a). I had the great need to be nourished by God, and through this time of testing I desired to be nourished by the living God. This experience was valuable, because I now learned that digging into the Word and leaning on prayer is vital for the follower of Jesus. There are times when church members speak out in the church and say that they are not being fed in their Sunday morning service. I feel with them, but I know that Jesus wants to feed His sheep, and there are more feeding opportunities than just during the Sunday morning worship service. During those tough years, Jesus always nourished me through the Word of God and the Holy Spirit. As a congregation, we reached out to our umbrella organization for a pastoral change, but due to some existing family ties in the umbrella organization, it quite some time before the change happened.

During the thirteen years in the Steinbach area, there was another vital lesson that I needed to learn. Having grown up in the German Church of God, we were taught that all true believers would come to be saved and find the true “Church of God.” We were very exclusive in our teaching and this deeply affected me, as I had become judgmental regarding other Christians and I had trouble accepting other Christians as being authentic followers of Jesus. I desperately needed to learn that there are many believers who may think differently than I do, yet they follow Jesus.

For a while, I worked at the window manufacturing plant with a man who became a real friend to me, though he attended a different church in the Steinbach area. As I worked with him, I found him to be an authentic follower of Jesus, and this was important for my spiritual growth, as I learned to listen to him and learn from him. This man was such an example of how a Christian should live, and I worked closely with him and observed his work ethic, his decision-making, and his faith. I noticed and appreciated his gentle manner as he dealt with his co-workers and bosses. I also had other friends from other churches and again, I learned that God has His followers all over the world and in other churches. What a valuable lesson to learn, and it certainly is a good feeling to know that the family of God is a worldwide family, and that all languages and cultures are included in His family.

During these years, there were many changes for us as a family. Irma and I were married when I was twenty-three years old, and then moved to Mexico and back again to Canada when I was twenty-six years old. Our first daughter was

born when I was twenty-six, our second when I was twenty-eight, and our son was born when I was thirty-one years old. Due to new growth in our family, both Irma and I worked to support the family, with Irma working part-time to supplement my income. At Loewen Windows, I had the opportunity to be accepted into an apprenticeship program, and I soon had my papers as a millwright, so I continued going to school to learn basic welding and machining. Throughout these years, I kept up my Bible-reading and praying, and I desired to grow spiritually. In 1990, we had a pastoral change in our local church, which was relieving for most of the congregation, even though some families left with the outgoing pastor. Over the next years, a time of healing and growing was needed for the congregation and my family.

During these years, Irma and I built several new homes in a town called Mitchell, close to Steinbach, where our children attended the public school. This school was like a Christian school, and our children had great friends, and we knew many of the parents. We could offer our children music lessons and other extra-curriculars., and we were able to go on holidays with our children, often driving through the night to get to our destination. Our holidays were simple, yet we have great memories. We desired to be strict with our children, yet with balance. Most importantly, we wanted to be good examples for them. As parents, we desired to make Christianity as appealing as possible, and we wanted our children to follow Jesus, to love Jesus, and to be committed to Jesus.

It was Irma and my great desire to intentionally model for our children what a Christian should be. We would, as Comer writes, “make them our life

calling, putting them before ministry and careers, before personal comfort, before our own agendas—before anything” (Comer 2018, 24). As we look back today, we see many things that we did with our children that they are now doing in their homes and with their children. We see many of the same values that we taught them that they are now passing on to their children. At a young age, all three of our children became Christians and all three were baptized and to this day, they are interested in the Kingdom of God and are working in their local congregations. All three children are married, and we have ten grandchildren who are so good that we should have had them first, before our children!

Our Years in Kelowna, BC.

On December 13th, 2019, I turned sixty years old. The years have flown by, and I am slowly getting older. For me, the years thirty-five to sixty have been good years, though we experienced many changes during these years and many of those changes have been challenging for us. When I was thirty-five, we were heavily involved in our local church in Steinbach, MB and in the lives of our children, who were growing, spreading their wings, and involved in their local schools. Life was good, as we enjoyed where we lived, and I had advanced at work and really enjoyed my job. Financially, we were not rich, but we had more than enough, and life was smooth sailing.

A major change in our lives came just before Christmas 1998, when I received a phone call from a pastor friend asking if we would consider moving to Kelowna, BC. He was offering me the position of associate pastor in the Mission

Springs Church of God. This came as a real surprise for myself and my family at this time in life. I had felt the tug towards ministry for years, but the timing of this offer was totally wrong and perhaps too late, or so I thought. I had given up on the idea of ever being a pastor, as we were settled in the church, school, and community: for me, the door was closed on being a pastor, and I had come to terms with that.

When we received this phone call, I told my friend that we would pray about this, and we sure prayed. Irma and I spent weeks talking about this issue as we really did not know what to do. We asked others for advice, and we received much advice, though it was mainly negative. Many thought that we should not go to Kelowna, as the church there was considered by many in our congregation to be a liberal church. The more advice we asked for, the more the decision became clouded and difficult and, as the saying goes, our decision was clear as mud; in other words, we just did not know what to do. We prayed and prayed and waited for an answer. Other people who knew of our situation would ask us what our decision was, and we would just answer that we did not know what to do. The church in Kelowna finally set a deadline when they would like to have a decision from us. How could we know clearly what God's will would be for us? It was during this time that our oldest daughter came up to me and said "Dad, you need to do what God wants you to do."

One morning as I was praying, it was as if God spoke to me and said: "As I was with Moses, so I will be with you" (Joshua 1:5). I looked up the Bible verse in Joshua and was so blessed by this. This voice and verse certainly prodded us in

a certain direction, but that was not enough for me. I asked God to give total clarity, which He then did. A few days later, during morning prayer, I heard the voice of God again saying, “I have placed before you an open door, that no one can shut” (Revelation 3:8). Again, I opened my Bible to that verse and then I knew what we had to do. I called my wife from work that morning and told her about this verse and we then decided that the Lord had called us to the Kelowna church. We experienced what F.W. Boreham wrote about, and I have used this passage as inspiration when making important decisions in life, “‘Can a man [*sic*] be quite sure,’ I asked, ‘that in the hour of perplexity, he will be rightly led?’ I shall never forget his reply. He sprang from his deck chair and came earnestly towards me. ‘I am certain of it ... if he will but give God time. Remember that as long as you live ... Give God time’” (Boreham 1940, 178-9). We took our time, and God took His time, and so when clarity did finally come it was very clear.

I felt that I really needed to be clear that the decision we made would be God’s will. I realized that things in life can go wrong and that when things get difficult, I could claim God’s will for us and the promises He gave us. During the years that we have been in ministry, when life was tough, I have gone back to these clearly underlined verses in my Bible. I have spoken with God about those verses, reminding Him that He had promised to help us as He had helped Moses. For us, this was a life-changing decision. Leaving our home, leaving the area where our children had all their friends and many relatives was not a small decision.

We felt sure that this is the direction that God was leading us and, in the summer of 1999, we moved to Kelowna, British Columbia. This was very difficult for us, as moving was not easy for my wife, and we would leave her family behind in Steinbach. There were many tears and struggles along the journey and I needed to learn that grieving may also be necessary when a family moves to a new place.

Once we settled into the Kelowna church and life in Kelowna, we loved living there. Kelowna has great summer weather, as it is quite hot there. We lived close to the lake. We biked and swam, and our children learned how to ski and snowboard. I enjoyed fishing and ice fishing with an older friend, who would take my son and I along on his fishing trips. Our children settled into their schools, and the church was very good both to us and for us. Our church family in Kelowna was wonderful and I can say that, during our stay there, it was a dream congregation. There were many children, young people, and young families. The people really embraced us. The congregation did not put pressure on our children as “PKs” (Pastor’s Kids) but greatly loved them.

One of the more important lessons I learned there was the lesson of working together with the senior pastor. There were situations about which we disagreed, but he was the senior pastor, and I was not. Many decisions were his to make and, since he had been there for years, he knew the people, so he often knew what was right for the congregation. I always supported him in the decisions he made and we worked together. God blessed the church with growth during the years we were there. We spent four great years in this church. Still, we knew that

my being the associate pastor meant that we would eventually move on to another church where I would be the senior pastor.

The time came when another tough decision needed to be made. Our sister church in Aylmer, Ontario, contacted us and asked if we would be willing to move to Aylmer and serve the church there. Once again, we asked the Lord for direction, and I also asked my mentor friend what he thought we should do. It became clear that our time in Kelowna had come to an end, and we would have to move on.

Pastor of the Bradley Street Church of God

In the summer of 2003, our family made the long move across Canada and accepted the challenge of our next church. This church was a small-town church and was a unilingual German congregation, with many of the congregants clinging to the German language. We had accepted this call because it made sense at the time and my spiritual mentor advised us that this was the right decision. We prayed, seeking God's will for this move, and we felt confident that this was what He wanted us to do. Our children would soon start university and, since there was one close by in London, they could drive to and from school while continuing to live at home.

When we arrived in Aylmer, I soon noticed that this was a dwindling congregation; the church's attendance records showed that there was an annual decline in the number of people coming to services. The church was stuck on the German language and some other outward issues such as sports, TV, clothing,

haircuts, and jewelry. After making many visits and talking with the younger families, I realized that we needed to introduce English into the church and change the church culture. For many in the congregation, this sounded like a terrible mistake because, in their way of thinking, Satan spoke English and a harmful spirit would be introduced into the church through the English language. During this time, we had Sunday evening services, and a group of young people would come to the service. I sat behind them, and I sometimes cried because I would preach a German sermon and they would sit there and not understand me. Some of the congregation felt that being unilingual German was a safeguard against Satan and worldliness. I was often awake at night with a headache, as I did not know what to do.

I knew we had to offer an English service, but how could this change come about with so much resistance? Our family visited a young couple during that time who were very involved in the church. They told us that if change did not happen soon, many families would leave, as they had called us to bring about change. After many meetings and talking and praying, the church board and I decided that we would have a test month of an English service on the Sunday morning, following which the congregation would vote on whether this change should continue. After a month of Sunday morning English worship services, we had the vote as announced. The result of the vote was a 97 percent approval for the continuation of the English service. This meant that every Sunday morning we would have a German worship service and an English worship service. As soon as we started offering an English service, things started happening in the

congregation. In a matter of months, we had a spiritual revival among the young people, as they came and found the Lord. This was very exciting for us. The church had energy, and it grew. We attracted many young people, and we soon had many young families with children and our Sunday school program boomed. We had some people coming to church who were not attending anywhere, which was good for the congregation.

In a few years, we realized that the church building was too small. We started expansion plans as the church was full during the worship services. As the expansion plans were being made, there were all kinds of other issues to deal with. The building project was completed in 2009. The new church renovation gave us seating for over four hundred and ample Sunday school room. The architect gave us a wonderful plan, which we followed. We had a great building, and great hope for the future. During these years, we experienced an almost 10 percent growth in attendance every year. There were new people, more youth, and more children; it was very exciting.

Not long after the church building was finished, the congregation began experiencing growing discontent. What I did not realize clearly back then was that where God was working, Satan would always be sowing his seed. There is no doubt that I was very busy and driven, and this did cause issues. Looking back, if I had taken more time and been more focused on what I should have been doing, I think things could have been worked out. With the growing discontent, some congregants reached out to our umbrella organization, and this organization decided that the congregation should have a vote as to whether our family should

stay or leave. It was decided that there needed to be a 75 percent approval for us to continue in this church and, when the vote was taken, the number came in at about 72 percent. Thus, we would have to resign and leave this church. At this time, the church was still growing and many of the new people attending did not understand how this could even happen. They loved the church; they loved what was being offered to them—and now this?

This whole unfortunate situation was one of the low points in my life. What were we to do? We had to move, but we did not know where to go. We really did not know what to do, so we decided that we would load our belongings onto a trailer and leave. People would ask us where we were moving to, and we did not know how to answer them. We moved away from Aylmer in the summer of 2011 with broken hearts. There were many in the congregation that loved us and were sad to see us go, and we also had to say good-bye to our daughter and her husband and our five-month-old granddaughter.

Our plan was to drive to Edmonton to a wedding and then see what would happen. I left the church in Aylmer with overwhelming grief: I had given so much to this congregation. Looking back now, I can see how I could have done things differently, and that perhaps in the greater scheme of things, it was for the best. As Shelley states, “In most disputes neither side is entirely innocent” (Shelley 1985, 121), and instead of working through the issues we were faced with in Aylmer, we moved.

Pastor of the Mountview Church of God

As we left Aylmer, we heard that a church in Calgary wanted a pastoral change, and we wondered if perhaps this would be something that could work out for us. Our umbrella organization, the Canadian Mission Board (CMB), was involved with us and with the Calgary church, and were the ones who alerted us to the congregation's wishes for a change. We travelled to Edmonton and talks began regarding the Calgary church pastoral situation. The pastor couple there were our good friends, and the church was facing a tough time; eventually, a vote was taken in the Calgary church, and we were voted in to become their new pastor couple. Before we accepted the position, we met with the outgoing pastor couple to see what they thought of this process. They were deeply hurt that the church wanted them to leave. We talked together, we prayed together, and we cried together, as we did not know what to do about the situation.

Finally, our pastor friend told us to accept the call and that he would always support us. Still, the whole transition was very hurtful for them, as things were said and done by some people that caused much pain. We were still hurting because of what happened to us in Aylmer, and now, we were faced by hurt in the Calgary church. We felt like the sick taking care of the sick, and this was not a pleasant and comfortable situation for us to be in. It was such a tough time for the church, the former pastor couple, and for us—how would this work out? This was really a no-win situation for us, for the former pastor couple, and for the Calgary church, especially considering that the former pastor faced financial difficulties due to being forced from the pulpit. We had meetings with the former pastor and

some of his family, and our umbrella organization tried to mend things, but this did not happen. Soon the former pastor and his whole family would leave the church, as they simply could not get over what had been done to them. To this day, I still feel sad about the whole situation. As is often said, hindsight is always 20-20. I wish we could go back and redo some of the things said and done and avoid some very hurtful situations.

After many congregants left the Calgary church, we now had a church that was smaller in numbers. Today, I can say that God has blessed us, because our congregation has grown as families have moved into the area and decided to attend the Mountview Church of God. Though the years have passed, I still sometimes look back and wish things had been handled differently when we first arrived. I wonder if all this pain was necessary, as there are things that could have and should have been avoided.

Chaplain at the Calgary Remand Centre

Amid some trying times and difficult situations with the Calgary church, something very positive happened in another area of my life. In the spring of 2012, I started volunteering at the Calgary Remand Centre, the place where people who have been arrested are held. A long-time friend of mine was a volunteer chaplain there and wanted me to get involved as well, so he invited me to come with him to the Remand Centre. I spent a morning at the Centre volunteering there, and I loved it, so I began volunteering for one morning a week there, Centre doing several Bible studies. I did this for five years, after which I

was offered a part-time paid position working eight hours a week. The pay was good, and I really enjoyed working there. During this time, I met many men who were drug and alcohol addicts, and I had many heart-to-heart discussions with murderers. These were often very sad discussions, since some of these men came from some very difficult environments, and I felt so sorry for them. Often, I could sit down with the inmates and share Jesus with them; as part of our ministry to them, they could attend group Bible studies, and we gave out many Bibles and good Christian literature. Most of the men were open to talking and praying, as they had hit rock bottom. I felt like I was doing a very necessary ministry, and the inmates appreciated the love and honesty that I had for them.

This was also part of my healing from the Aylmer situation and what I was dealing with in the Calgary church. Here at the Remand Centre, I would talk with many men and women who had a dark past, and I could point them to Christ. It was my pleasure dealing with the inmates, as I learned where things become truly challenging in the lives of so many people. The inmates would ask to talk to me as the chaplain, so I had an audience that wanted to talk with me. I would love them as best I could, and I would speak truth to them.

There were many inmates that needed to be there and they themselves admitted that the Remand Centre was the best place for them. We chaplains would give of ourselves and, through that, we would come to know the inmates in a very personal way. I left the Remand Centre in May of 2019 due to the start of my DMin program at Tyndale. I learned many life lessons at the Remand Centre and perhaps someday I would like to be a chaplain there again. This job at the

Remand Centre fed me and sustained me through some deep valleys in life. I am grateful I spent those years interacting with those inmates as, while I was ministering to them, they were often ministering to me in a wonderful way.

My Formal Education

I had desired to go to university when I finished high school, but due to a misunderstanding over my university credits, this did not happen. Years later, though, I still desired to go to school. I had finished high school and eventually I got a trade certificate, but I had no formal pastoral education. After becoming a pastor in 1999, I felt the need for formal education in my vocation. Some of the congregants in our churches are engineers, teachers, doctors, and other educated people, and I often wondered what they thought of their pastors, who were relatively uneducated. There were periods in my life as a pastor when I felt that it was embarrassingly obvious that I lacked a formal education and so, over time, a nagging sense kept growing in me that I needed to get more formal education.

It was in April 2013 while making a visit, that I was encouraged to take action on continuing my education. The person I was visiting had a magazine open, and there I saw an advertisement from the Mid-America Christian University (MACU). To this day, it is a miracle to me, as this small incident prompted me to start gathering information about that school, and a great burning desire exploded in me to continue my education there. I did some research and I found out that MACU has a fully on-line ministry course, and I was convinced that this could work for me. I started praying about going to school, and I talked

to some of the people in my life about this, as going back to school at the age of fifty-three was no small thing. I spoke with one of my mentors and asked what he thought about this. He shared some things with me about going back to school, and he was highly supportive.

One thing I realized, back in 2013, is that I would have to be very careful with the way I used my time, because I was questioning whether this could fit into my life. How could I be a pastor, a chaplain at the Remand Centre, and a student? Where would I, where *could* I find time to still be a father, husband, and grandfather? Where would there be time to visit the sick and elderly, and others that would need to be visited? Where was there still time to take holidays? I wrestled with these questions, and I concluded that I would have to be extremely intentional with my time and energy and do the best I could with the available hours that I had.

I was able to start school in September 2013, in in the Bachelor of Science in Christian Ministry program. I now faced something that I call the APA essay writing style cruelty: I had no idea what APA essay writing style was, as I had finished school about thirty-six years ago. I asked my son about this, and he attempted to explain APA to me, which was like learning a foreign language. I had to play catch-up with many of the elements of higher education, since there were many hoops to jump through and many frustrations, but I did not want to quit. Since I started my education program, I have had many understanding and sympathetic professors. They realized that I was not that young and that many things were new to me. Many of them took me by the hand and walked with me

during many different and challenging courses. Since I was a full-time pastor (and working part time at the Calgary Remand Centre) I also had to figure out some structure regarding my time, as I was aware that I had to be careful how I used it. However, after several months, I had a system of time management figured out, and I have kept this structure in place to this day, as I work best when my time schedule structure is followed.

One of the great lessons that I learned early in my educational journey is that I must do the best I can with the time I have. I have sent in assignments that could have been better, but with the time I had, that was the best I could do; I have had to figure out what success really means and how it applies to my life. I found that John Wooden's definition of success as "peace of mind that is a direct result of self-satisfaction in knowing you made the effort to become the best that you are capable of becoming" (Wooden and Jamison 2009, 33) is helpful to my own personal experience of what is successful. Once I figured out what success was to me, I was better able to deal with the stress and anxiety of my education process. I desired to finish my degree quickly, and I did my first program in three years, for I had an unquenchable desire in me, and I pushed and pushed to finish my studies. I told my advisors that I was old, and I had to finish quickly before I die.

Over the last years, I have also learned what the term plodding means to me in my education process. Plodding is about moving slowly and in an unexciting fashion, and this is how I would describe my school journey of the last nine years. I move at a slow pace, and I attempt to keep things in order in my life.

I plod through assignments, essay styles, and Word document formatting. I have found out that in the education process there are many hoops that need to be jumped through, assignments that need to be handed in, and things that may take a lot longer than I would hope for. Therefore, I just continue plodding along and intentionally stick to my schedule and my work.

