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The Practice of Silence and Its Related Spiritual Disciplines
in Guiding Cambodian Christian Leaders
Toward Christlike Transformation

A Research Portfolio
submitted in partial fulfillment
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By

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ABSTRACT

I have in my desire to be inwardly transformed toward Christlikeness and become as close to God as possible. My spiritual autobiography in this portfolio is a testimony of such a journey toward Christlikeness, a journey guided by God's grace. Out of the various spiritual practices that exist to build up Christlikeness in believers, I consider silence a central discipline in my spiritual life. This led me to learn the fundamentals of silence and other spiritual formation methods to train myself and be transformed inwardly. I described these fundamentals as a model for spiritual growth in this portfolio. My experience of the beauty of silence and related spiritual practices also led to my desire to convey my learning and experience to the Cambodian people in my missionary work. I prepared a spiritual discipline program for Cambodian church leaders. This program introduced and fostered the ability to practice silence through *examen* and prayer walking. I then examined how this program affected participants. Participants had the opportunity not only to experience new spiritual disciplines but also to establish a foundation for pursuing deeper spiritual experiences that will allow them to grow in their Christlikeness and become closer to God.

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GLOSSARY

Community: The community embodies a unique type of interconnectedness in which individuals foster mutual respect and love, resulting in profound personal growth for all involved. The actions and behaviours of influential members within the community play a significant role in shaping individuals, while the shared values and overall environment of the community exert a profound influence on them. Within the community, certain individuals may have extraordinary gifts and personal experiences that enable them to help others grow spiritually. Conversely, the ordinary or even seemingly less capable members of the community can serve as inspiring examples who embody the highest ideals of the faith journey.

Examen: *Examen* is regular self-examination before God to discern our faithfulness in following Christ in daily activities. *Examen* includes gratitude for the abundant blessings of God's love throughout the day, petition for discernment as we continue the prayer, and review of the day, attentively observing the inner thought and feelings. *Examen* also seeks forgiveness for failures in Christlike living and the renewal of God-given purpose and strength to walk faithfully with God in the upcoming day's activities.

Immanence: God's immanence denotes His omnipresent existence among all things, including time and space. God is personally and intimately present in His creation, especially in His people. It means that God is close to us and actively involved in our circumstances, not detached from our lives. It affirms that God knows us, loves us, and draws all people to Himself.

Kairos: Scripture distinguishes between two different kinds of time: *chronos* time, which is measured by clocks and calendars, and *kairos* time, which is a time characterized by spiritual abundance, a time when God's purposes and plans come to fruition. We experience *kairos* time as a precious gift that is set apart as holy to the Lord. It is a sanctuary where we encounter the presence of God.

Lectio divina: *Lectio divina* is a meditative way of Scripture reading. It is a process of intentional listening to the Word of God with the intention of responding obediently to what is heard. It includes *lectio* (reading the Scriptures), *meditatio* (reflecting on the Word), *oratio* (responsive praying from the heart), and *contemplatio* (the awareness of the divine presence while enwrapped in inner silence).

Prayer Walking: Prayer walking is a slow and deliberate walk through places with the purpose of deepening in prayer. Prayer walking typically involves a sense of walking in the company of Jesus through a particular place that needs prayer. The aim is to nurture attentiveness to the work of the Holy Spirit that leads ultimately to obedience to God.

Silence: Silence is a regenerative practice of attending and listening to God in quiet, without interruption and noise. Silence offers a way of paying attention to the Spirit of God and what He brings to the surface of our souls. Silence opens up the contents of our hearts, allowing us deeper access to God than we experience at other times. Silence is a time to rest in God.

Solitude: The practice of solitude involves having an uninterrupted time in a distraction-free environment where we experience isolation to be alone with God. Solitude opens a space to bring our vulnerable and compulsive selves to God. Solitude is a formative place because it gives God's Spirit time and space to work deeply within us. Solitude serves as a valuable context for self-discovery, enabling us to learn from our inner selves when we disconnect from the constant external stimuli that surround us. Solitude is frequently linked with silence, for without silence, there is no solitude. However, solitude does not always depend on physical isolation; even in a crowd, we can seek God's guidance to create our own sacred space of solitude, the solitude of the heart. This emphasis on the solitude of the heart is particularly significant within the context of this portfolio.

Spiritual disciplines: Spiritual disciplines are actions of body, heart, and mind that we actually do to promote spiritual growth. They are habits of devotion, habits of experiential Christianity that have been practiced by God's people. It is participation in the kingdom of God and fellowship with Christ. It is initiated by the grace of God to begin a journey of growing in the grace of God, maturing in the faith and seeking the holiness that is the life of Christ.