MACU was very gracious to me and, after I finished the bachelor program, I started the Master of Ministry program that MACU offered one week later. Almost every class was a challenge for me, but I had learned to take my assignments one week at a time. As I was finishing this program, I wondered what I should do next. I had a dream of getting a doctoral degree, but I knew very little about this, and again had a lot of questions for myself. Where does this type of dream and desire come from? Why would I, now getting close to sixty years old, want to continue with a formal education? When I started this formal education process in 2013, I told the Lord that I would give Him ten years for this process. I looked ahead and realized I still had some years to go. I asked, I talked, I prayed, and I researched various schools that offered Doctor of Ministry programs.

I am very blessed that a pastor friend of mine was taking courses at Tyndale Seminary in Toronto at the time and suggested that I look into the DMin program at Tyndale. I checked into their programs and what did I find? A DMin program in spiritual formation! This is what I desired, as this is exactly my passion. In the spring of 2018, I had an in-person tour of the Tyndale Seminary grounds and had a chance to talk with some professors, and the whole encounter led me to decide that I would like to attend there. There were all kinds of hoops

that I needed to jump through once again, but I was accepted and, in June 2019, I was able to be on the campus for the initial two-week residency.

I was so excited to be at Tyndale that I thought that I would kiss the ground when there. I find that being in school now for quite a few years is draining and I now take one month at a time, but I am still thrilled by what I can learn from the books I read and by rubbing shoulders with many experienced Christians. At the Tyndale residencies, I have had close contact with my professors and fellow students and I have learned so much through the many discussions I have had with all of them.

I have learned much over the last years, but my main takeaway has been about intentional spiritual formation. There are many reasons why this subject fascinates me, but one of my life's goals is learning more about spiritual formation and then teaching about the practices of spiritual disciplines.

Spiritual Formation

I have attended Church of God (Anderson) all my life. The denomination was founded in the 1880s, and it came out of the Wesleyan holiness movement. In general, I love our theology and doctrine, but I always felt there was something that I just did not understand especially when I would listen to the sermons on sanctification. Often, this topic was explained as follows: “We surrender our lives to God, we receive the Holy Spirit, and the root of sin is removed from us.” I did not know exactly what that meant. I was taught what was termed sin-free living, but at the same time it was explained to me that as sanctified people we could not

sin and, as believers, we would achieve “sinless perfection.” I listened to this over the years, and I came to know the personal lives of some of the pastors who taught this, but I admit to often having some questions about the whole thing. In my opinion, there was an imbalance in our teaching, because sin was explained away as a mistake, as if a person cannot sin. I would observe things that were clearly wrong and sinful but were nevertheless justified and explained away as mistakes, and so I just could not wrap my head around this teaching. I would also read the Bible and seek what the Bible said on spiritual formation and growth, and I have realized that the Bible must be used in presenting our denomination’s complete theology on this subject.

Having been introduced to spiritual formation at MACU, I started reading authors who wrote about spiritual formation as a lifelong process. I have come to understand the view Wesley held of spiritual formation as a life-long process of growing into the image of Christ. As Thorsen notes, “[t]rue religion is what Wesley liked to call ‘heart-religion’ ‘or inward religion’—religion that balances knowledge and vital Piety” (Thorsen 2005, 52). I have come to believe that, as part of the holiness movement, there must be a clear focus on the fruit of the Spirit. I believe that, as followers of Jesus Christ, Christians’ loudest and strongest preaching should be the example of their daily lives. The fruit of the Spirit is to be a source of spiritual nourishment for those around us. As I view the concept of the fruit of the Spirit, I see spiritual growth as a process in the life of the Christian. I do not see that perfection, in the sense of “sin-free perfection,” is the goal. Dr. Sam Bruce, one of my professors in my first-degree program at

MACU, writes that “spiritual formation then includes a focus on the inner transformation of the human person into the likeness of Jesus Christ” (Bruce 2011, 16). This quote is from a book on spiritual formation and, on reading it, many things made sense to me. Dr. Bruce goes on to explain how spiritual disciplines are involved in spiritual formation (Bruce 2011) and, to me, many of these terms were not familiar, and how to use them was also totally unfamiliar.

I realized at that time that spiritual growth does not just happen, so the Christian needs to be intentional about this. I was then introduced to Richard Foster and Dallas Willard and other authors who wrote about Christian disciplines in spiritual formation. I started reading Scripture and seeking what the Word would tell me about this, and I came upon the concept of the transformation of the heart in 2 Corinthians 3. I then did a study on this word transformation, which comes from the Greek word here is metamorphosis, illustrated by the change in the life of a caterpillar to butterfly.

When I put this all together, I could then understand the process of spiritual formation, of how God works in the Christian. I could understand the process of God working in and together with the faithful through intentional spiritual disciplines to transform Christians into the likeness of Jesus Christ. In the process of transformation, the person needs to allow God to be the potter and their self to be the clay. In this process, God will take the person and lead the person through different teaching processes using the spiritual disciplines to produce a person such as Paul describes, writing that “We all ... are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory; this is from the Lord who is the Spirit” (2

Cor 3:18). For example, as Christians allow God to speak to them through the discipline of silence and as they learn to listen to Him through the discipline of listening, God can correct, guide, and work in them as the potter works the clay and, in doing so, they are transformed into the likeness of Jesus. Diane Leclerc and Mark A. Maddix reference Dallas Willard to describe this process and write that “Willard defines spiritual formation as ‘the process whereby the inmost being of the individual (the heart, will, or spirit) take [*sic*] on the quality or character of Jesus Himself’” (Leclerc and Maddix 2011, 12). Since this concept of a process was foreign to me at the time, I needed to think it through and work through it then. As I did that, the concept of spiritual formation made sense in that God works in me and, over time (as the process continues), spiritual growth takes place.

As the whole concept of spiritual formation as a process started making more sense to me and I could see how the church would benefit from this type of teaching, I started working on a seminar that would present the concept of spiritual formation and then the spiritual disciplines. I have presented this seminar to my church here in Calgary and titled it “Being a life-long disciple of Jesus Christ! By being in the process of Examination/Transformation and Disciplines of the Heart.” I have presented on this topic in the past, but I am still working on the concept in my own mind and personally working through the different aspects of spiritual formation. My goal with this seminar was that it would be in ten parts, which I could present as I travelled to different places and different churches. I now know that spiritual formation is important, and I also know that having

proper disciplines in place greatly assisted me in the structure that I needed for my walk with Christ. To be able to present a ten-part seminar is a life-long project for me; being able to research spiritual formation is one of the reasons I studied at Tyndale, and to that end I have been reading about Christian disciplines and how they affect me. Many writers have different lists of spiritual disciplines, and I am presently thinking about and working through different aspects of them in my own life. My view of these disciplines is that their usage allows for the placement of structures that will remind Christians of God, that will give them time for God, and that will allow God to work in their lives and change them as Christians.

Health Issues

Several years ago, while reading, I came across the subject of the labyrinth, which I then researched I studied the history of the labyrinth concept and how the labyrinth can be a great visual tool in the life of a Christian; I printed off a labyrinth for myself and realized that my life story is much like a labyrinth. One of the most important points I learned about travelling the labyrinth is that life is on a continuum—humans do not stay in one place. The labyrinth walker proceeds through the different quadrants of the labyrinth to get to the centre, and to travel from one quadrant into the next takes only seconds. I have realized that life is much like that, as it only takes seconds to go from joy to unrest, to upheaval and grief, and then, hopefully, back to joy (or perhaps even contentment). As I think about the health issues that I have dealt with over the last years, I see myself walking the labyrinth.

In my early thirties, I developed an issue with a swollen knee, which was soon very uncomfortable. I went to the doctor as I had pain when I walked and when I ran and had a scope check done on the knee. At that time, some damaged cartilage and burrs were cleaned up, but since then I have not been able to run as I used to. I can cycle, but my running days are over, and there are other sports such as basketball and squash that are very difficult for me to participate in. I have had to learn to change some of the things that I do in life because I just have too much pain; for example, I can skate with our grandchildren, but I need to use extreme caution. I am physically not the person I was when I was twenty years old, and I have had to learn to let go of some things in life.

When I was about forty-six years old, I had a severe attack of vertigo. It was on a Friday evening as I was driving home that I noticed something flashing across my vision; my world was spinning apart, but I continued driving and got home safely. When a severe attack of vertigo comes upon a person, the person gets very sick and usually vomits, and this happened to me: I vomited until there was nothing left inside of me. I was squirming on our bathroom floor in a fetal position, with my world coming to an end, and I did not know what to do, which was an awful feeling for me. My wife called the ambulance, and I was taken to the hospital, but on the way, I vomited again, this time producing a bit of spit and blood. In the hospital I was given strong medication to calm down the vertigo, but as a result of the meds, I hallucinated spiders crawling up and down the walls all night. The attack settled down, and due to my great dislike of hospitals, I checked myself out on Monday morning: I could not walk straight, but I needed to get

home. I had some physiotherapy treatments which did do some good, but since that attack, I have not been the same person. I have not been able to preach as freely as I used to. I also need to be very careful on ladders, and some motions, like on a roller coaster, will make me sick again. As I walk the labyrinth of this sickness, I need to realize that I cannot do what I used to be able to do, and that I need to be careful with some of the things I do. I was at home sick in bed for over a week when the initial vertigo attack happened, and I have realized that walking from joy to sickness was but a step along the path of life. One moment I was talking with my wife and having a good time; in the next moment, I felt like my life was unraveling in front of me. Thus, this attack of vertigo has left its mark on my life.

Then, several years later, another health issue presented itself in my life. Stress is a part of life for a pastor: there were times when, after a Sunday evening service, I would be driving home and my head felt like it would explode. We lived about a kilometre away from church and, on my way home, I often became so sick that I would open the vehicle door and vomit would explode from my stomach. Once I reached my home, I would take extra-strength Tylenol and go to bed, and soon I would feel better. This went on for a several years but would only show up occasionally. Once, when visiting a friend, he mentioned that he would like to test my blood for my blood sugar level, which he did. My blood sugar level was around 15 and he said right away that I needed to get this checked out. I made an appointment with my doctor and had a diabetes test., and the result showed that I am a type 2 diabetic. Since discovering this, I drink more water and exercise

more and, as a result, I have never had an episode like I used to have, but when I do cheat too much with sweets and other things, I get headaches and feel bad. Being a type 2 diabetic has helped me watch my diet more, and thus the diagnosis has been useful to me, as being careful with my diet is good for my long-term health. Being a diabetic, along with having had an attack of vertigo, sometimes causes some dizziness. When this happens, I need to be extra careful with all my activities. The word intentional meets me when I think about my diet and my food intake. The more intentional I am about what I eat, the better off I am.

What kind of lessons are to be learned when one's health changes? How much should people realize that many things in life come to them and they have no control over them? My greatest health issue so far caught me totally by surprise. In 2018, we were on vacation in Palm Springs when I went to the bathroom and my urine resembled chocolate milk. I was shocked, but I assumed that I was dehydrated. Over the next days I would drink a lot of water, hoping this issue would clear up by itself, but over the next weeks and months, this did not change. Gradually, my urine color changed into a reddish color, and I noticed blood clots in the urine. Finally, in August, of that year, I decided that I needed to see my doctor, and I did some research on this issue and realized it was serious. My doctor quickly set up some other tests and I was diagnosed with bladder cancer. My urine was red, with constant blood clots. During my cystoscopy, we could see the cancerous tumour growth and a wound in the bladder. My doctor scheduled me for surgery, and the growth was removed. The aftermath of the surgery was terrible, however, because I had accidentally pulled out the tube that

supplied me with liquid painkiller. During the night, I needed to urinate, which I did, and I stood in the bathroom crying, as I was bleeding and in terrible pain. I made it back to bed and the nurse came to help me. She was very gracious and understanding, and I made it through the night, and soon felt a bit better. Over the next weeks I was in discomfort and had a burning sensation when urinating.

Then, several months later, I had another surgery. After the surgeries, I was on a program of treatments and checks and, after finishing these, all the tests up to this day have shown that there is no more cancerous growth in the bladder. This has been quite the experience for me, and many things have been learned. God has always helped me when I needed His help during the surgeries and treatments. I have learned to appreciate all my doctors and nurses, as all of them have been good to me. I am realizing that there are things in life people do not wish for, and do not ask for, but many things in life do happen anyway. For example, my mother-in-law was visiting us for a few days recently, and I watched her come up the stairs one evening. From my viewpoint, it looked like she was crawling up the stairs, and I thought to myself about how this is not something she wished for, or ever expected, but that is what has happened. And so, while I continue my bladder checkups and tests, I am looking up to God for help and healing. What will the outcome be? I do not know; I just know that God will always be there for me.

Having dealt with knee issues, with diabetes, and with cancer has helped me in my understanding and my compassion for others who deal with sickness. When I was diagnosed with cancer, some people came to me and shared their

perspectives about different healing methods. When I was diagnosed with cancer, I expected the diagnosis, yet there were many unknowns, and I now know this as I talk and walk with others who are dealing with difficult health issues.

Recently, I came upon another totally new health concern: My PSA (prostate-specific antigen) numbers had gone up and I went to see my doctor. I am again wondering, what new tests will I have to take? Where will this lead me to? There have been ups and downs, but those next months were challenging. From where I am right now in my life, I have no desire for more tests, or more invasive interventions. Who wishes to be sick? Who wishes to have diabetes or bladder cancer or prostate cancer? Who wishes to have dementia or blindness? Who wishes surgery or chemotherapy? I believe that as there are laws of nature, there are also laws of life. Humans live in a broken world, where sickness is a part of the experience of living. Who am I to say who will get sick and who will die in a plane crash?

I went to the doctor regarding my PSA, very concerned that the news would be bad. I entered the room, and he told me right away that he had good news for me. My PSA level was still a bit high but had come down since the test and was in the acceptable range, and my doctor wanted to see me simply to explain this whole situation. I was very relieved for this diagnosis, but who knows what sicknesses will come up in the future. I am learning to trust God with the years of life I have left. The tests are ongoing to monitor the situation.

Sixty + Years Old

I turned sixty on December 13, 2019, and I feel so blessed. My parents both only lived to the age of forty-one, so I have outlived both of them. My parents never had the chance to see their six children grow up, finish school, and get married. My parents never had the chance to become grandparents and know their grandchildren. I wonder what my parents thought when they finally realized that their lives were coming to an end, and how helpless they must have felt. I think about how they must have asked God to take care of their six children. In contrast, I am blessed to be married for many years and have a wife who is very gracious with me and puts up with many of my impulses. We have three children, all married, and ten grandchildren, and I have learned that life is about ups and downs, with different issues to deal with. However, I have learned that God is always faithful in all of life's ups and downs.

As both Irma and I get older, we are realizing that there are things we cannot do anymore. We used to paint our homes together, with Irma doing the trimming and I doing the rolling, but that will not happen anymore since Irma has had shoulder surgery. We are now learning to adapt to changes in our lives. We are learning how to help one another more as there are things that we once did alone that we cannot do anymore, or we need help. For example, I have started being the one who washes the floors, as this is easier for me to do. We recently talked about the upcoming changes in our lives; how we will have to communicate with each other more often and in a better way and keep these lines of communication open as life brings different challenges to us. We are now

working together on being intentional in doing the things in life that are important and putting away things in life that perhaps are not that important.

So here I sit, looking back over the years of my life and I am full of amazement. I am grateful that I accepted Jesus into my life when I was seventeen years old, because that decision was the most important decision that I have ever made. I have never regretted making this decision, as walking with God made my life a lot simpler and less confusing. Likewise, I am so glad that I started reading my Bible every year when I was twenty-one years old, as this discipline has given me structure and a moral compass for my life, for which I am grateful. I am also exceptionally grateful that I was able to start a formal education, which has changed me in many ways. I am so grateful that the word intentional has been prodding me for so many years. To this day, I feel the prodding of being intentional in so many areas of my life. I am more convinced today than ever before that there is a great value in intentional spiritual disciplines.

So how will life continue? Will I experience seventy, and then eighty, years? I do not know, but I would like to share some of my dreams and plans as if that were the case. I hope to continue with my reading and learning, and I hope to continue travelling and preaching. I have prayed the ancient prayer of Caleb, that “[God] has kept me alive for forty-five years ... I am still as strong today as the day Moses sent me out; I’m just as vigorous to go out to battle now as I was then” (Josh 14: 10-11). Caleb was eighty-five years old and, looking back, he realized how God had carried him and helped him. This is also my dream, to have the necessary grace and strength to continue living for Him and living for my family.

Having thought and dreamed and prayed about the future, however, I am aware of how quickly things can change, be it my health or the health of my wife. So today, as I think about the future, I place everything into the hands of the Lord and I desire to do the best and be the best that I can be. I see that spiritual formation through spiritual disciplines will continue being a part of my life as long as I live. The Holy Spirit, who is the enabler, will continue doing His work in me, as I continue the pursuit of both the enabling disciplines and the spiritual disciplines. The Holy Spirit has been and will continue to be the formative force of my life as I continue to grow and mature.

Another important lesson that I have learned through the work of the Holy Spirit and through talking with my advisors and through prayer is that I was exceedingly arrogant during my mid-life years. I now see and am very sorry about how I used to be. I have prayed the prayer of Job, saying that “Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes” (Job 42:6). I cannot go back and change the past, but I have repented and am learning to be a better person moving forward. I feel that I am more humble and more teachable than in the past, which is a good place for me to be. Having gone through many things in life, I now feel that I can reach out and help others who go through the same deep valleys. It took many years for me to allow the Holy Spirit to work in my life, and I look forward to assisting others who also need the help of the Holy Spirit. The realization of the importance of both enabling and spiritual disciplines came later in my life and so, having had that experience, I am able to understand those who were never in

contact with the disciplines. I am now able to teach those Christians from an experience standpoint, which I know will make me a better educator.

Readers may be wondering what happened to that little boy who started the kitchen on fire. What happened to the boy who was threatened to be expelled from Sunday school? What about the boy who found a bullet and decided to take a hammer to it? Or the boy who took a hammer to his mother's watch; the same one who would throw rocks at railroad cabooses, and the one who would go for long walks on the frozen river in Winnipeg? The good news is this: that boy has gotten older and wiser and so, at times, he is more careful, but he is still impulsive; he still loves having fun, and he loves pestering others. He makes up songs that he sings to his grandchildren and will often act like a child when playing with his grandchildren. They think that he is "funny and silly" at times, but that is all okay. The man, Sieg Schuler, knows that life can be very serious and that it does bring tears. He also knows that, as a Christian, life should be enjoyable and there should be laughter and fun. There are times when it seems as if he is still "out of control, but not disobedient," as his teachers said, because this is who he is: this is who God created him to be. He may be the one in heaven who will continue teasing and having fun in the afterlife; should it ever get boring, he may be the one to liven things up a bit. He may be the one sitting beside you at the great dinner table, who pulls out your chair and watches as the angels come to help you up, and you will turn to him, and you will see that funny smile on his face and you will realize that he was a child who was once called out of control, but not disobedient by the adults around him. You may also notice that if there is

any program to attend to in heaven, Sieg will be the one to ensure that everything is done on time. I think he will continue being intentional in heaven.

CHAPTER THREE: MODEL OF SPIRITUAL FORMATION

The overall concept of this model of Christian spiritual formation that I am presenting here has been previously presented to churches in Canada, Kenya, and Thailand. The goal of this model of spiritual formation is taken from Paul's letter to the Corinthians, where he writes that "we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit" (2 Cor 3:18). Christians are over time transformed into the image of Jesus. As Christians continue to grow, they are on the journey of Christian maturity.

The Holy Spirit's Involvement in Spiritual Formation.

Transformation into the image of Christ is the goal of the Holy Spirit and the goal of spiritual formation. In 2 Corinthians 3, Paul writes about the ministry of the Spirit and how it brings about righteousness; how glorious is it, when a person who is lost finds Christ, and is transformed over time into the image of Christ! At the end of the chapter, Paul adds this thought, "which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit" (2 Cor 3:18b). It is important to state that the Holy Spirit is the enabler and practitioners' Helper in this process.

When Jesus was with His disciples, He desired for them to properly understand who the Holy Spirit is, and therefore He gave several important

descriptions to His disciples, a few of which I would like to share. First, Jesus names the Holy Spirit as "... the Advocate ... whom I will send" (John 15:26a), and this advocate helps Christians, as He works in their lives. Jesus then describes the Holy Spirit as "the Spirit of truth [who] will guide you into all truth" (John 16:13b). Once again, observers can recognize the importance of the Holy Spirit in their lives from the words of Jesus. Again, Jesus speaks about how the Holy Spirit: "... will teach you all things and remind you of everything" (John 14:25). These verses stress the importance of the Holy Spirit in spiritual formation, and in the spiritual maturing process. The Holy Spirit is vital in Christians' lives, so it is vital that they have the correct understanding of Him as their friend, guide, and enabler.

Spiritual disciplines are important pieces in the process of spiritual maturing. Richard Plass and James Cofield (2014, 134) state that "spiritual disciplines are not an end in themselves. They are a means to an end. They facilitate an awakening to what is most real. Disciplines set the soul on the path where it can come to know God and live present to others in love." In this chapter, I will discuss specific spiritual and enabling disciplines and their uses. Spiritual disciplines are disciplines that, when practised, allow the person to be in a place where God can develop spiritual growth. Enabling disciplines, when practised, enable the believer to engage in spiritual disciplines and practices. One of the reasons for a lack of spiritual growth in the church may be the lack of knowledge and emphasis placed on spiritual and enabling disciplines.

The Hunger Games

An example of a life that exemplifies the term intentional is that of the character Katniss Everdeen. Katniss is the central figure in *The Hunger Games* books and movies. Katniss had, over many years, become a precision markswoman with her bow and arrow. After many hours of intentional practise, she was able to hit moving targets with exceptional accuracy, and this ability provided food for her family. She also traded some of the wild game for other provisions to assist her family in the tough task of survival in District 12. Her marksmanship with bow and arrow is one of the central themes of *The Hunger Games*, as it would assist in the political revolution and the eventual downfall of the whole nation of Panem. For Katniss, her family, and an entire dystopian nation, her hard work training with bow and arrow changed many lives.

All her hours of practise would have been perceived by some as a waste of time; yet later, as she fought in *The Hunger Games*, all her critics were quiet. To properly show the value of intentional training, there are two specific scenes in *The Hunger Games* movies that demonstrate this: in the seventy-fifth Hunger Games, Katniss uses her bow and arrow to shoot at the dome which covers the Hunger Games arena and, as a result, the dome is destroyed (Ross and Lawrence, 2012). Then, in perhaps the greatest and most shocking scene of all the movies, Katniss is given permission to kill President Snow. She chooses to kill the true enemy instead, not President Snow, and thus changes the political direction of Panem (Lawrence, 2015). Katniss did what was right for her family and for the people of Panem. Her bow, her arrows, her intentional training, her quiver, and her strong purpose in life all came together in the closing scenes of the story.

I would like to impress the point that proper training together with the proper choice of spiritual disciplines are an important part of Christian spiritual formation. In the story of *The Hunger Games*, the arrows did not just show up in the quiver; Katniss had to make the correct choice of arrows based on their proper use. Later, in the arena during the Hunger Games, she shows how the bow and arrow have become a part of her being. In the man-made place of killing called the arena, where the actual Hunger Games took place, the bow and arrows were provided for her use and again her expertise is shown in how quickly she adapted to a strange bow and strange arrows (Ross and Lawrence, 2012).

Readers can use Katniss and her bow, quiver, and the bullseye as an analogy for spiritual formation. The quiver represents the broader Christian community and authors. Authors like Richard Foster, Dallas Willard, R. Kent Hughes, and others have taught about and popularized the practice of spiritual disciplines. The bullseye in spiritual formation is Christlikeness, which is the goal of spiritual formation. The bow is the working of the Holy Spirit, and the arrows are both the spiritual and enabling disciplines. As the bow is used to release the arrows, so the Holy Spirit is used in the life of the Christian to facilitate the use of spiritual and enabling disciplines. The Holy Spirit, working in the life of the Christian, prods the Christian in certain areas and is the enabler of the spiritual disciplines. Both types of disciplines are used in order to reach the goal of Christlikeness. The arrows, which are carefully and purposively chosen, are the disciplines; they are aimed at the bullseye and so, through the partnership of the

Christian and the Holy Spirit, guide their journey and growth toward spiritual maturity.

Katniss represents the Christian who is intentional and desires to grow into Christian maturity by using spiritual and enabling disciplines to facilitate growth. Katniss has a mentor and family who assist and encourage her on her journey. For the Christian, there is the Christian community and the family of God who encourages the journey towards Christian maturity.

The Goal of Christian Spiritual Formation

Isaac tells his son Esau to go out with his hunting gear and shoot some game and make a delicious meal for him (Gen 27). In order to do this, Esau needed to know his target, carefully stalk his target so that he could get into position to shoot, then to shoot carefully. Esau knew what his father liked, and where to find this type of game, but he also knew that his time was limited and so the game had to be killed quickly, as his father was waiting for him. Through many years of patient hunting, Esau had become an expert with his bow and arrow and he knew the target, as he had shot the same game time and time again. The hunt was simple for Esau, and the outcome was clear to him because of the experience he had gathered over the years. With all this expertise, it is clear that the result will be delicious food for his father (Gen 27:31). Throughout the whole process of the hunt, the kill, and the preparation, it was never in doubt that a great meal awaited Isaac.

The result of the whole spiritual formation process must never be in doubt. What is the target and the bullseye in Christian spiritual formation, if the target is unknown? What is the Christian to aim at as the weeks, months, and years of Christian service flow by? In my life before discovering spiritual disciplines, I had plateaued in my spiritual growth, and I did not know how to move on. I did not know that Christians are to train intentionally, using the spiritual disciplines to assist them in becoming more Christ-like. Paul, writing to the Roman church, states that “For those God foreknew He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His son” (Rom 8:29). I want to suggest that Christian maturity, as defined by Christlikeness, is the bullseye: it is the goal of spiritual formation.

By making spiritual disciplines part of their daily walk with Christ, Christians keep the goal of Christlikeness in mind. The Lord oversees the transforming process, and the Holy Spirit is involved. Christians are constantly being reminded of what they, as followers of Jesus, are to become. Willard (1988, ix) states his central claim that “we *can* become like Christ by doing one thing—by following him in the overall style of life he chose for himself.” Throughout his teaching and writing, Willard constantly places the goal in front of his audience, which is that “we can become like Christ.” Tozer (1955, 70-71, contemplating Christians’ transformation, “Into what image are they to be changed? Who or what is to be the model for them? The gospel not only furnishes transforming power ... it provides a model ... and that model is Christ Himself.” Let there be no mistake, Tozer proclaims, Christians are to be transformed into the image of

Christ. Their model is neither pastor nor priest, neither angel nor saint, but Christ alone.

In a world filled with false role models and false ideals, Christians must press forward with making Christ known as their role model and ideal. Young people may have posters in their rooms with pictures of their role models, whom they may want to talk and walk and act like. As sometimes happens, the role model may end up being involved in some moral scandal and the young person may be deeply disappointed. In contrast, having Jesus as a role model and ideal shows Christians the balance they need in their spiritual growth. “Just as most parents want their children to resemble them, God also desires that we grow into the image of Jesus by becoming like Him” (Chandler 2014, 24). Let every Christian be told and let every Christian know that their Father in heaven desires to mold them, to conform and transform them into the image of His son. This ideal must be shared and reshared, as the process is never ending and may be painful at times. To again emphasize the goal of Christian spiritual formation, Horne (1918, 41) asserts, “So here, we need a concrete embodiment in personal form of the ideals of complete living to serve as our inspiration, guide, model, leader, and master. This, we believe, we have in Jesus.”

Committed, Intentional Training and Discipline

To become an accomplished marksperson with a bow, much intentional training is needed. A friend of mine who hunts with a bow and arrow writes, “The Archer must know his bow well, in fact, given that the archer is the one who

utilizes the bow to launch the arrow, the bow must almost become part of the archer's anatomy" (Tribiger 2020). For the archer to become one with their bow, hours upon hours of practise are needed. A complete knowledge of the bow is needed, and a complete knowledge of the arrows is needed: a total commitment to the whole process is necessary for the arrow to do what it is intended to do. Clay Hayes (2014, 63), a professional wildlife biologist and a primitive bowhunter, writes about one specific arrow he used, describing how "The arrow passed clean through, and I found it sticky and blood soaked ... I thanked ... reflecting on the feeling that comes with a well-placed arrow and a quick, clean kill." Hayes trained intentionally for that moment, when he could release the arrow and it would do its work as it penetrated the target. Hayes knew his arrows well as he worked with the specific arrows over time to ensure the proper result when using them. For the Christian, when dealing with the battles of life, knowing that tragedy can result at any moment, all the training and all the hard work pays off as learning and growth take place, and victory is finally achieved. For this reason, Paul encourages Timothy to train with the goal of godliness. The training that Paul encourages Timothy to do requires a life-long commitment to the training process (1 Tim 4:7-8). The root Greek word here is *gymnaze*. In other words, go to the place of training and exercise and workout and train and do what is necessary to become godly. Reimer (2016, 8) states that "Salvation is free. Maturity comes at a cost." This is an important reminder. Spiritual maturity does not just happen; becoming Christ-like does not just happen. There must be an intentional process in place to ensure maturity and growth.

For training to be effective, it must be focused and intentional. For the Christian, the disciplines must become part of the very anatomy and nature of the Christian and must be available for use at all times. For the football player who is a receiver, the training to develop perfect hand-eye coordination and perfect concentration is constant. For the marathon runner, the training focuses on endurance in order to finish the marathon at a quick pace. During the race, the marathon runner shows onlookers the result of intentional long-term training. For a world class marathon runner, the training sessions are tough and long. To endure these sessions, the athletes must keep their goal in mind—to run and finish the marathon. “The mark of disciplined persons is that they are able to do what needs to be done when it needs to be done” (Willard 1988, 151). To do what needs to be done as a Christian is a tall order, but as one studies the disciplines, one will realize why Willard’s statement is correct. To do regardless of feelings, to do regardless of what others think, to do because God desires one to do it is truly the mark of a disciplined person. Hughes (1991, 13) reminds his readers that “we will never get anywhere without discipline, be it in the arts, business, athletics, or academics. This is doubly so in spiritual matters.” Discipline must be practised, whether convenient or not, as the disciplines are vital for the follower of Christ.

Routine is also an important part of the Christian’s training. Writing about Nehemiah, Swanson (2013, 118) comments that “I kept the routines ... every day ... Every week, Sabbath. Every year, the appropriate feasts.” The Christian needs the routine of appropriate spiritual disciplines to combat being slothful or

becoming lazy. Jascha Heifitz, described as “the greatest violinist of this century” (Hughes 1991, 13), started playing violin at the age of three and continued playing until the age of seventy-five, and it is said that he practised four hours a day for many years. This is called routine: doing what needs to be done because it needs to be done. As Jones (2005, 97) reminds readers, “it’s vitally important that each believer develops a ‘Rule of Life’—that is, a pattern of spiritual disciplines that provides structure and direction for growth in holiness.” Habits and the concept of intentionality define the structure and direction that the follower of Christ is to take in becoming Christ-like.

Hindrances in Training

The writer of Hebrews says “let us lay aside every hindrance and the sin that so easily ensnares us. Let us run with endurance the race that lies before us, keeping our eye on Jesus, the source and perfecter of our faith” (Heb 12:1-2). To lay off every hindrance is not that simple; intentional effort is required to put aside the things that slow the Christian down. Hughes (1991, 15) writes, “The successful Christian life is a sweaty affair.” When the writer of the book of Hebrews writes about hindrances, what is he talking about? Is there a certain force behind these hindrances? Paul writes, “So that we may not be taken advantage of by Satan. For we are not ignorant of his schemes” (2 Cor 2:11). If the goal of spiritual formation is godliness, as Paul claims it is, then Christians must know that their enemy, Satan, will put hindrances in place to distract them from this important goal. There are all kinds of hindrances that a follower of Christ faces.

Some of these hindrances have to do with a person's own character. Certain hindrances may have more deadly results than others. The list of hindrances may be long, but I will discuss only a few common hindrances here.

I was talking with a friend who mentioned how he just could not get up on Sunday morning for church for, that morning, his alarm did not go off. Going to church does not make a Christian, but being slothful is a real hindrance in the life of a Christian. One can read in the book of Proverbs that "The slacker buries his hand in the bowl; he is too weary to bring it to his mouth" (Prov 26:15).

Slothfulness may harm the health of a person and spiritual slothfulness will certainly harm the Christian. Slothfulness is the enemy of intentionality. When I see how our grandchildren practise piano or practise playing baseball, I am reminded of the hours of work needed to become proficient. There is pain involved in practise, and there are sacrifices involved to be proficient in playing the piano or in being a good athlete. Effort is even involved in the learning process when a person desires to understand and discern. As I listen to some children who find schoolwork hard, I encourage them to stay with the process and to stick with learning because, over time, the learning is worth the effort. For many people and for some Christians, slothfulness can be a serious spiritual problem. Noll (1994, 243) claims that "the problem of Christian thinking is a problem of intention." How will the Christian stand for their faith if they have been slothful? Jesus asked His disciples: "Why are you sleeping?" (Luke 22:46) In the most trying time of His life on Earth, when Jesus needed His friends the most, they were sleeping. Is it possible that, in the times of greatest need, the

Christian may be found sleeping instead of preparing for the future? It is to this work that the Christian is called. Plass and Cofield (2014, 133) insist that “Soulful relationships are a gift that require our intentionality. We know this to be true. A strong marriage and a solid family are the fruit of someone being intentional.” Too many slothful Christians wonder why their relationship with God is not thriving. A growing, and intimate relationship with God is the result of intentional disciplines. When the heat of battle arises, there is no room for the slothful tendencies that lead to spiritual ruin.

The opposite extreme of slothfulness is the hindrance of busyness; perhaps one of the greater hindrances of the present time. Humans are constantly on the run, with fast food, we have Amazon Prime, we have automatic washers and dryers, automatic garage door openers, but what is gained from all of these? “Busyness has become a badge of significance, albeit a heavy one. A devoted pastor told me about archiving ten thousand emails from the previous six months and needing to clear fifty unheard voicemails in a day, skimming through them quickly to see if one mentioned death” (Phillips 2015, 26). If people are dealing with the curse of busyness, where will they find quiet time, as there is so much noise in so many places? What if God wants to speak to people, but they have earbuds and listen to a speaker when they go for a walk? What if God has something to say but because of busyness, people cannot hear Him? As Mulholland (1985, 53) asks, “Where is there a space, a silence, in which God can speak?” Satan, as a grand schemer, is making life more and more busy, even though modern conveniences offer more time. If Christians do not have time to go

into God's gym and there develop the disciplines needed for godliness, what will the results be? To develop Christ-like attributes, the follower of Christ must devote time to the process.

There is one other hindrance that must be mentioned and it is the terrible word duplicity. For example, the man who was called the greatest apologist of the 20th century may have lived a life of duplicity, and it is possible that he was a fake. Ravi Zacharias was an extremely gifted speaker who, on the one hand, had a great memory and was able to teach difficult subjects with ease. On the other hand, he may have lived a dark life sexually; it seems that he used vulnerable women who needed money and took advantage of them. Some of these women wanted to immigrate to the United States and he helped them do that, for a cost. Silliman and Shellnutt (2021) state that "When he died in May [2020], he was praised for his faithful witness, his commitment to the truth, and his personal integrity. Now it is clear that, offstage, the man so long admired by Christians around the world abused numerous women and manipulated those around him to turn a blind eye." When he taught about Daniel and his life in Babylon, Zacharias spoke of drawing a line in the sand, but did he himself have this line in the sand? It seems that he allowed himself the sexual freedom against which the Bible speaks. Was he a man of duplicity? Because of his actions, some Christians may have started to doubt their faith. The truth be told, duplicity is a problem for many Christians, as it weakens the body and hinders spiritual maturity. Duplicity will appear in the battles of life for, as life gets tough, the real person is forced to show

up. To avoid duplicity the Christian must be accountable and honest, and tough questions must be asked of them to stay authentic.

The Choice of the Disciplines

The choosing of the arrows is vital for the archer. The length of the arrow, the weight of the arrow, the tip of the arrow, and the feathers are all important features. Once the arrows are chosen, then hours of practise must take place. For success, the archer and the bow and arrow need to become one. In the heat of battle or in the moment of hunting in the woods, there is no time for learning. Muscle memory and proper training now come to the forefront, and every small detail of training is magnified. For the Christian, whose desire is to be more like Christ, the choice of spiritual disciplines is critical. The spiritual disciplines will assist in accountability and will assist the Christian when they are dealing with temptations. Spiritual disciplines will assist in the dark days of life and when battles are being fought.

The basis or the foundation for the spiritual disciplines in my life has been the writings of Christian authors, who not only wrote about but also practised spiritual and enabling disciplines. The disciplines are undergirded by the Word of God, which Christians know is useful in many areas of life. As Paul states, “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Tim 3:16-17). There are some great Christians who have taught spiritual disciplines, and readers can learn from these writers. I personally

have learned a lot from Dallas Willard's writings about spiritual disciplines, and I was also impacted by Richard Foster and his book, *Celebration of Discipline*.

Another book which I enjoyed reading was written by R. Kent Hughes: *Disciplines of a Godly Man*. These books, along with others, have helped me on my journey of understanding and practicing spiritual disciplines.

The chosen disciplines in my model are the disciplines that are important to me in my own personal life and that I have observed as being important in the lives of many Christians. I have observed that certain disciplines are more important at certain times, yet all the disciplines that I have chosen have assisted me in my spiritual journey overall. The importance of one discipline may recede and another increase depending on the season of life the Christian is in. Here are nine disciplines, both spiritual and enabling, which have assisted me in my spiritual growth; I will first list the spiritual disciplines and then the enabling disciplines. Both types of disciplines are important and vital in the maturing process of the Christian.

Spiritual Disciplines

Specific practices that, when done, allow the person to be in a place where God can develop spiritual growth. Calhoun (2015, 19) explains, "From its beginning the church linked the desire for more of God to intentional practices, relationships and experiences that gave people space in their lives to 'keep company' with Jesus. These intentional practices, relationships, and experiences we know as spiritual disciplines."

Spiritual Discipline #1: Contemplative Reading of Scripture

Definition: Reading Scripture in a quiet and thoughtful way and thus allowing Scripture to speak into the reader's life.

The writer of Psalm 119 expresses his great love for the Scriptures, writing that "I have treasured your word in my heart" (Psalm 119:11). There are many other verses in Scripture that speak of loving the Scriptures. The Christian will desire to read the Bible and, through reading the Bible, the Christian will come to a better understanding of God. God has revealed Himself in His word and through thoughtful reading the Christian gets to know God more intimately. Mulholland (1985, 9) states that "Clearly one of the most important resources for spiritual formation is the Bible," which has been the experience of many followers of Jesus. Many Christians have learned to make proper use of this important resource and it can be expected, given what the Bible says about itself, that every Christian will love and use it appropriately. In an impure world, in a world of darkness and sin, the Christian has the roadmap to meander the minefields of sin and darkness. The Psalmist asks, "How can a young man [*sic*] keep his way pure? By keeping your word" (Psalm 119:9). Yet many who claim to be followers of Christ are not in love with the love letter given to them, as evidenced by how the Canadian Bible Engagement Study reported in 2017 that "only one in seven Christians read the Bible once a week ..." (Helland 2017, 1-2). When this discipline is not used properly, there can be negative results in the life of the Christian. One can see Christians and even churches sliding down the slippery

slopes of modern liberal theology. Therefore, reading the Bible and lingering over the written Word to the point of soaking in the Word, must become a priority once again in the life of the Christian. In order to love the Bible and use the Bible properly, the Bible must be read not only as a pastime but as a way of life. As Studzinski (2009, 103) insists, “Reading is a lifelong task; we are destined to be readers ... the type of reading described here, will not be a mere pastime but a pathway to life.”

It is exciting to read the Bible knowing that the Bible is teaching about life, teaching about spiritual formation, and presenting a love letter from God. Reading the Bible makes the reader aware of the dangers in life and the schemes of Satan. Reading the Bible gives wisdom to the reader, so that they can “Apply God’s truth to [their lives], so that [their] choices will indeed be godly” (Fee and Stuart 2003, 225). When the Bible is read in a contemplative way, it permeates the heart and soul of the reader. As the written Word becomes inscribed on the heart of the reader, the Word gives wisdom, and the Word warns. The Bible prepares Christians for the battles in life and the Word gives security and hope and victory. Willard (1988, 150) sees Bible reading as a vital tool for the Christian, writing “As a pastor, teacher, and counselor I have repeatedly seen the transformation of inner and outer life that comes simply from memorization and meditation upon Scripture.” For the Christian, to sit with Scripture, to read from the Bible, to memorize parts of it, and to meditate on what was read and memorized will greatly assist the Christian in all areas of life. This is the miracle

of this living and active book. This discipline must be intentional, well-used, and well-known if the goal of becoming Christlike is to be achieved.

In a world of digital manipulation of picture and video, it is becoming increasingly more difficult to discern truth. For the Christian, who is a warrior in battle, the Bible becomes increasingly important. The book of Truth shines forth in this world. The discipline is essential to destroy false narratives in order that the Christian stays on the way of truth. In the Book of Acts, Luke writes about a certain church that held Paul and Silas accountable for what they preached by contrasting their words with what was written in Scripture. One reads that “they received the word with eagerness and examined the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so” (Acts 17:11b). This has been important for followers of Jesus throughout the history of the Christian church. It is important to examine the Scriptures daily, to linger over the words, and to ensure that truth is being digested into the soul. This is important in order to face the battles against sin and to accurately hit the bullseye of Christian living. There is no substitute and there never will be a substitute for contemplative Scripture reading. Many churches have Bible studies and, in these Bible studies, the participants benefit greatly by being present and involved in the study and the discussions that follow. McCartney and Clayton (2002, 16) write, “What God says is absolutely true. If we wish to know the truth truly, our only avenue is to know the One who knows absolutely.” If Christians are to know God, who speaks only truth, then they can read Scripture, and through spending time with Scripture they will know God better.

An example of reading Scripture in this manner is to sit with the Bible and read Psalm 23, and to ask questions pertaining to the Psalm. Who is my shepherd? How is he my shepherd? What kind of quiet waters are there in my life? What about rest for my soul? These and more questions would bless spiritual practitioners richly and allow the Word of God to speak to them.

Spiritual Discipline #2: Intimate Prayer

Definition: Praying in a way that provides an intimate connection with God. In this prayer, the person praying both speaks and listens to God.

One of the continuous and important things a Christian can do is pray. To be in a relationship with God and to speak with Him as a friend speaks to a friend is a great thing. To know that God is always present and always listening, to know that speaking with God always serves a purpose, is comforting. Prayer is a vital part of the growth process of the Christian, though learning to pray may be difficult for some. To kneel before God, knowing that God is in the room, and then speaking to God as to a friend is immensely helpful. Reimer (2016, 15) writes, "This is why I have made time with God a nonnegotiable commitment in my life. I spend time with God when I feel like it and when I don't." Reimer has made an intentional commitment to take time to speak with and listen to God, demonstrating how the Christian must move beyond feelings and do what needs to be done regardless of their feelings. The Christian may have time for many things, as the schedule may be full, but time for God alone is of the essence. Bounds (2016, 70) writes about the ability to wait upon and to stay with God,

claiming that “Our devotions are not measured by the clock, but time is of their essence. The ability to wait and stay and press belongs essentially to our intercourse with God.” This speaks of being intentional in Christians’ time alone with God, and of its vital nature.

Our master and Lord, Jesus Christ, spent many hours alone with His Father in prayer. Mark writes, “Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, He got up, went out, and made His way to a deserted place; and there He prayed” (Mark 1:25). In Scripture, many examples are given, showing readers the prayer life of Jesus and it is these examples that should prod the Christian into taking the necessary time to linger with Christ. How does prayer affect the disciple in the battles of life? Sanders (1985, 74) quotes Chadwick to suggest, “Satan dreads nothing but prayer. His one concern is to keep saints from praying. He fears nothing from prayerless studies, prayerless work, prayerless religion. He laughs at our toil, mocks our wisdom but trembles when we pray.” If this is the case, then when prayer is properly used in battles against sin, the outcome of the battle is never in doubt. If Satan fears the prayers of the Christian and flees when God’s arm is moved by the praying Christian, then this discipline must be used time and time again. A once-popular song was titled “Just a little talk with Jesus.” This song has been sung thousands of times, but is it correct? Should the Christian have only a little talk with Jesus? If Christians are facing life-and-death battles every day, if they need strength and wisdom, is a little talk enough? When studying the prayer life of Christ, one sees much more than just a “little talk.” The Christian, who desires Christlikeness, must pray enough so that Satan shakes and

heaven notices their prayers. Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1970, 11), one of the great men of prayer in the twentieth century, wrote a book on prayer in which he states that “and so we must learn to pray. The child learns to speak because his [*sic*] father speaks to him.” God the Father in heaven speaks to Christians, so they must learn to listen and speak with Him. Every Christian needs to know that the study of prayer and learning how to pray is a life-long endeavour.

What should motivate the Christian to pray? This motivation comes from within, which is intrinsic motivation. The Christian knows about the battles in life and knows that being alone on the battlefield will only end in defeat. Therefore, the Christian prays to secure victory. As Peterson (1988, 89) suggests, “Prayer is the coming into awareness, and practicing of attention, the nurturing and development of personal intensity before God.” Awareness, practise, and intensity are parts of the prayer life of the Christian. Does the church need to be taught to pray? Does the Christian need to be taught to pray? Peterson (89) states clearly that “my primary educational task as pastor was to teach people to pray.” I feel that I, too, should teach intimate prayer more, as my parishioners need this in their lives. Therefore, intentional effort must be dedicated to teaching this discipline. In his writings, Tozer (1963, 78) reminds readers, “In our sickness and our health, in our want, or in our wealth, if we look to God in prayer, God is present everywhere.” God is indeed everywhere and always ready to assist the Christian who asks for help, guidance, and strength.

Intimate prayer is experienced when Christians sense the presence of God as they pray. The petitioner may pray a portion of Scripture and then listen to

God, as intimate prayer is both speaking and listening. Intimate prayer is knowing that God is present and is listening and desires to respond.

Spiritual Discipline #3: Sabbath-keeping

Definition: To spend a day per week resting from everyday tasks and taking time to rest physically and spiritually. The Israelites understood this as a day of connecting with God, family, and friends, and putting aside the business and work of life. They accepted this day as a gift from God.

In the church today, there are many discussions about burnout. A friend of mine who was a long-time pastor recently went on a sabbatical for several months and then, after returning to his church, he soon resigned and retired from ministry. Another pastor friend of mine also resigned from his church and he too retired, stating that he was burned out. Being introduced to the concept of sabbath-keeping a few years ago, I have come to realize in my own life how important keeping a sabbath is to my own spiritual health. It is interesting that God spoke about sabbath-keeping many years ago. Humanity's Creator, the one who knows His creation better than anyone else, asks humans to rest one day per week. Calhoun (2015, 44) says, "Sabbath is God's way of saying, 'Stop. Notice your limits. Don't burn out.'" Do Christians even know how to stop? When the Master Teacher gave His great invitation, He said to "take up my yoke and learn from me, because I am lowly and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls" (Matt 11:29). How many Christians realize that they really need rest, real rest? It is real rest that Jesus desires to give us; it is real rest that people need.

When Jesus teaches about rest, readers should hear “sabbath rest.” The writer of the letter to the Hebrews picks up this thread, writing, “For the person who has entered His rest has rested from his [*sic*] own works, just as God did from His” (Heb 4:10). When a person rests from their own works, they come into proper sabbath rest, resting physically when needed and taking a sabbath rest every week as prescribed. In trusting God with a day off, in seeking God for the sabbath rest, the Christian can replenish their spiritual batteries. Allender (2009, 18) writes, “If we would only take a weekly sabbath, our lives would be more balanced and buoyant ... the Sabbath is the way God intended for us to recharge our batteries so we can return to work with more vigor.” To stay alert and in the battle long-term, people’s batteries need to be recharged and sabbath is one way of recharging. For the Christian who is in the race for the long term, sabbath rest is therefore a must.

When practicing sabbath, it is important to note that when rest is needed, rest should be taken. If on the sabbath an outing is needed, then an outing should be taken. In the New Testament, Christians do not have strict guidelines for the sabbath even though the principles of the sabbath follow from the Old Testament. In the New Testament, the sabbath is to be taken for the physical and spiritual wellbeing of the Christian. Jesus, when speaking about the sabbath (which was not often) said: “The Sabbath was made for [humans], and not [humans] for the Sabbath” (Mark 2:27). For the tired and weary and stress-filled Christian, sabbath is taken so that the Christian can rest and recuperate. Because rest is a command of God, rest should be taken. Phillips (2015, 92) mentions that “The Hebrew word

shabbat means to stop, cease, rest, and as a command of God, is a stop in the name of Love.” Humanity’s Lord and Creator knows their limits and commands them to stop, cease, and rest. This command should be taken very seriously, for the well-being of every Christian. Note that the practice of sabbath may be different for each Christian but even if the journey is different, the results should be similar. Buchanan (2006, 3) perhaps states it best: “Sabbath-keeping is a form of mending. It’s mortar in the joints.” The Christian should view the sabbath as a gift from God. It is one day set aside every week to heal and rest. Sabbath-keeping should be a part of the spiritual disciplines of every Christian, otherwise weariness will set in and when the battle starts, failure will follow. Sabbath-keeping should not be viewed as an option only when the Christian thinks there is a need; rather, sabbath-keeping must be an integral part of the routine of the Christian and must be used accordingly.

Sabbath-keeping may be different for different people. The employee who works nine hours a day and arrives home at seven in the evening may need an evening rest. On Saturday, all the chores of the home, yard, and vehicle care need to be done. On Sunday, there may be church in the morning and family visits during the rest of the day. When does a person like this have time for sabbath? Such a person needs to figure out their sabbath rest and realize the importance of sabbath rest for long-term health. With the pace and schedule of contemporary life, I do not think that people can put sabbath rest or sabbath-keeping into a square box. The importance of sabbath rest will be revealed to practitioners as

they seek guidance through the Holy Spirit or spiritual mentors, who will assist them in finding space for sabbath rest that fits their lifestyles and schedules.

Spiritual Discipline #4: Confession

Definition: Sharing with God and others a person's own deepest weaknesses and failures. "Confession is a discipline that functions within fellowship" (Willard 1988, 187).

Seven words that needs to be said, but that are difficult to say, are these: "I am sorry; will you forgive me?" James, the brother of Jesus, writes, "Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, so that you may be healed" (James 5:16). Many pastors and church leaders are dealing with spiritually sick congregants, and there are many questions asked regarding the poor spiritual condition of those who follow Christ and whether lack of confession could be an issue. James states clearly here that confession leads to healing. Willard (1988, 187) also reminds his readers that "Confession is a discipline that functions within fellowship." Mutual confession, in which there is person-to-person confession, is a builder of the fellowship that Christians have with one another. Confession allows there to be honesty and transparency. It is human nature to cover up: in the Garden of Eden, the first parents hid from God and attempted to cover up their sin. Though since then, thousands of years have come and gone, Christians have not learned the lesson from the Garden of Eden. True confession would have been better for Adam and Eve.

Often, true confession would bring about the healing of many wounds. However, people are living in an age of image management and optics, and even virtue signaling, all of which are ways of covering up what is real. John adds to James' words in the Bible, writing, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). Confession to God to receive forgiveness and confession to one another to receive help and clarity, if needed, brings healing. To have a soft heart that is willing to confess and to admit wrongdoings is to have a healthy heart. Jesus says, "Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted" (Matt 5:4). The sensitive heart, the heart that is willing to confess, is a heart that is hearing God's voice and that humbly walks with others. This attitude keeps the Christian pliable and keeps the Christian on their knees, protecting them against image management and pride, as the person is honest and authentic in daily living. Helland (2017, 65) writes, "Confession and repentance are daily spiritual disciplines for me." Having this sensitive relationship with God and others certainly leads to healing and promotes wellness; for example, in troubled homes and marriages, confession could be one of the vital paths to reconciliation. In counseling, when there is brokenness and confession, healing is possible.

Pride can easily be the enemy of confession, for if the child or parent or spouse cannot admit failure, then healing will not happen. Foster (1980, 181) knows about the difficulty of confession as he shares that "Confession is a difficult discipline for us because we all too often view the believing community as a fellowship of saints before we see it as a fellowship of sinners." Certain

people may feel that confession is below them, or that others will be disappointed in them, yet mutual confession is spiritually healthy.

As Christians are led into confession, the Holy Spirit will make them aware of things that they should confess. They will see their shortcomings and they will seek the face of God and seek forgiveness, and so confession becomes a vehicle for Christians' own inner healing. When people confess their wrongdoings to others, this may lead to the healing of relationships. This is why confession is good for spiritual health.

Spiritual Discipline #5: Self-examination

Definition: Self-examination is the seeking out and subsequent awareness of blind spots, weaknesses, or failures, and the effort taken to see and improve on or to eliminate these issues.

In a world of image management and the promotion of self-image, self-examination may seem to be out of place, but it is nevertheless critical for the Christian. *Know thyself* is an old and tested saying, and to know oneself and to be honest about oneself is part of the growth process of a Christian. Paul writes and reminds his fellow believers in Corinth to “Examine yourselves to see if your faith is genuine” (2 Cor 13:5). Every person has a blind spot, or more than one blind spot, but through self-examination these blind spots can be revealed. Self-examination should show the strengths and the weaknesses of the person, as both need to be known and observed. Thomas à Kempis (2005, 87) tells his readers, “In the morning form your intention, and at night examine your conduct, what

you have done, said, and thought during the day, for in each of these you may have often offended both God and your neighbor.” Self-examination therefore will take time and effort and can be painful, as things may be realized that will require repentance and forgiveness. One of the ways of conducting self-examination is with the help of the Holy Spirit, to come before the Lord with Scripture and with prayer and with an honest heart and ask, as David did, “Search me, God, and know my heart ... see if there is any offensive way in me” (Psalm 139:23-24). The Christian may find that there are character issues that need to be resolved and changed; for example, anger issues or issues of impatience that need to be rooted out. Jones (2005, 90) reminds readers of the importance of self-examination, saying, “This happens by first examining one’s own life in an incredibly thorough manner.” Self-examination is not to be taken lightly; as an intentional discipline, time and effort must be given to it.

At the root of self-examination there must be a desire to change and grow. In the life of a Christian, there will be things that the Christian needs to do away with; Paul uses the words “put to death” and “put away” (Col 3:5 & 8) when he is writing to the Colossian church. In self-examination, honesty has an important place; as Jeremiah writes, “The heart is more deceitful than anything else, and incurable—who can understand it” (Jer 17:9). Knowing how deceitful the heart can be, a person needs to be brutally honest in the process of self-examination. Are compromises being made? Are slippery slopes becoming attractive? Are lines in the sand being crossed? Is spiritual laziness creeping in? Is a compromising situation being sought out? The Christian must be honest and open with God and

self because otherwise the discipline will not be effective. It appears that some church leaders have forgotten the value of true self-examination. This must take place in the presence of the holy God with authentic questions. These questions could include: Do I love God more than I used to? Do I spend more quiet time with God? Do I have a greater desire to be obedient to God? Am I becoming more reliant on God in my day-to-day activities? Does God still speak to me and correct me when I read Scripture? Self-examination takes time and effort and will bring great spiritual rewards when done with a sincere heart. As Jones (2005, 90) states, “self-examination has been part of the Jewish-Christian story since close to the beginning.”

Self-examination can take place throughout the day, yet it may be most beneficial when the day is done and the spiritual practitioner can review the deeds of the day. Often, when I am having my morning prayer time, I relive the past day and I rethink certain discussions and actions. I then have moments to self-examine and often I realize that certain things said, or certain things done, could have been more in tune with the leading of the Holy Spirit. I feel that self-examination is taught by Jesus when He says to “first take the plank out of your eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye” (Matt 7:5). Self-examination is a vital discipline in the life of the Christian.

This discipline is a test of honesty. The Christian desires to see themselves as God sees. This discipline may lead the Christian to confession and prayer. Self-examination can happen at any time during the day or night, whenever the Christian is alone with their thoughts.

Enabling Disciplines

The following disciplines are enabling disciplines. These are the disciplines that put people into a place where they can practice the spiritual disciplines. These disciplines are no less important than the spiritual disciplines and are necessary in order for the Christian to practise the spiritual disciplines. The enabling disciplines may be the road that many people use in order to get to the place where they can practise spiritual disciplines. For example, if practitioners do not make time for contemplative Scripture reading, then they may never receive that which the Holy Spirit desires to give them through reading Scripture. If, however, they take the quiet time needed, which is the enabling discipline, then spiritual practitioners will receive the benefit of reading Scripture in a contemplative manner. Enabling disciplines cannot be placed in a box. These disciplines enable practitioners in different places, different spaces, and even in different movements. For example, as practitioners walk, they can be active in their listening to God. As they sit by a running stream, they can use that time wisely to read Scripture.

Enabling Discipline #1: Self-control

Definition: An inner control mechanism that allows the person to say “yes” or “no” as needed. It should be noted, however, that self-control is also one of the fruits of the Spirit. One can exercise self-control through personal willpower, or by cultivating the fruit of the spirit, so it is an enabling discipline useful in the life of the Christian.

Recall again Katniss Everdeen in *The Hunger Games*: Katniss had to ensure that her bow and arrows were in the best condition possible. Taking care of her bow and arrows may not always have been fun and interesting, but it was highly necessary. The bow and the arrows need to stay clean and dry, and the feathers of the arrows need to be straightened if necessary. Taking the required time was necessary for the long-term health of both the bow and the arrows, as the condition of both was critical in the arena.

Paul writes of the importance of self-control to the Corinthian church, “Now everyone who competes exercises self-control in everything” (1 Cor 9:25). For the Christian preparing for battle or in battle, self-control is a must. The importance of control of the emotions in the heat of battle cannot be overstated. How many Christians have failed and have damaged themselves and their families and the cause of Christ due to out-of-control anger? Anger as an emotion is not wrong, but out-of-control anger leads a person to do things that should not be done, or to say things that should not be said. As a prison chaplain, I heard many tragic stories in which anger led to abuse. How many punches were thrown and how many shots fired due to lack of self-control? Then there is the problem of control of the tongue. What should a Christian say or not say? How much ugliness in life would be avoided if there was proper self-control of the tongue? How many hearts have been broken due to hurtful words? Writing about Bonhoeffer, Bethge (2000, 184) says, “He took an interest in a qualified silence.” Bonhoeffer learned that there is a time to speak and a time to be silent. Even when a person is passionate about an issue, the best thing may be to choose silence.

Then there is the issue of pornography. Hughes (1991, 22) claims, “Sensuality is easily the biggest obstacle to godliness among men today and is wreaking havoc in the Church.” The amount of pornography watched by men (and others) within the church is eroding the foundation of the church. If there is no self-control of the eyes, then soon there is no self-control of the thoughts, and this leads to lack of self-control of certain actions. “Those in the grip of sensuality can never rise to godliness while in its sweaty grip” (Hughes 1991, 22). How is self-control achieved? How does the Christian deal with things in life that are slippery-slope issues? Paul gives the answer to this question in Romans 12:2, writing, “Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may discern what is the good, pleasing, and the perfect will of God.” If a person’s actions flow from their thoughts, then their thoughts give birth to their actions. In the battlefield of life, the Christian always needs to be alert, humble, and ready for an attack.

The Christian must never be so self-assured as to think that defeat cannot happen. As Sanders (1985, 85) writes, “No Christian, however ripe their experience, however established in character, however fruitful in service, will ever get beyond the possibility of backsliding.” Thus, the Christian needs self-control constantly and must never think that they are out of the reaches of Satan. Self-control is involved in the daily routine of life, such as eating, drinking, and even resting. Why is it so difficult for some Christians to have a quiet devotional time in the morning? Are they going to bed too late? Self-control may be needed in the evening so that bedtime is at a reasonable hour to enable a reasonable

waking time. Self-control is really a whole-life concept. Scripture teaches that “your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you” (1 Cor 6:19). As Christians’ body is the place where the Holy Spirit lives, self-control is needed in their physical body and this includes what they eat and drink, how they rest, and how they work. Therefore, this enabling discipline is really a whole-life concept.

To sum up this enabling discipline, I would like to suggest that self-control is about saying no in certain situations and also saying yes in other situations. To say no to evil and yes to good is important. To say no to the temptations of Satan and say yes to the voice of God is self-control.

Enabling Discipline #2: Active Listening

Definition: Being aware that God wants to speak, asking God to speak, and being willing to focus on hearing the voice of God. Murray (1923, 15) captures it this way: “When a man in his littleness and God in His glory meet, we all understand that what God says has infinitely more worth than what man [*sic*] says.”

Years ago, I read about a counselor who had a big model of an ear on his desk. This model was to remind him that his clients wanted to be listened to. In many post-secondary schools there are courses on public speaking, but where are the courses on public listening? As part of the disciplines of a Christian, the value of listening cannot be overstated. The Christian needs to learn to listen to God and the Christian needs to learn to listen to other human beings. “Trappist monk Thomas Merton wrote in his *Thoughts in Solitude*: ‘My life is listening, His is speaking. My salvation is to hear and respond’” (Jones 2005, 38). What a great

insight. I fear that many Christians have this statement turned around: they want to speak and for God to listen. However, when carefully listening, the Christian will hear things that are otherwise not heard; God will give insights and God will give hope and guidance. Peterson (1989, 21) notes, “Listening is in short supply today; people aren’t used to being listened to. I know how easy it is to avoid the tough, intense work of listening by being busy.” How much insight has been lost due to lack of listening? How many battles have been lost, due to the ear not being tuned to the voice of God?

To fight the good fight and achieve victory, a Christian must be a listener. The Christian needs to spend that quiet time alone with God so that God can speak. It is God who calls His people and desires to speak to them; as it is written in the Bible, “The Mighty One, God, the LORD, speaks ... ‘Listen, my people and I will speak’” (Psalm 50:1a, 7a). The One who knows all, the One who cannot be wrong, desires to help His creation and speak to them. But do they listen? God knows that His creation, His people struggle with listening, so He invites Christians to do this. People today are dealing with “weapons of mass distraction” (Phillips 2015, 107). Because these weapons are all around, in people’s homes, in their vehicles, and in their pockets, listening must become more intentional. Time must be given to listen both to God and to one’s fellow humans. Through listening, Christians will be warned about dangers, told about their own blind spots, encouraged, and know what is going on in the lives of those for whom they care. DeMoss (2011, 149) describes how, years ago, the famous talk show host Larry King stated, “I have never learned anything while I was talking.” Perhaps in

schools and universities, more courses should be offered on the topic of listening. DeMoss (152) adds, “The advice to shut up and listen contradicts the human desire to be noticed or known, but not every good thing is easy.” Listening may be easy for some, hard for others, yet it is an important discipline to practise for the Christian.

Years ago, my wife and I struggled with listening to each other. We heard about a certain method which would help us deal with this. I call this method the spoon method of listening: we have one spoon and whoever has the spoon has the floor. The other person is not allowed to interrupt or say anything until the spoon is handed to him or her. As the procedure continues, both persons speak and listen. If only people would listen more, some battles of life would never show up, and others would be more easily resolved. This story is an example of an enabling discipline, where both of us needed to learn to listen. In the same way, if Christians let God hold the spoon then they, too, should listen.

When John received the vision of the book of Revelation, which was to be sent to the seven churches in Asia Minor, he gave each church a stern reminder, writing, “Let anyone who has ears to hear listen to what the Spirit says to the churches” (Rev 2:7). Of course, Christians have ears to listen, but are they being used? Sometimes their ears are used to hold their eyeglasses in place or as a place to attach jewelry. The Holy Spirit wants to be listened to but there is often a problem with listening to Him, so the Christian needs to nurture listening as an intentional spiritual discipline. When the Christian listens to God, much wisdom is received that is necessary in the daily grind of life. When the Christian listens to

God, guidance is received, hope is received, comfort is received. For the Christian, there is nothing that can replace the fact that listening to God is necessary.

Every Christian should do as Joshua did, "... ask[ing] Him, 'What does my Lord want to say to His servant?'" (Josh 5:14b). This question is the necessary question for the listening Christian. God desires to speak to everyone, but does everyone desire to listen to God? As Willard (1988, 164-65) reminds readers, "Silence and especially true listening are often the strongest testimony of our faith." To listen to God on a regular basis, Willard states, should be a part of Christians' testimony. As Christians speak with others about their relationship with God, they can share how they listen to Him. Christians can share how much they receive when they listen to Him.

This enabling discipline keeps the disciple close to the master. The Christian always desires to hear the master's voice. The voice of the master is heard during both the sunny days and the storms of life. The voice of the master can be heard in so many places; as the Psalmist describes, "The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of His hands" (Psalm 19:1). This discipline keeps the ears of the Christian open to the voice of God.

Enabling Discipline #3: Life-long Learning

Definition: Life-long learning is an enabling discipline. Effort and time are used to facilitate new learning. "A devoted disciple is a life-long learner" (Helland 2017, 16).

Christians live in a world in which there are many opinions and some facts. If the Christian is to survive and make an impression in this world, then intentional, well-planned, life-long learning is a must. Christians live in a world of change and as followers of Christ there are things that they need to be aware of and properly learn about in order to nurture a heart that can discern. Jesus gives his disciples this invitation, “Take up my yoke and learn from me, because I am lowly and humble in heart” (Matt 11:29). When entering Jesus’ school—and it must be emphasized that this is the greatest school—every student should become a life-long learner. In this school, the teacher knows everything about everything and cannot ever be stumped, confused, or trapped. The teacher, Jesus, is filled with all wisdom and patience so that He can teach as no one else can. As a life-long learner, the student must know that the learning process never ends and that new ideas must be thought through and old ideas rehashed. In being a life-long learner, the Christian will attempt to understand the culture and the issues that others are dealing with. Willard (1988, 176) emphasizes the focus of this discipline, writing, “In the spiritual discipline of study we engage ourselves, above all, with the written and spoken Word of God.” Scripture should remain the focus of study for the disciple of Christ, yet balanced study is also important, as Willard (177) again states, “we should read well the lives of disciples from all ages and cultures of the church, building a small library....”

This is especially critical for the pastor, who needs to know what their sheep are dealing with in the real world. As part of life-long learning, reading is vital. One of my mentors, F.W. Boreham, was told to “read, my dear man, read

and read systematically; and keep on reading: never give up” (Boreham 1940, 141). Reading expands the mind; reading puts many authors on the table. When people read, they learn many things about which they had no concept and their world expands. The Christian knows and accepts the fact that the Bible is true but not everything in the Bible is black and white, and life is certainly not black and white. Being a life-long learner on the journey of seeking truth is a good place to be. Rudinow and Barry (2004, 34) counsel that “a critical thinker must discipline himself or herself to be patient in the pursuit of truth.” As the Christian studies the biblical text and reads books, clarity will result, and godly wisdom and discernment will grow in the heart of the student. Perhaps this statement says it best for the life-long learner, “A prime mark of the Christian mind is that it cultivates the eternal perspective. That is to say, it looks beyond this life to another” (Blamires 1978, 67).

Is a person ever too old to learn? Oldham (1968, 23) writes, “Another friend of mine has come into his best years since his seventy-fifth birthday. He is growing old sweetly, graciously, and with a lovable Christian spirit.” Learning has little to do with age and more to do with desire. The Christian never retires from their faith and walk with Christ, so their walk should always stay relevant and vibrant. The psalmist reminds readers that “[believers] will still bear fruit in old age, healthy and green, to declare: ‘The Lord is just; He is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in Him’” (Psalm 92:14-15). The older Christian may have many experiences and much wisdom to pass on to the next generation; therefore, it is important for the older Christian to continue learning about what is going on

in society and to stay relevant. As the Christian focuses on life-long learning, the Christian will realize that there are teachable moments every day and in many situations. The Christian will also realize that almost every person whom they meet is a teacher, because from almost every discussion, things can be learned. The seven-year-old boy or a twelve-year-old girl can be a teacher. For Christians, an intense desire to learn should be continually nurtured. This eternal desire for knowledge should include more about God and creation, humankind and science, and other topics that give the Christian a broad spectrum of knowledge.

This enabling discipline keeps the learning process fresh and exciting as the Christian grows older and matures. There are always new lessons to learn and new books to read, and there are always new truths to dig up in Scripture.

Enabling Discipline #4: Time Management

Definition: The practice of using time wisely and carefully and being aware that it is a precious commodity.

Katniss Everdeen needed to take time to ensure that both her bow and arrows were battle ready. She knew that there were no shortcuts and that time must be taken to prepare well or there would be severe consequences. In society today, almost everyone is too busy and, when a person is asked to help another person, the response is often, "I am too busy, I don't have time." Yet everyone has the same amount of time: everyone has twenty-four hours every day. Perhaps when every person is important and every task is so crucial, the consequence is to rush and life becomes one big rat race. Because time is limited in nature, and time

flows so quickly, the concept of time management is important. The Christian can waste hours and days and weeks and have nothing to show for it. Christians are in a time of crisis. “We live in a whirligig of cyberspace communications ... in international shopping sprees and instant messaging ... we are so busy making things happen that we have little time left to think” (Chittister 2008, 7). People run and run some more and when the day comes to an end they crash, hoping for a better tomorrow. Their busyness does not equate to spiritual health and growth.

The greatest human being that ever walked the face of this earth was Lord Jesus Christ. His mission was more important than anyone else’s mission. In the three years that He preached, He needed to find twelve disciples and He needed to teach them, as they would carry on His message when He was gone. As every reader of Scripture will know, Jesus was always busy, yet seemingly never in a hurry. He had time to pray (Mark 1:35-36). He had time to go to a wedding (John 2:1-12). He had time to take a detour to help a demon-possessed man (Luke 8:26-39). He had time for a sick woman on the way (Luke 8:43-50). He had time to spend with Zacchaeus in his home (Luke 19:1-10), and he even found time for the little children (Matt 18:1-5). He was always busy but never in a rush. If that is true, then the same should be said of the Christians in 2022.

The Christian of today should be busy but should not be in a hurry. Perhaps there are too many time-robbers in the lives of many Christians, taking so much time that the leftover time is always rushed. In the battles and stresses of life, time is of the essence. Jesus, when dealing with the death of His friend, says to His disciples to “Come away by yourselves to a remote place and rest for a

while” (Mark 6:31). Jesus knew the value of downtime and rest for Himself and His disciples. Rest is often a very efficient use of time. When a lawnmower blade is dull, then it is wise to take time and sharpen the blade; this time is not lost but used wisely. For the follower of Christ, there must be proper time management, otherwise some battles in life will be fought and lost. There must be time for Scripture reading and prayer and time to linger with the Lord. Too often the Lord may get some left-over time and nothing else. If the statistics are true that about one-half of all Christian marriages fail, then more time needs to be put aside to ensure healthy marriages. In Christ and following Christ, the disciple needs to learn proper balance in time management. Christ always did what needed to be done. If He needed to travel, He did, and as He travelled, He taught His disciples. When He rested, even that was properly managed. Scripture tells readers how He slept in the back of a boat (Mark 4:38).

For the too-busy Christian, research into the time management system that Jesus used would be a valuable study. Jesus did not have timewasters in His life and, as noted, Christ showed Christians how to be busy, but not in a hurry. Having observed many Christians over the years, I have concluded that there is far too little discipline in time management. Not everything in life needs to be done perfectly; there are also things in life that are not critical and here the Christian needs to be disciplined. Scripture never tells Christians that Jesus missed opportunities because He was too busy. Time management is what is called for in the life of the believer. The Christian needs to have this discipline to eliminate timewasters and to appreciate the value of time.

Many years ago, as God was dealing with the Israelites, He said to them: “In repentance and rest is your salvation, in quietness and trust is your strength,’ but you would have none of it. You said, ‘No, we will flee on horses’” (Isaiah 30:15-16a). God was telling His people to slow down and to seek quietness. However, the Israelites needed to do something, so they ran and ran. If only Christians would spend more time doing what is necessary instead of just being busy. Christians need to learn to spend time on being, instead of doing. There is the danger that spirituality is measured by how busy Christians are and they may forget to realize that quiet well-balanced time management serves them in their spiritual growth.

This enabling discipline brings balance to the life of the Christian. The Christian needs to work, needs to sleep, needs to pray, and needs to worship. As the Christian allows the Holy Spirit to guide, the Christian will be on the path to consistent time management.

Summary

The purpose of my model of spiritual formation is to give the Christian direction in their day-to-day lives, in living the life of a follower of Christ. The Christian should live a purposeful and joy-filled life here on Earth. Having a clear model of spiritual formation and using the disciplines as a rule of life will benefit the Christian. For the Christian to get up in the morning and read and pray according to a schedule is good. To have time in the evening or at another scheduled time for lingering with Scripture and self-examination is also

important. Tom Brady, perhaps the greatest NFL quarterback ever, follows a very strict schedule with diet and even sleep. He goes to bed early for his body to be as healthy as possible and to give him the longevity that he desires as a quarterback. If the Christian would show the same amount and intensity of discipline in the maturing process, then Christian growth would be normal and constant. Sanders (1985, 133) reminds the Christian that “Man [*sic*] is a bundle of habits. Character is made up of a cluster of habits either good or bad. Habit-making and habit-breaking are one of man’s dominant activities.” To know what to do and to do it throughout life is what the Christian needs to do. Being as ready as possible for every situation in life is what the arrows in the quiver are all about. As situations arise, the Christian is as prepared to meet each situation. Peter writes, “In your hearts regard Christ the Lord as holy, ready at any time to give a defense” (1 Pet 3:15). To be ready at any time is vital in the life of a Christian. To stay in the battle and to have victory comes at a cost—the cost of purposeful preparation using the appropriate disciplines to ensure long-term growth and victory.

My model of spiritual formation is to be a prod in the life of the church, to goad the congregants to a life-long journey of being transformed into the image of Christ. I believe that my model of spiritual formation can be useful in the lives of many Christians on their journey.

In the example of Katniss, readers see a young lady who was cast into a role that she never expected to be in. Due to her training and diligence, she grew as her role expanded and she could be described as a difference maker. Katniss used her bow and quiver of arrows to hit the bullseye. Christians, too, should be

difference makers, and they can be, if they use the spiritual disciplines in their lives. They have the quiver, the broader Christian community, which teaches them about spiritual disciplines. They have the arrows, the spiritual and enabling disciplines. They have the bow, the Holy Spirit, as their teacher and guide. They know the bullseye in their personal spiritual lives. Now it is up to Christians to do as Katniss did. When she was placed in an unexpected situation, she stepped into her given role and excelled. Christians too, have a place given to them as followers of Christ. They too should step into the role God has given them and they too should excel in the place where they are to shine. The use of both the enabling and spiritual disciplines will assist Christians in doing this.

CHAPTER FOUR: MY RESEARCH PROJECT

As a pastor, I have noticed the lack of spiritual growth over the long term in my own life and the lives of other Christians. However, spiritual growth is promoted and possibly accelerated when spiritual disciplines are practised. In practicing spiritual disciplines, individuals put themselves in a place where God can nurture and grow the person toward Christian maturity. Because of the importance of spiritual disciplines, I did my research project on this topic. I know the value of spiritual disciplines in my own life and how the practice has changed me, so I wanted to know how the practice of spiritual disciplines would work in the lives of others.

About eight years ago, I was introduced to the practice of spiritual disciplines. At the time, I was in a spiritual desert. I was not moving forward in my spiritual life even though I was doing what I thought necessary for growth. It was during my first years at Mid-America Christian University I learned the importance of spiritual disciplines. At that time I felt as if I had been reborn. Since then I have realized that many Christians are dealing with the same issue that I had. During the last number of years, I have studied spiritual disciplines, read about spiritual disciplines, and practised spiritual disciplines. Over the same years, I have realized that there are Christians who are not familiar with spiritual

disciplines as I was not familiar with them. There are also Christians who are practicing spiritual disciplines but would not be able to put their finger on a specific discipline and expand on it. In the context of my denomination it was uncommon to teach about spiritual disciplines specifically. I know that since I grew up in my denomination and I have been a pastor in the denomination for many years and have listened to many denominational sermons. I, too, had never specifically preached on spiritual disciplines since I knew very little about spiritual disciplines.

I recently heard an older man saying that he has been floundering for over ten years now, and he feels that he needs a push and that the spiritual disciplines may be exactly what he needs. As Bruce (2008, 20) writes, “They discover that there is more than the tiring monotony of shoddy, shallow, mask wearing, unfulfilling spirituality they have seen personally and in other persons.” For Bruce and many others, spiritual disciplines are the tools that promote spiritual growth. Foster (1980, 1), a friend and student of Dallas Willard, writes, “The classical disciplines of the spiritual life call us to move beyond surface living into the depths. They invite us to explore the inner caverns of the spiritual realm.” Spiritual disciplines point to Jesus Christ and invite the participants to a more devotional relationship with Jesus Christ. I feel that my ministry is becoming more of a direction sign pointing others to Jesus. “Do you not know that the greatest book is Jesus Christ Himself? He is a book who has been written on within and without. He will teach you all things. Read Him!” (Guyon n.d.,

15). Practicing spiritual disciplines helps the follower of Christ to read Him more and, in doing so, they promote spiritual growth.

The apostles Paul and Peter both encouraged their people to be growing as Christians. Peter writes: “But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Pet 5:18). Growth as a Christian is meant to be a balanced growth. The Christian is to grow in grace and knowledge, both of which are important. Paul adds to this, “we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of Him who is the head, that is, Christ” (Eph 4:15). As the Christian stays connected to Christ, Christ will push and prod them to grow in maturity as needed. Each Christian is an individual project that needs their own special guidance. In his letter to the Corinthian church, Paul reminds this young congregation, “I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow” (1 Cor 3:6). In the heart of a healthy Christian, there is a desire to grow and to mature, and the growth process can be enhanced using spiritual disciplines. The follower of Christ places themselves in a place where God can “make things grow” (1 Cor 3:7b). Therefore, spiritual disciplines are useful in the life of a Christian.

Spiritual disciplines do not just happen. There needs to be an intentional push to realize the importance of the disciplines and then to follow through and incorporate spiritual disciplines into one’s personal life for the long term. For myself, I realized that I needed to be more intentional in my spiritual life and that I needed to be in a place where God could transform me. Spiritual disciplines are part of the roadmap on the journey to becoming more like Christ. Spiritual

disciplines can be a tool to provide accountability in the life of Christians, mainly to ourselves and perhaps even to others.

Project Overview

Before starting my research project, I had a different topic in mind and was pursuing that topic. When I reread my autobiography and my model of spiritual disciplines, I realized that I needed to change the direction of my research project. As I was mulling over a new research project, I met a man in a coffee shop here in Airdrie, Alberta. This man, whom I got to know over the next few months, leads a men's Bible study group at a church here in Airdrie. We talked at length, and I suggested to him that I could come and teach spiritual disciplines to his men's Bible study group. In this way, both of us are helped, as he gets a break from teaching the group and I have an opportunity to present spiritual disciplines and do this for my research project. We agreed that this would work for both of us and together we started working on the details of the project.

The group of men who participated in this workshop is from a variety of churches in the Airdrie area, so the group is multid denominational. These men meet in a local church basement on a weekly basis and study different Bible themes. They may watch a video and discuss it, or they may work through a Bible study series. These men are not active in any ministry activities and attend Bible study to learn and share and to have fellowship with other Christian men. This group has existed for at least five years. The group has changed slightly over the years as some men moved away or decided to move on. These men come from all

walks of life and their ages are from thirty to seventy years old. Their spiritual maturity is unknown to me and I felt that this was good, as I would not have any biases toward any of the men. Some of the men are married and are fathers. The diversity of the group was a benefit as I presented the disciplines and as I measured the benefits of practicing the disciplines.

After discussing options and working with my research advisor, I came up with the topic of my research project. The title of my workshop was “Practicing Four Intentional Disciplines to Develop Spiritual Growth in a Men’s Bible Study Group in Airdrie, Alberta.” The question that I wanted to answer through this workshop was this: Does the practice of spiritual disciplines promote spiritual growth? I wanted this research project to be narrow in scope and exact in order to answer my research question. I know what I have experienced as I have practised spiritual disciplines and I know how this practice has benefited me, but would others experience this as well? I have studied the topic of spiritual formation and spiritual disciplines for a long time so I was familiar with the process, but how would others respond to practicing spiritual disciplines, others who had perhaps never even heard of such a thing?

I spent many hours with my research advisor preparing for the workshop and working on a proper and concise consent form for those who would be interested in this workshop. We also discussed at length the creation of a feasible schedule for the workshop. In the end we realized that for me, the participants, and the existing time constraints, a four-week, five-session workshop would work well.

The workshop took place over four weeks with a total of five sessions. Included in the sessions was the review of the consent forms and then the distribution of the pre-and post-workshop questionnaires to the men who consented to participate. The participants were given a week in which they could think about the workshop and then, if interested, they would give their consent. The men were taught about the importance of spiritual disciplines, which they then practised for two weeks.

Methodology

My research methodology was qualitative and I utilized qualitative data-gathering methods. Sensing describes qualitative research as research that “systematically seeks answers to questions by examining various social settings and the individuals who inhabit these settings” (Sensing 2011, 57). I had a small group of participants who were asked questions in the pre-workshop questionnaire, practised disciplines, and were asked questions again in the post-workshop questionnaire. Specifically, my research project utilized a case study method, an appropriate method for my research project. As Sensing (2011, 140) adds, “Case studies introduce your participants to tasks, dilemmas, and practices of everyday life and enhance their confidence for the next time they engage in similar situations.” My case study group was the men’s Bible study group. We met together as a group; I did not meet with any of the men outside of the time we had together as a group. My group meetings functioned as a focus group in which the group together talked about both the positives and negatives of practicing

spiritual disciplines in a safe group setting. I found the focus group sessions workable. These sessions allowed me to present the material and allowed for discussion and feedback. Sensing (120) describes this as follows: “Group interviews are sometimes called focus groups. Through group interaction, data and insights are generated that are related to a theme. The group responds to a series of questions that allows the researcher to quickly gather data from several points of view.” Sensing perfectly describes the method of my case study. Using the Bible study group as my focus group and using the pre- and post-workshop questionnaires, along with the interaction during the focus group sessions, I was able to gather the data needed for my case study. I found this method highly applicable to the group that I met with, as the subject of the workshop was new to them, and this allowed for necessary interaction with the men.

After working through the pre-workshop and post-workshop questionnaires, I realized that my research method was not only qualitative but also had a quantitative element. In the questionnaires, I asked quantitative questions such as “How much ...?” The participants needed to quantify their answers. Some questions asked for counts e.g., times per week, which enabled me to quantify the data. This approach allowed me to use more than one research method, which was appropriate. Sensing (50) also agrees with this, writing, “a multi-methods approach is flexible enough to use quantitative tools.” For my research, I found that both methods blended nicely with each other and allowed me to ask the questions that I felt were relevant to the project. Both qualitative

and quantitative questions were valuable to provide a clear comparison of the knowledge and practise of the spiritual disciplines before and after the workshop.

As part of my research project, I taught the disciplines I had studied as part of my spiritual formation models paper. I introduced nine disciplines to the group and then allowed the group to choose four of the disciplines for more in-depth study. The group only studied and practised four disciplines due to the time constraints of the workshop, and a written explanation was given for each of the four disciplines that were chosen. As Myers (2011, 143) suggests, “The case study as a completed descriptive narrative, (a “story”) presents an example of ministry chosen from a natural setting and evaluated using appropriate tools.” This was important for me, as I wanted each spiritual discipline to be understood in its natural setting, that is in the life of each participant. As the men then practised the disciplines, they would realize the benefits in real-time, real-life situations.

I presented nine disciplines to the group, as some are spiritual disciplines and some are enabling disciplines. As a group, they chose four of the disciplines, each of which they then practised for two weeks. Once the four disciplines were chosen, these four disciplines were taught, demonstrated, and discussed at an in-depth level. Then, over a period of two weeks, the men practised these disciplines in their personal daily lives. As the men practised the chosen disciplines, there were discussion sessions in which they discussed their spiritual activities and the growth in their spiritual lives. When the two weeks of practise were completed, the participants filled out the post-workshop questionnaire. The

spiritual growth of the participants was measured through the comparison of the pre-workshop and post-workshop questionnaires.

Ethics

In a research project like this one, in which the participants are of different ethnicities, ages, and cultural backgrounds, ethical standards must be maintained. One of the tools used to ensure this is the approval of the Research Ethics Board (REB). Once I had all the forms and scheduling finished, I sent all the pertinent information to the REB for approval. The REB came back to me with several issues that needed to be corrected or appropriately implemented. This was my first REB application, so it required a lot of work on my part. Here are some of the issues that I had to correct:

- 1) The records from the participants needed to be secured in a locked cabinet in my office. I purchased a cabinet with a combination lock.
- 2) In the wording of my consent form there needed to be more clarity about what participation in the workshop involved. I added more information to the consent form to ensure that the participants knew exactly what would be expected of them.
- 3) In the consent form, it was not clear how much time would be given to the participant to consider the workshop and then to give consent. I added more information to the form to give clarity.

I then submitted the required changes to my research project and received the REB approval for the project. (See Appendix A)

My experience with the REB was an interesting experience. I realized how exact my interaction with the participants needed to be. All of my forms needed to be clear and concise to communicate clearly with the participants. I may know what I mean when I write or say something, but I need to clearly communicate my thoughts and intentions to the participants. My main takeaway from the experience was fourfold:

- 1) It was important to me to ensure that there was confidentiality for all involved.
- 2) I must ensure that the data was stored in a safe and secure place.
- 3) I must be careful that no one is hurt, both physically and mentally. In all the material and all the interactions there must be fairness and respect between myself and the participants and between the participants themselves.
- 4) Having the REB approval is vital to a research project like this. The REB was able to see potential risks or ethical violations and make me aware of these risks and offer some valid suggestions to proceed with the workshop.

Phases and Timetable

The actual case study took place over a four-week period, with five sessions during that period. I realized that this was a very short period in which to do this type of project but, due to time constraints, the participants and I were focused as we got together and worked through the sessions. Here is a brief overview of the five sessions.

Session #1: Information Session

The purpose of this first session was to serve as an introductory session. In this session, I gave a brief overview of who I am. I also gave a short explanation of the workshop. I explained to the participants that this workshop would be a four-week, five-session workshop, and that participation was completely voluntary.

The introductory letter (see Appendix B) was read by me.

- A. I gave time for questions. Some of the attendees wanted some clarity regarding the whole workshop. Since the practice of spiritual disciplines was new to most of the participants, there were questions regarding their practice. For some participants there was concern about commitment. Would the expectation of commitment be too high for them? Different concerns were tabled and addressed in this session. In general, there was enthusiasm in the group as spiritual disciplines were something new to these men. I also sensed that there were men who were not interested in this type of workshop, so I was comfortable with the fact that there was no obligation to participate.
- B. The consent forms were distributed to be completed and returned at the next session if after consideration the attendees agreed to become participants in the research project. (See Appendix C for a copy of the consent form.)

Session #2: Pre-Workshop Questionnaire

In this session, the participants came with their completed consent forms.

The participants also received the pre-workshop questionnaires.

- A. The completed consent forms were collected. From the original group of ten participants, the five who were going to participate were present in this session. A total of five other participants opted out of the workshop for a variety of reasons, such as lack of interest, or too much time commitment required for the workshop.
- B. The pre-workshop questionnaires were handed out to each participant (see Appendix D). Each questionnaire was assigned an alphabetical letter to ensure the confidentiality of each participant., A list of possible disciplines was listed in the questionnaire, and from these the participants chose which four disciplines would be taught and practised as part of this workshop. At the end of this session, I collected the questionnaires, which I stored securely. These questionnaires assisted me in the preparation for the next session. Here is the list of possible disciplines.

Spiritual Disciplines:

1. Contemplative reading of Scripture
2. Intimate Prayer
3. Sabbath-keeping
4. Self-Control
5. Self-Examination

Enabling Disciplines:

1. Active Listening

2. Life-Long Learning
3. Time Management
4. Confession

Session #3: Teaching Four Spiritual Disciplines

In this third session, I explained the disciplines that the participants had chosen to the participants. We talked about each chosen discipline and there was time given time for questions.

The four spiritual disciplines chosen were now taught. All four spiritual disciplines were the same for each participant, and each participant had two weeks to practise the discipline as part of the workshop. I gave each participant a handout that would assist them in understanding the chosen disciplines and assist in their practice of them (see Appendix E). The documents used and included in Appendix E are the original research documents. I revised these instructional documents to create the descriptions used in the presentation of my spiritual formation model in Chapter Three.

- A. I gave time for discussion in which the participants could ask questions about the disciplines and how to practise them. Participants asked questions like the following: “How can I find the time to practise these disciplines?”; “How much time should I take to pray?”; “How can I pray in the morning, when I get up so early?”; and “Where do I find some quiet time to listen to God?” We spent time going through the various questions with the group, seeking common experiences in dealing with the specific

questions. Time management was a big issue for the group, as the participants were busy with their lives and work. We talked about setting aside a bit of time every day for the disciplines. We talked about getting up earlier to have some quiet time. I realized though that time management is something that needs to be worked out on a personal level in each person's life.

Session #4: Conversation and Questions

The fourth session was run as a focus group. The participants had one week in which they were to practice the spiritual disciplines.

A. Time was given for discussion. Questions and concerns and issues regarding the practice of the discipline were talked about. The participants had now practised their list of four disciplines for a week. Some of these men were very busy and it was difficult for them to practise the disciplines due to their busy schedules. The discussion about how to practise the disciplines in such a short time carried on and it was suggested that each participant do the best they could, as this was a short workshop. Some of the participants were not even able to practise one or two specific disciplines during that week and we discussed this issue as well.

Session #5: Session of Reflection

The fifth session was also the last session together with the focus group. In this session, sharing took place and the post-workshop questionnaires were filled out by the participants.

- A. As a group, we now had time for reflection, sharing, and testimony. The participants were able to share what they had learned from the practice of the disciplines, and they were able to share some of the tough parts of practicing the disciplines. The participants shared that they had found it tough to find the time needed to practise some of the disciplines. The participants realized that time is needed to read Scripture, pray, and listen to God. As I listened to the men, I realized how busy life can be and so in order to practise spiritual disciplines it is good to have the mindset of intentionality. I also realized that, depending on where the participants are in their lives, sometimes life is just very busy, with work, home, church, and other activities. The challenge is to do what is most important, and every participant would need to figure that out on their own.
- B. Included in this session was the filling out of the post-workshop questionnaire (see Appendix F). Each of the participants filled out their specific questionnaire and these were collected by me.
- C. In closing, I thanked the men for their willingness to participate in this workshop. I realized that they had taken time from their busy schedules and had spent these evenings in this workshop.

Summary of Data

As part of my data collection, I used the pre-workshop and post-workshop questionnaires along with the personal testimonies and sharing which happened throughout the workshop. Here are some of my findings from sifting through the

data of the participants. Overall, the data showed that there was an improvement in the knowledge of spiritual disciplines and, because of the improvement in knowledge, there was a realization of the importance of the practice of spiritual disciplines. Now knowing the importance of spiritual disciplines, the participants spent more time in the practice of spiritual disciplines such as time spent in prayer and Scripture reading. Another important result from both the data and discussions was that the participants realized the importance of being intentional in the practice of spiritual disciplines.

Here are some examples of participant responses:

Participant A14 did not report much spiritual growth over the four weeks of the workshop. This participant stated in the questionnaire that life was very busy in the last weeks of the workshop. Scripture reading decreased over the weeks and prayer time was the same over the four weeks. After the four-week workshop, this participant answered the question “How important are spiritual disciplines to you right now?” with “very important.” This participant also noted, “Spiritual disciplines are life.” For this participant, the discipline of active listening was the most important aspect of the workshop. For this participant, the four-week workshop was too short a time to properly delve into the many elements of spiritual disciplines.

Participant A12 mentioned that spiritual growth takes time and, in understanding spiritual growth, he realized that spiritual growth means growing into a more intimate relationship with Jesus, the Father, and the Holy Spirit. Daily Scripture reading improved for this participant after a two-week period of

practicing the disciplines. This participant realized that without intentional effort there will be no growth and, for this person, intentionality is critical. This participant also mentioned that he had had no previous experience in the practice of spiritual disciplines and now realized the importance of the disciplines. In his closing comments, this participant also stressed the importance of being intentional in the practice of the disciplines, adding that “We were reminded of the importance of being intentional about our walk and relationship with our Father.”

Participant A11 reported spiritual growth over the four weeks. This participant also gained a better understanding of spiritual growth. From the pre-workshop questionnaire to the post-workshop questionnaire, this participant recorded an increase in the number of times reading Scripture per week. The participant also mentioned that there was more care in his time management. In the life of this participant, the importance of the Word of God as it relates to the spiritual disciplines increased. This participant did not practise spiritual disciplines before the workshop, based on the pre-workshop questionnaire. In the post-workshop questionnaire, this participant noted that spiritual disciplines were very important and that he has a great desire to continue the practice of spiritual disciplines after practising the disciplines for two weeks.

Participant A6 reported moderate spiritual growth over the four weeks as noted in the post-workshop questionnaire. This participant also added a note regarding spiritual growth, saying, “I know it’s getting better every day.” Scripture reading improved to a consistent point. This participant also reported in

the post-workshop questionnaire that he had a great desire to continue the practice of spiritual disciplines. For this participant, being together with others to practise the disciplines was a highlight. In the closing comments, this participant wrote that “It would be really cool to keep getting together, keep each other accountable, watch each other grow over a longer period.”

Lastly, participant A13 experienced spiritual growth and growth in understanding the spiritual disciplines. Scripture reading and prayer time remained the same over the two weeks. The participant realized that his time management was poor and that help would be needed to resolve this issue. This participant realized the importance of spiritual disciplines and had a great desire to continue practising them. The highlight for this participant was that there was now an understanding of spiritual disciplines, having been able to practise four of them for two weeks. When asked what has been the most important in this workshop, this participant wrote, “getting introduced to these four spiritual disciplines and having a group to grow with.”

Findings and Analysis

Having spent months on this research project, I realized that the measurement aspect of the project may be the most important aspect. Since I had only four weeks and five sessions planned with my research group, the measurement aspect needed to be scrutinized closely in order to have data at the end that is coherent and measurable.

I struggled with the concept of measuring spiritual growth. How can growth into the image of Christ be measurable? Also, having been a follower of Christ for many years, can my growth be measured and if so, how? I think that measurement can be highly subjective and, if not done carefully, the risk is that the measurement will be inaccurate. “The person ... who looks for quick results in the seed planting of well-doing will be disappointed. If I want potatoes for dinner tomorrow, it will do me little good to go out and plant potatoes in my garden tonight” (Peterson 1989, 3). Growth in Christian living is often a long-term project and is more difficult to measure in the short term. To measure spiritual growth for my research project, I used the pre-workshop questionnaire and the post-workshop questionnaire. With the help of my research advisor, I spent hours going over these questionnaires, to ensure that the questions were asked in a way that the data collected from the questionnaires is accurate and understandable. When I started thinking about measuring spiritual growth, I was stumped. Having worked through the pre-workshop and post-workshop questionnaires now, I see that measurement is possible and real.

Some of the participants were not used to this type of workshop, so the measurement aspect was very interesting and complicated. I needed a listening ear and heart as I worked with the participants. As Sensing (2011, 92) states, “Throughout the research project, you should always take a neutral stance.” The participants asked questions amongst themselves, which also became points of discussion. In the discussions that followed, they were able to answer some of their questions. For one participant, this meant that he needed to get up earlier to

practice the spiritual disciplines before the day got too busy. For another person, this meant setting aside some time for Scripture reading. For another person, this meant having some quiet time to listen to God. It is by putting many minds together that the best research is done. Reissman (2011, 91) suggests “that the researcher use open-ended questions and techniques so that the listener can construct answers and generate data without unnecessary prodding.” In both questionnaires, I asked questions that allowed the participants to construct their own answers and not be led to select one of my suggested answers.

Interpretation of the Data

Having received data from both the pre-workshop and post-workshop questionnaires, I now could interpret it. The first question in both questionnaires was about understanding spiritual growth. Before the workshop, participant A12 described this as “my growth or maturity in becoming and being more like Christ.” After the workshop, participant A12 defined spiritual growth in the following way: “spiritual growth is progressively growing in relation and intimacy with Jesus, the Father, and the Holy Spirit.” Due to the workshop and the time the participant spent practicing spiritual disciplines, spiritual growth became more relational and intimate. This outcome for such a short workshop is wonderful. Reading both the pre- and post-workshop questionnaire data, I could see differences. A comparative interpretation of the data showed that there was growth in the understanding of what spiritual growth is.

Another question that I asked in the pre-workshop questionnaire, which I changed slightly in the post-workshop questionnaire, was: “How do you rate your present spiritual growth?” I gave five options from which the participants could choose. After the workshop, three participants gave the same answer and two participants gave different answers. When looking at the questionnaires, I think the meaning of the answers were too close to each other; for example, the difference between moderate spiritual growth and constant spiritual growth may not have been clear enough to the participants. After taking an in-depth look at the data, I think that due to the short timespan of the workshop the participants could not really sense any major growth in their spiritual lives.

The pre-workshop questionnaire asked another important question regarding the spiritual disciplines. The participants were to choose if they understood the concept of spiritual disciplines, if they see their value, and if they would like to learn more about them. One participant wanted to learn more about spiritual disciplines, acknowledging that he does not practice any spiritual disciplines. After the workshop, this participant indicated that spiritual disciplines were important to him and that he had a desire to continue their practice. Based on the data from this participant and three other participants, I concluded that the participants did learn about the practice of spiritual disciplines and had developed a desire to continue this practice. The participants felt that practising the disciplines improves their spiritual lives and increases their intimacy with Jesus.

Analyzing the data, it was difficult to come to a conclusion for every question due to the unfortunate fact that the pre-workshop and post-workshop

questionnaires were not the same. In the above examples, I have taken the questions that were the same or similar on both questionnaires.

In coming up with my interpretation of what the data meant, I used the following method: I placed the five pre- and post-workshop questionnaires together on my desk, sorted them by participant numbers, and looked through the data. When dealing with a specific question, I would read and reread the questionnaires and I would look at the overall data of all participants. As I read through them again and again, and as I compared answers, slowly a pattern would appear, which enabled me to give certain interpretations based on the data. Having given each questionnaire a number made it impossible for me to link pre- and post-responses. This allowed me to look closely at the data and allowed me to search for the appropriate interpretations.

Another interesting point that should be mentioned is this. Looking at the data and interpreting the data is not a one- or two-hour task. I have looked at the data for months now and, as I sit and think about the different answers and reread the data, I see certain patterns in the questionnaires. If a participant struggles with time management, then the same participant will struggle with practicing spiritual disciplines, making enabling disciplines such as time management important. If the participant desires to learn about the disciplines, and then was highly committed to continue the practice, the participant then desired to continue meeting together and practising the disciplines. To see and understand the patterns did take effort and time, but now as I start seeing more patterns the concept intrigues me. As I work through the completed questionnaires, there is a danger to

jump to conclusions quickly and see a pattern that may not be valid. It is important to analyze the complete data package for each participant in order to see the complete picture and understand the data as thoroughly as possible.

Outcomes

When I looked at the responses to the pre-workshop and post-workshop questionnaires and I noticed the differences, I was blessed as I recognized the difference the workshop made in the life of these participants. Since the workshop was only four weeks in length, I thought it would be difficult to measure any spiritual growth. However, I was wrong. The immediate outcome is that the men realized the importance of the word intentional. I know that the participants realized that spiritual growth does not just happen and that there are intentional practises that help with growth. This workshop prodded the participants to practise spiritual disciplines, which put the participants in a place where God gave spiritual growth and, therefore, the goal of the project was achieved.

As noted, in the last session the men filled out the post-workshop questionnaire and there was a time for sharing and testimony. I also asked how the workshop could be improved and received some great advice on how to improve the overall workshop.

Did the workshop answer my research question? My research question was: Does the practice of spiritual disciplines promote spiritual growth? Was there spiritual growth? If so, why? If not, then why not? Even though the workshop was only over four weeks, and the practice of spiritual disciplines was

only over two weeks, I can say that according to the data that I received from the participants, spiritual disciplines promote spiritual growth, without a doubt. The group mentioned this in the post-workshop questionnaire, and the data strongly pointed in that direction as well.

I think that questions may be raised regarding the small sample size due to the number of participants. Since the group consisted of only five participants, can a reliable conclusion be substantiated with this sample size? I think the data points in a certain direction yet, in the future, it would be worthwhile to do a similar workshop with a larger sample size. Based on my own experience with spiritual disciplines and based on the workshops I have been involved in, I suggest that the conclusion that I have come to is reliable.

As I worked through the pre-workshop and post-workshop questionnaires, there were several clear indicators, such as:

- 1) The workshop was too short, and the participants wished for a more prolonged workshop over a greater length of time so that topics could be discussed at a more in-depth level.
- 2) The word intentional became a very important word for the group. There was a yes-moment for some of the participants, as they realized that they would need to be intentional in practicing spiritual disciplines. The group realized that being intentional is a critical part of being a follower of Jesus. In several of the post-workshop questionnaires, the participants made the comment that being intentional as a Christian and the practice of spiritual and enabling disciplines had become more important to them.

- 3) For most of the men, the topic of spiritual disciplines was a somewhat new concept. In the post-workshop questionnaire, 80 percent of the men stated that they had a great desire to continue the practice of spiritual and enabling disciplines.
- 4) One of the disciplines practiced was time management. All the men stated that this was an issue that needed to be dealt with. There is an overall agreement that life is too busy that the men need to limit the number of projects in which they are involved, and that they need to say no to certain things that come up in life.
- 5) On the question of having an intimate relationship with Jesus Christ, 40 percent of the group noticed an increase in intimacy over the four weeks.
- 6) The participants studied and worked together as a group, which was important to them. The value of the group became evident in the discussions and the questionnaires. To practice intentional spiritual disciplines is not something to be done alone. The group felt that there needed to be structure, discussion, and accountability. The participants felt that there was great power in meeting together and working on and working through intentional spiritual and enabling disciplines.

Reflections on Research Design

As I was struggling with the whole concept of the workshop, I realized that I had to take things one step at a time. I spoke with my research advisor. I searched for a topic. I met a person who was leading a men's Bible study.

Through this connection, I was able to teach spiritual disciplines to a Bible study group, and it was as if the pieces just fell into place. I realized that, due to time constraints, this workshop could only have five sessions. The five-session, four-week workshop did not allow more time for the practice of more disciplines. The data that I received through the pre-workshop and post-workshop sessions indicates a clear answer to my research question. Another thing that I realized was that it was helpful to present the workshop to participants who were previously unknown to me, as I would not hold any pre-workshop biases toward any of the participants. The participants were also aware that the workshop was part of my Doctor of Ministry program and were very gracious to me.

In my last session with the group, there were discussions about definitions. It was clearly pointed out to me that there needed to be more clarity with my definition, such as spiritual growth, or even spiritual maturity. I had never really thought about the importance of clear definitions, but I now realize that the terms must be clear. I realize that the terms must be precise for three specific reasons: 1) Different people understand different terms in different ways. 2) Certain terms change their meaning over time and therefore I needed to be precise with specific terms. 3) There are cultural differences in the understanding of certain words, so again, precise definitions are needed. Having realized the above, much time and discussion was spent with my advisor in coming to the definitions provided. I remember being prodded to give clear simple definitions for all the terms used in the workshop, which I thought

unnecessary at the time. Now, having sat and listened to the participants, I realize how critical simple, clear, precise, and consistent definitions are to research. I have started in this paper and in my profession as a pastor to give clear definitions to the words that I use.

Review of the Research Project

Before I became a pastor, I worked at a window manufacturing plant as an industrial mechanic (millwright). During the thirteen years I worked at this plant, I had some very frustrating moments. One of the most frustrating things for a mechanic is having to work on a machine that is broken and needs to be fixed quickly, but not having the proper tools to do the job right. Often, this added hours to the repair and the production people were not happy with me. As a Christian who desires to become more Christlike, I have had the same frustrations. I wanted to be more Christlike; I knew that there were things that needed repair, but I did not have the tools. Once I found out about spiritual disciplines, I quickly realized that I needed these in my own spiritual toolbox. I realized that spiritual disciplines would help others as well. I realized that others also desire to be more Christlike but do not know how to do it. As we worked through the different disciplines, the group was given spiritual tools to work with. These tools helped them with time management, patience, and with learning how to listen better. The disciplines are meant to be “not so much as one element among many in human existence but as the integrating factor in life—

attending to ‘life-as-a whole’” (Sheldrake 2013, 3). Focused intentional spiritual disciplines assist the whole person in growing into the image of Jesus Christ.

Having completed my research and having examined the data, I have come to the following conclusions: 1) There is great value in intentional spiritual and enabling disciplines. As I spent time with the workshop participants, I could see how they realized the importance of the word intentional, and then how this applied to the practice of spiritual disciplines. 2) This type of workshop should be taught over 8–10 weeks. This would give the participants time to dig into each discipline and practice each one, which would broaden the content of the workshop and allow participants to practise the disciplines for a longer period. 3) The pre-workshop and post-workshop questionnaires need to be more consistent with each other, to provide more consistent data. 4) The need for clear definitions also is essential.

At the beginning of this research project, I wanted to answer the question: Does the practice of spiritual disciplines promote spiritual growth? Now, the workshop is finished, and the data has been analyzed. I have had time to think through the whole workshop with the different participants. I have reread the data many times over and thought through the many conversations I had with the participants during the workshop sessions and I am now able to answer yes to the question that I started out asking in this research project. The practice of spiritual disciplines does promote spiritual growth. I have seen it firsthand with the participants in this group.

CHAPTER FIVE:

CONCLUSION

In the spring of 2013, I started a long journey, and I am not at the end of this journey yet. This journey started some years before, when I had the desire to receive a university education as a pastor. I really did not know how to go about this. Then, while visiting a friend, I saw an advertisement for a Christian university. I applied to the university and after jumping through many hoops, I finished almost five years later with a master's degree in ministry. And then my journey continued with having a conversation with a friend about my future path and my future education. In this discussion, Tyndale Seminary was mentioned, as my friend was attending Tyndale at the time. This life-changing discussion prodded me to explore the possibility of going to Tyndale Seminary for my Doctor of Ministry. Again, after jumping through many hoops, I entered the school in 2019. As I entered the school for the first time, I was tempted to kiss the floor as I was so excited to start this part of my education journey. Now, years later, this part of my journey in life is coming to an end.

During the last ten years, I was tempted to quit my education journey. At times, the journey seemed to be too difficult. I am not a writer and essay formatting was very difficult. On top of the writing and formatting issues, I also travelled as a pastor and, at times, my education endeavors and my travels

conflicted, or so I thought. Edman (1948, 137) recounts how Henry Ford was asked about success and how to achieve it; Ford answered, “If you start a thing, finish it.” I did not want to quit, yet there were times when I felt like it. I then decided to measure my education process by months. I plodded along, through ten, then twenty, then over one hundred months of school. Now, at the end of this process, my desire to learn is not over.

Three years ago, I started writing the story of my life. As I was writing, I realized a common theme in my story. Being an orphan as a ten-year old boy is not fun and not nice. However, through my early life experiences, something deep within me sparked. It was this never-quit attitude. I also realized that I needed to be intentional in my life. I wanted to buy my first car when I was sixteen years old, so I needed to be intentional in saving money so that when the right car was found I could purchase it. At Wheaton college there is a certain tradition, which is the following saying, “TOO SOON TO QUIT” (Edman 1948, 137). Yes, I have been tempted to quit in my life, but honestly, it is too soon to quit. I have found that in life, after reaching deep within me, and seeking strength and guidance from above, I have received great blessings as I continued the journey instead of giving up.

There were many times in my life when tough decisions needed to be made. By the grace of God, I chose some of the right paths. Having taken those paths, and because of those decisions, the trajectory of my life changed and the direction that I went changed as well. The path of being an orphan was not chosen by me, yet it was the path that I had to follow. Later in life, by the grace of God, I

chose to become a follower of Christ. Then years later, there was the opportunity to go to school. Then, following in the education process was the introduction to spiritual disciplines and truly that has made all the difference.

For a fifty-three-year-old pastor, husband, and grandfather to start this journey was at times lonely. I have been asked why? Why go to school at your age? What will it help? Often, when asked, I did not know the answer, but today I do. My answer is, "Because I had to." Something inside of me drove me to this. As Robert Frost ([1916] 1993, 1) wrote in the last stanza of his famous poem, "I shall be telling this with a sigh, somewhere ages and ages hence. Two roads diverged in a wood, and I took the one less traveled by, and that has made all the difference." Why did Frost write about the road less travelled? What is it about the road less travelled that makes this road less attractive to the wanderer? Is it because the masses are viewed as taking the correct way? Taking the road less travelled is often a risk. There may be hidden dangers. Yet taking the road less travelled may revealed many hidden treasures that are there for the taking. Having started years ago and now finishing, I am able to look back and say that this part of my journey was worth it. Yes, it is a road less travelled. Many of my colleagues have not travelled this road. Many of my pastor friends have not travelled this road. But today, it has made a difference.

I am not the same person I was ten years ago. I have slowed down and become more cautious. I now dig deeper into the Word of God. I now realize that often there are no simple answers to many of life's questions. I am learning to say, along with the Prophet Ezekiel as he gave an answer to God's question, "He

asked me, “Son of man, can these bones live?” I said, “Sovereign LORD, you alone know” (Ezek 37:3). I now can give this answer to God when life brings tough questions. I can also give this answer to others who seek to find answers that are not possible to give. I have also found that life does have a way of leading me down certain paths that were not my choice. I would never have chosen certain paths, but there was nothing I could do except go down a certain path or quit. Being an orphan is not something I chose. Some of my difficulties in life came upon me without my choosing. God, who has given me much grace over the years, has at times just pulled me along.

As I look over this paper and think about the past years at Tyndale, I realize that I have learned many important lifechanging. I realized once again that there are many hoops to jump through in life. Throughout this education process, there were things to learn, things to relearn, and things that had to be unlearned. I have learned that there are many men and women who have great wisdom and they have been willing to share their wisdom with me. I have learned to listen more to those who speak to me, and I have also learned to listen more when I read the books of many authors.

I have come to realize that everyone’s life is a story. Your life is a story and my life is a story. In our stories, there are often small, seemingly insignificant decisions made or actions taken that strongly influence our narrative. At one of the Tyndale residencies, my classmates shared their autobiographies and we listened to fascinating life stories. They would ask me questions and I would have to seek the answers in the fine details. This has happened hundreds of times over

the last years and I am a better person for this. It may be easy to come to a certain conclusion, but is the conclusion the correct one? Are there more details? I am thankful for my advisors who have helped me on this journey.

As mentioned throughout this paper, I did not know of spiritual disciplines for many years. After hearing about the disciplines, thinking about them, and being prodded to read and practise them, I experienced the life-changing value of spiritual disciplines. Because of my own experience, I felt that I should explore the spiritual disciplines at a deeper level, because I wanted to teach about this topic. Then Tyndale Seminary fell into my lap, with a Doctor of Ministry in Spiritual Formation. How could I be so fortunate? As I attended the school and was able read more books on this subject, and met some amazing people, my desire to learn and teach has only increased.

In Chapter Two, I presented my spiritual formation model. It is the start of what will become a more refined model. Having been prodded and pushed to better explain myself, I feel that I now better understand spiritual formation through the practice of spiritual disciplines. Having a better understanding leads me to a better practise of the disciplines and enables me to better teach and explain spiritual disciplines in a more precise way. When I started at Tyndale, it was my wish to dig deeper into this topic in order to teach it better. I also wanted to finish with a model of spiritual formation that I would then be able to teach in future years. My wish has come true in that I now better understand spiritual formation. I recognize that since I now have a model of spiritual formation, I am able to work on this model and continue to improve the model in the future. I

know that there will be new insights through my own experience and through the experience of those practising this model of spiritual formation.

As a full-time pastor, I have realized many benefits of being a student once again. I was introduced to many important books and topics that I otherwise would not have read, and I would not have been introduced to some great authors. Being in school once again also taught me the value of digging a bit deeper. My advisors would often question me on why I thought a certain way. I had to think and rethink many things, which forced me to dig a bit deeper. Today, as I prepare my sermons and as I prepare to speak with people, I dig a bit deeper. I ask questions as I read the text of the Bible and I ask questions about my own thoughts of the Bible. When I listen to speakers, I also ask more questions. In other words, I have become a more critical thinker. Blamires (1978, 106) states, “The conception of truth proper to the Christian mind is determined by the supernatural orientation of the Christian mind.” This has become more important to me over the last years, in that I desire to be a critical thinker while still maintaining a Christian perspective and Christian faith.

In Chapter Four, I presented my research project. If I could do a similar research project again, there are things that I would certainly do differently, the most important part being that the workshop would take place over a longer period. Perhaps the workshop would be scheduled over a ten-week period with one session a week. In this way, the disciplines could be taught more thoroughly and they could also be practised over more weeks. This would give the participants time to readjust their lives and schedules to properly participate in the

disciplines. The longer time frame would also give the participants more time to fully appreciate the value of the practice of spiritual disciplines. The ten-week period would give enough time for each participant to realize their own strengths and weaknesses relevant to their own spiritual growth and maturity.

Another issue that I was made aware of and would correct was that there needed to be clear definitions of the disciplines, and all terms used in the workshop. For example, what do the following terms mean: spiritual growth and spiritual disciplines? The participants would need to know exactly what is meant by all the terms used. The researcher needs to remember that while they have been dealing with these terms for years, many of the terms are new and unfamiliar to the participants.

As I have studied and practised spiritual disciplines and enabling disciplines for years now, I have realized that teaching spiritual disciplines would greatly benefit many congregations. In my experience, I was not taught spiritual disciplines and not knowing about spiritual disciplines hindered me in my spiritual growth. When introduced to spiritual disciplines, and when I started practising them, I noticed growth in my spiritual life. It would be beneficial for the church if the teachers and leaders of the church would study spiritual disciplines and then teach them. It is my opinion that these teaching sessions could be repeated (and I would suggest every two years) in order to encourage the congregation to continue the practice and to prod others to start the practice of spiritual disciplines.

The pathway of spiritual disciplines opened to me many years ago and I am glad that I have journeyed this road for years. There have been times when I was weary and tired but, due to the practise of spiritual disciplines, I stayed on the journey with Christ. There are many things in life that I now see are important and I plan to remain intentional on my spiritual journey till I arrive in heaven. Being intentional and staying that way in my spiritual journey is important to me. Being an intentional person and an intentional Christian means that I do what needs to be done in my own life to promote spiritual growth.

Having taught spiritual disciplines in workshops in Kenya, in Thailand, and here in Canada, I have realized that the practice of spiritual disciplines is important for the followers of Jesus in countries around the world. Spiritual disciplines can be taught in a way that cultural differences are considered and that no one is hurt or offended. In my teaching of spiritual disciplines, I have found that spiritual disciplines are intercultural and intergenerational. Spiritual disciplines are important for all age groups in the church. I have found that teaching the disciplines assists those who have only followed Jesus for a short time as well as those who are long-time followers of Jesus.

Learning about spiritual disciplines and enabling disciplines and then teaching both has become a pursuit for me. There is still much research that can be done on this topic. There may be better and more precise ways to do the workshop. Different tools could be used more effectively to reach a greater audience. Sessions could be recorded, as this would enable on-line teaching in order to reach a larger audience. Teaching could be via online conference, such as

Zoom, which would facilitate live teaching with relevant discussion. I think the sky is the limit and with God's help and the leading of the Holy Spirit, this journey will continue.

APPENDICES

**Appendix A:
Ethics Board Approval**



***Certificate of Ethics Review
Clearance for Research Involving Human
Subjects***

Primary Investigator:	Sieg Schuler
Faculty Supervisor:	Doctor of Ministry
REB File Number:	2022-00009
Title of Project:	Practicing four intentional spiritual disciplines to promote Spiritual growth in a men's Bible study in Airdrie, AB.

Status of Approval

- Approved**
- Revisions Required**
- Denied**

May 24, 2022

Chair, Research Ethics Board

Date

Appendix B: Letter of Introduction

Dear Participant:

Welcome to this session and thank you for your interest in this workshop. Before you formally agree to participate in the workshop, perhaps it is good if you know a bit of the background and purpose of this project. Over the years I've been studying and learning to know what it means to grow spiritually and using specific spiritual disciplines as tools for growth. I have realized how important spiritual disciplines were in my Christian growth. "We all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into His image with ever-increasing glory, which come from the Lord, who is the Spirit" (2 Cor 3:18). As we journey with God through life, He continues to work in us to become more like Him. Spiritual disciplines are great tools that put us into the place where God can continue His work in us.

The purpose of this project is to practice four specific spiritual disciplines and as a result of practicing the disciplines we will grow in our spiritual lives and we will grow in becoming more like Christ. The process for this workshop is that we will meet five times. You will be given the opportunity to choose four disciplines from a list of nine disciplines. It is these four disciplines that you will then practice over a few weeks. Together, we will learn and practice these disciplines together.

Here is the overall layout:

- 1) Before the actual workshop begins, you will receive a consent form for you to read carefully, and to sign if you choose to take part in this

workshop. You will be given a week to think about this workshop, and to pray before giving your consent.

- 2) In the first session together, we will talk about spiritual disciplines and how they are important in our lives. Then, you will be given a coded pre-workshop questionnaire to fill out. Please remember your code, as you will need this code when you receive your post-workshop questionnaire. The code ensures anonymity, and it also ensure that your data is understood correctly by me. As part of this questionnaire, you will choose four disciplines from a list of nine disciplines. These questionnaires will be collected by me. These questionnaires will have a variety of questions that pertain to our spiritual lives. Both the pre- and post-workshop questions will seek to find our level of spiritual growth.
- 3) In the second session, the first two disciplines as chosen by the group, will be demonstrated and practiced. Time will also be given for discussion.
- 4) In the third session the last two disciplines as chosen by the group, will be demonstrated and practiced. Time will also be given for discussion
- 5) In the fourth session, any questions and concerns about the practice of spiritual disciplines can be discussed.
- 6) In the fifth and last session, time will be given for testimonies, and a post-workshop questionnaire will be filled out.
- 7) The goal of the workshop is twofold. First, that everyone who participates grows in their spiritual lives. Secondly, that the researcher is enabled to complete his research project.

8) I cannot stress enough, that the discussions and sharing and testimonies are confidential and must stay within this group.

If at any time you have any questions, please feel free to contact me and speak with me. We are in this together as we learn and study and practice together. Please remember that this is a project for my Doctor of Ministry studies, and that is why I am required to have you sign a consent form. I welcome you to be a part of this project, as I am sure everyone will benefit.

Thank you for considering taking part in this workshop.

Sieg Schuler

Doctor of Ministry student.

**Appendix C:
Consent Form**
Consent to Participate in the Study

*Practicing Four Intentional Spiritual Disciplines to Promote
Spiritual Growth in a Men's Bible Study in Airdrie, AB.*

May 2022 – December 2022

Conducted by: *Sieg Schuler, pastor*
 Mountview Church of God, Calgary, AB

Contact information:

Under the supervision of: *Dr. Mark Chapman PhD*

For the course: *DMSF 0943 SPIRITUAL FORMATION ACTION*
 RESEARCH PROJECT

I understand that I am invited to participate in the research study named above. By signing this form in the space provided at the end, I indicate my agreement to participate in the study.

What Will Participation Involve?

My participation will consist of attending five Bible studies where the topic of spiritual disciplines will be discussed. The group will pick four disciplines from a list of nine disciplines and these specific disciplines will then be taught and practiced and reflected on for the duration of the workshop. I will also be asked to fill out a pre- and post-workshop questionnaire which will assist the researcher in his research project. During the fifth session, a time will be given for sharing and testimony. The sharing and testimony are shared strictly on a volunteer basis and it will be stated that what is said is to stay with the group, to ensure confidentiality.

Are There Risks?

My participation in this study will entail that we will discuss spiritual disciplines in a group setting and fill out a pre- and post-workshop questionnaire. I

do not need to share any personal information about myself. I know the researcher and I am sure that only my best interest is at the heart of this research project. I have received assurance from the researcher that every effort will be made to minimize any risk by never mentioning any names or places specifically and ensuring that complete anonymity is guaranteed.

What Benefits Will My Participation Bring?

My participation will assist the researcher in understanding the benefits of spiritual disciplines. Also, by participating, I should gain some valuable spiritual insights into the usage of spiritual disciplines.

Will the Information I Share Be Kept Confidential?

I have received assurance from the researcher that the information I will share will remain strictly confidential. I understand that the contents will be used only for the research purposes of this project. In the pre- and post-workshop questionnaires no names are used, therefore ensuring total anonymity, therefore my name cannot be attached to any specific data.

Will My Identity Remain Anonymous?

The research project will be done with a group of men who are part of a Bible study. Since the questionnaires are coded, there is no way to attach a name to the data. As part of the Bible study group though, I am not anonymous, as I know all the men the partake in this study. As part of the Bible study introduction, it will be stressed that what is said in the study is confidential.

What Will Happen to the Records of My Participation?

All research data documents collected which include the consent forms and the pre- and post-workshop questionnaires, will be stored in a filing cabinet in the private office in the home of the researcher. This filing cabinet will always be locked thereby ensuring that the documents are stored in a safe, secure and private place. These questionnaires will be destroyed at the end of the research project.

How Will the Study Results Be Shared?

Once the workshop is over, the researcher will study the data and use the data in his research project. Only the researcher will see the pre- and post-workshop questionnaires.

Is My Participation Totally Voluntary?

I understand that I am under no obligation to participate in this study. There will be no penalty if I choose not to participate, and I will not lose any benefits to which I am otherwise entitled. If I choose to participate, **I can withdraw from the study at any time** and/or refuse to answer any questions without suffering any negative consequences. If I choose to withdraw, all information gathered about me prior to my withdrawal will be deleted and not used in any further study. I understand that if I choose to participate in this research, I have not waived any legal rights.

Consent to Participate

I, [NAME], have read and understood the above information and I freely consent to participate in this research study by signing in the space provided below.

If I have any further questions about the study, I may at any stage contact the researcher or study supervisor who is: Dr. Mark Chapman PhD (mchapman@tyndale.ca).

This study has been reviewed and approved by the Research Ethics Board of Tyndale University. If I have any questions regarding the ethical conduct of this study or my rights as a participant, I may contact the Research Ethics Board at reb@tyndale.ca.

Appendix D:
Pre-Workshop Questionnaire.
Intentional Spiritual Disciplines Questionnaire

Pre-Workshop Questionnaire

Sieg Schuler

*Practicing Four Intentional Spiritual Disciplines To Promote
Spiritual Growth in a Men's Bible study in Airdrie, AB.*

1. What is your understanding of spiritual growth?
2. How do you experience spiritual growth?
3. How do you rate your present spiritual growth?
 - a) No spiritual growth at all
 - b) Slight spiritual growth.
 - c) Moderate spiritual growth.
 - d) Constant spiritual growth.
 - e) Excellent spiritual growth.
4. How many times in a week do you spend reading Scripture?
5. How many times in a week do you spend in prayer?
6. How frequently do you celebrate the Sabbath as a day of rest?
7. How do you engage in self-examination?
8. What kind of situation would prod you to exercise self-examination?
9. How intimate is your relationship with Jesus Christ now?
 - a) No intimacy at all.
 - b) Slight intimacy.
 - c) Moderate intimacy.
 - d) Great intimacy.
 - e) Excellent intimacy.
10. How much Scriptural knowledge do you have about Jesus Christ now?
 - a) No knowledge of Jesus.
 - b) Slight knowledge of Jesus.
 - c) Moderated knowledge of Jesus.
 - d) Great knowledge of Jesus.
 - e) Excellent knowledge of Jesus.

11. How motivated are you in developing an intimate relationship with Jesus Christ?
- No motivation.
 - Slight motivation.
 - Moderate motivation.
 - Great motivation.
 - Excellent motivation.
12. Choose from the statements below, which one describes you the best. You can choose more than one.
- I do not understand the concept of spiritual disciplines.
 - I do not see the value of spiritual disciplines.
 - I understand the concept of spiritual of spiritual disciplines.
 - I see the value of spiritual disciplines.
 - I would like to learn more about them.
13. Do you practice spiritual disciplines? Yes or No.
14. If so, which disciplines do you practice?
15. Which of the following spiritual disciplines do you want to learn about and practice in order to experience spiritual growth? Please put a check mark beside four disciplines that you would like to practice.

Active Listening: Being aware that God wants to speak, and to ask God to speak, and to focus on the voice of God is what active listening is.

Confession: When wrongdoing happens, the person is willing to confess that wrongdoing. The words “I am sorry, will you forgive me” are important words as part of confession.

Contemplative reading of Scripture: Reading Scripture in a quiet and thoughtful way, allowing Scripture to speak into the readers life.

Intimate Prayer: Praying in a way, that provides an intimate connection with God. In this prayer the person praying speaks and listens to God.

Life-Long Learning: Life-Long is the mindset, that there are still things in life that should be learned. Life-long learning means that effort and time will be used, to facilitate new learning.

Sabbath Keeping: To spend a day a week resting from the everyday tasks and taking time to rest physically and spiritually.

Self-Control: An inner control mechanism, that allows the person to say “yes” or “no”, as needed. This inner control mechanism also allows the person to walk away from certain discussions and situations.

Self-Examination: Self-examination is the awareness of blind spots, weaknesses or failures in life, and the effort take to see and improve on, or eliminate these issues in life.

Time Management: The practice of awareness, that time must be used wisely and carefully, as time is a precious and priceless commodity.

13. Why did you choose these specific four spiritual disciplines?

Participants' signature

Date

Appendix E:
The Four Chosen Disciplines
*Practicing Four Intentional Spiritual Disciplines to Promote
Spiritual Growth in a Men's Bible Study in Airdrie, AB.*

June 2022

Presenter: Sieg Schuler

Active Listening: Being aware that God wants to speak, and to ask God to speak, and to focus on the voice of God is what active listening is.

As part of the disciplines of a Christian, the value of listening cannot be overstated. The Christian needs to learn to listen to God, and the Christian needs to learn to listen to other human beings. When properly listening, the Christian will hear things that are otherwise not heard. God will give insights and God will give hope and guidance. How much insight has been lost, due to not listening? How many battles have been lost, due to the ear not being tuned to the voice of God?

The Christian, in order to fight the good fight, in order to have victory in life, must be a listener. The Christian needs to spend that quiet time alone with God, so that God can speak. It is God who calls His people and desires to speak to them: "The Mighty One, God, the LORD, speaks; 'Listen, my people and I will speak'" (Psalm 50:1a, 7a). The One, who knows all, the one who cannot be wrong, desires to help His creation and speak to them, but do they listen? God knows that His creation, His people struggle with listening, so he invites us to do this. Through listening we will be warned about dangers, we will be told about our own blind spots, we will be encouraged, and we will know what is going on in the lives of those we care for.

When John received the vision of the book of Revelation, which was to be sent to the seven churches in Asia Minor, each church was given a stern reminder: “Let anyone who has ears to hear listen to what the Spirit says to the churches” (Rev 2:7). Of course, we have ears to listen, but are they used? Our ears hold our glasses in place and are used to attach jewelry. The Holy Spirit wants to be listened to. Yes, there is often a problem with listening to Him, so the Christian needs to nurture listening, as a spiritual discipline. When the Christian listens to God, much wisdom is received, which is necessary in the daily grind of life. When the Christian listens to God, guidance is received, hope is received, comfort is received. For the Christian, there is nothing that can replace the fact that listening to God is necessary.

Every Christian should do as Joshua did: “Then Joshua bowed with his face to the ground in worship and asked Him, ‘What does my Lord want to say to His servant?’” (Josh 5:14b). This question is the necessary question for the listening Christian. Yes, God desires to speak to everyone, but does everyone desire to listen to God. As we speak with others about our relationship with God, we can share how we listen to Him. We can share how much we receive when we listen to Him.

Intimate Prayer: Praying in a way that provides an intimate connection with God. In this prayer, the person praying speaks and listen to God.

One of the continuous and important things a Christian can do is pray. To be in a relationship with his God and speak with Him, as a friend speaks to a friend, is a great thing. To know that God is always present and always listening,

to know that speaking with God always serves a purpose, is comforting. Prayer is a vital part of the growth process of the Christian. Learning to pray may be difficult for some, but for others prayer is simple. To kneel before God, knowing that God is in the room, and then speaking to God as to a friend is so nice. The Christian must move beyond feelings and do what needs to be done regardless of feelings. The Christian may have time for many things, as the schedule may be full, but time for God alone is of the essence. This ability speaks of the vital nature of spending time alone with God.

Our master and Lord, Jesus Christ, spent many hours alone with His father in prayer. Mark writes: “Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, He got up, went out, and made His way to a deserted place; and there He prayed” (Mark 1:25). In Scripture, many examples are given showing us the prayer life of Jesus. These examples should prod the Christian into realizing the importance of prayer and to take the necessary time to linger with Christ.

The Christian, who desires Christlikeness, must pray enough so that Satan shakes and heaven notices his or her prayers. Our father in heaven speaks to us, so we must learn to listen and speak with Him. Every Christian needs to know that the study of prayer and learning how to pray is a life-long endeavour.

What should motivate the Christian to pray? This motivation comes from within which is intrinsic motivation. The Christian knows about the battles in life, knows that being alone on the battlefield will only end in defeat. The Christian therefore prays to secure victory. Awareness, practice, and intensity are parts of the prayer life of the Christian. Does the church need to be taught to pray? Does

the Christian need to be taught to pray? I feel that I, too, should teach intimate prayer more, as the congregants need this in their lives. Therefore, intentional effort must be given to teaching this discipline. Yes, God is everywhere, always ready to assist the Christian who asks for help, guidance, and strength.

Self Control: An inner control mechanism, that allows the person to say “yes” or “no” as needed. This inner control mechanism also allows the person to walk away from certain discussions and situations.

Paul writes of the importance of self-control to the Corinthian church: “Now everyone who competes exercises self-control in everything” (1 Cor 9:25). For the Christian preparing for battle or in battle, self-control is a must. The importance of self-control of the emotions in the heat of battle cannot be overstated. How many Christians have failed and have damaged themselves and their families and the cause of Christ due to out of control anger? Anger as an emotion is not wrong, but out of control anger leads a person to do things that should not be done, or to say things that should not be said. As a prison chaplain, I heard many tragic stories in which anger led to abuse. How many punches were thrown and how many shots fired due to lack of self-control? Then there is the problem of self-control of the tongue. What should the Christian say or not say? How much ugliness in life would be avoided if there was proper self-control of the tongue? How many hearts have been broken due to hurtful words? Even when a person is passionate about an issue, it may be the best thing though, to choose silence.

Then there is the issue of pornography. The amount of pornography watched by the men within the church is eroding the foundation of the church. If there is no self-control of the eyes, then soon there is not self-control of the thoughts, and this leads to lack of self-control of certain actions. How is self-control achieved? How does the Christian deal with things in life that are slippery-slope issues? Paul gives answer to this question in Romans 12:2: “Do not be conformed to this age, but be transform by the renewing of your mind, so that you may discern what is the good, pleasing, and the perfect will of God.” If our actions flow from our thoughts, then our thoughts give birth to our actions. In the battlefield of life, the Christian always needs to be alert, humble and ready for the attack.

The Christian must never be so self-assured and think that defeat cannot happen. That being the case, the Christian needs self-control 24-7, and never think that he or she is out of the reaches of Satan. Self-control is involved in the daily routine of life, such as eating and drinking and even resting. Why is it so difficult for some Christians to have a quiet devotional time in the morning? Are they going to bed too late? Self-control may be needed in the evening so that bedtime is at a reasonable time so that a reasonable get-up time is enabled.? Self-control is really a whole-life concept. Scripture teaches that “your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you” (1 Cor 6:19). As our body is the place where the Holy Spirit lives, then the Holy Spirit does have dominion over our physical body. This includes what we eat and drink, and our resting and working. Self-control is really a whole-life concept.

Intentional Time Management: The practice of awareness, that time must be used wisely and carefully, as time is a precious and priceless commodity.

In society today, almost everyone is too busy. When a person is asked to help another person, the response is “I am too busy, I don’t have time.” Yet everyone has the same amount of time. Everyone has twenty-four hours every day. Perhaps every person is so important, and every task is so important that there needs to be a rush and life is one big rat race. Because time is limited in nature, and time flows by so quickly, the concept of time-management is important. The Christian can waste hours and days and weeks and have nothing to show for it. We are in a time crisis. We run and run some more, and when the day comes to an end we crash, hoping for a better tomorrow. Our busyness does not equate to spiritual health and growth. The greatest human being that ever walked the face of this earth was our Lord Jesus Christ. His mission was more important than anyone else’s mission. In the three years that He preached, He needed to find twelve disciples and He needed to teach them as they would carry on His message when He was gone. As every reader of Scripture will know, Jesus was always busy, yet seemingly never in a hurry. He had time to pray. He had time to go to a wedding. He had time to take a detour in order to help a demon possessed man. He had time for a sick woman on the way, he had time to spend with Zacchaeus in his home, and he even found time for the little children. Yes, He was always busy, but never in a rush. If that is true, then the same should be said of the Christian in 2022.

The Christian of today should be busy but should not be in a hurry. Perhaps there are too many time robbers in the life of many Christians, robbing so

much time that the left-over time is always rush, rush, rush. In the battles of life, in the stresses of life, time is of the essence. Jesus, when dealing with the death of His friend, says: “Come away by yourselves to a remote place and rest for a while” (Mark 6:31). Jesus knew the value of downtime and rest for Himself and His disciples. To rest is often a very efficient use of time. When a lawnmower blade is dull, then it is wise to take time and sharpen the blade. This time is not lost time, but time used wisely. For the follower of Christ, there must be proper time management, otherwise some battles in life will be fought and lost. There must be time for Scripture reading and prayer and time to linger with the Lord. Too often the Lord may get some left-over time and nothing else. If the statistics are true that one half of all Christian marriages fail, then more time needs to be put aside to ensure healthy marriages. In Christ, and following Christ, the disciple needs to learn proper balance in time-management. Christ always did what needed to be done. If He needed to travel, He did, and as He travelled, He taught His disciples. If He rested, even that was properly managed. Scripture tells us how He slept in the back of a boat.

For the too-busy Christian, a study into the time management system that Jesus used would be a valuable study. Jesus did not have timewasters in His life, and as noted, Christ showed us how to be busy, but not in a hurry. Having observed many Christians over the years, I have concluded that there is far too little discipline in time-management. Not everything in life needs to be done perfectly, there are also things in life that are not critical, and here the Christian needs to be disciplined. Scripture never tells us that Jesus missed opportunities

because He was too busy. Time stewardship is what is called for in the life of the believer. The Christian needs to have this arrow ready to eliminate timewasters and to appreciate the value of time.

Appendix F:
Post-Workshop Questionnaire
Intentional Spiritual Disciplines Questionnaire

Post-Workshop Questionnaire

Sieg Schuler

*Practicing Four Intentional Spiritual Disciplines to Promote
Spiritual Growth in a Men's Bible Study in Airdrie, AB.*

1. What is your understanding of spiritual growth now?
2. How did you experience spiritual growth in the last 4 weeks?
3. How did you rate your present spiritual growth after 4 weeks?
 - a) No spiritual growth at all
 - b) Slight spiritual growth
 - c) Moderate spiritual growth
 - d) Great spiritual growth
 - e) Maximum spiritual growth
4. How many times a week do you now spend reading Scripture?
5. How many minutes weekly, do you now spend reading Scripture?
6. How many times a week do you now spend in active listening?
7. How many minutes weekly, do you now spend in intimate prayer?
8. How frequently do you think about self-control? Has your self-control improved?
9. How would you describe the word "intentional"? Has the importance of this word changed over the last 4 weeks? If so, how?
10. How are your time management skills? How can you improve?
11. How intimate is your relationship with Jesus Christ now?
 - a) No intimacy at all with Jesus.
 - b) Slight intimacy with Jesus.
 - c) Moderate intimacy with Jesus.
 - d) Good intimacy with Jesus.
 - e) Excellent intimacy with Jesus.

12. How much do you know about Jesus Christ now?
- a) No knowledge of Jesus.
 - b) Slight knowledge of Jesus.
 - c) Moderated knowledge of Jesus.
 - d) Good knowledge of Jesus.
 - e) Excellent knowledge of Jesus.
13. How motivated are you in your relationship with Jesus Christ now?
- a) No motivation.
 - b) Slight motivation.
 - c) Moderate motivation.
 - d) Good motivation.
 - e) Excellent motivation.
14. How important are spiritual disciplines to you right now?
- a) Not important.
 - b) Slightly important.
 - c) Very Important.
 - d) Critically important.
15. Rate your desire in continuing the practice of the four spiritual disciplines.
- a) No desire
 - b) A slight desire
 - c) Great desire.
16. Rate your commitment in continuing the practice of the four spiritual disciplines.
- a) No commitment
 - b) Slight commitment
 - c) Great commitment.
17. What has been the most important for you during this workshop?
18. What can be done to improve this workshop?

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