Spiritual formation: Spiritual formation is the process of transforming the inner dimension of the human being. It is being shaped in such a way that the character of Christ is naturally expressed by the power of the Holy Spirit in every dimension of the human personality. The spiritual formation of a believer results in participation in the divine nature and escape from the corruption of the world caused by evil desires. Spiritual formation may

vary according to one's state in life, but all are called to grow in the life of grace.

Transcendence: God's transcendence means that He, in His holiness and His righteousness, is beyond the reach of His creation. God is exalted in His royal dignity and exercises both control and authority over His creation. Neither by an act of our will nor by our own reasoning can we possibly come to understand God or experience Him personally. However, this does not imply that God is distant from His creation to the point where we cannot understand His self-revelation in the Scripture or establish a connection with Him. On the contrary, God continuously seeks to reveal Himself to His creation.

CHAPTER I:
INTRODUCTION OF MY SPIRITUAL JOURNEY AND PORTFOLIO

A journey serves as an apt metaphor for a Christian's life, rich with meaning and purpose. Life's journey is a process of change in character, deed, and worldview. The most important change in a Christian is the inward transformation that leads them to Christlikeness and a closer relationship with God. Through spiritual experiences, a Christian is formed and matures, seeking to attain the whole measure of the fullness of Christ (Ephesians 4:13). A Christian's spiritual life can also be viewed as a tree growing in the soil of God's grace. Just as a tree absorbs sunlight, water and nutrients for its growth, a Christian's growth is nurtured by the abundant grace of God through the Holy Spirit (Psalm 1:3).

My spiritual journey began in an entirely non-Christian environment in South Korea. God, in His amazing grace, converted me to believe in Him as my Saviour. Christlikeness gradually formed in me, although I am still immature in various ways. God cultivated a desire in my heart to serve those who had not heard the name Jesus and sent me to plant a church in Cambodia, a Buddhist country. He created something incomparably precious in my heart and in my mission field. Looking back on my life, I see God's gracious guidance and protection clearly revealed. I cannot imagine how much more I did not recognize. All these years I have been blessed with good education and training opportunities

that have equipped me with knowledge, guidelines on how to live life and a desire to serve God and His people.

However, my journey toward God, probably like everyone else's, has been challenging. I have struggled daily to experience His presence. Although I desired to know God better and better, as my prayer went deeper and deeper, I often felt that it was not effective, making me thirsty. Despite my wholehearted devotion, my inner self needed something more to live an abundant life in Christ. Self-measured faithfulness did not guarantee an authentic Christian life. I endeavoured to acquire more knowledge and serve more diligently to demonstrate my faithfulness and dedication, hoping that it would shape me to be more like Christ. However, I realized that all the knowledge and experiences I had acquired up to that point were not sufficient to transform my deepest self. What I needed was more than collecting pieces of knowledge about God and more than hard ministry work to serve God and His people.

In my Christian circles—both my Korean evangelical community and the Cambodian Christian community I belong to—Christianity is viewed chiefly as a matter of doctrines to believe and duties to perform. I was taught that we are saved and transformed by hearing the truths contained in Bible, and I was encouraged to read, hear, and be exhorted by it. Being a disciple of Christ meant being trained to live out the teachings of the Bible. I thought that the busier a Christian was in studying and serving, the more faithful they were. To become more spiritual—in other words, to live an abundant Christian life—I needed to collect more knowledge about the Bible and dedicate my life to serving my

community. The quality of a Christian's life was assessed by the amount of work they had done and its tangible results, which was seen as a sign of God's favour.

However, I came to realize that outwardly faithful work was not always fruitful in regard to my inner life. I needed something more than the individual and group activities that had been recognized and encouraged in my Christian circles—something more than the knowledge of Bible and more than simply striving to win souls or do some social activities. I desired to find something more and deeper—something that would lead to the transformation of my life. My thirst for something more made me want to hear Him who speaks. I learned that I needed an active relationship with God to hear Him well. I had never thought of building a relationship with God because I assumed the relationship had been fixed by Him and was not something for a creature like me to develop. I wanted to learn how to create and develop such a relationship and live a genuine Christian life with vibrant spirituality. Through literature, I found that many spiritual formation methods had been used by the saints for a long time. I had never practiced these intentionally. However, during my self-evaluation, I realized that I was practicing a few of these old practices. The way I read and meditated on the Bible was similar to *lectio divina*, even though I had never learned it. Perhaps good spiritual practices naturally arise to seekers, although learning from those who have already experienced such practices is the most effective way to learn them.

Although self-directed study had its merits, I soon realized that it was insufficient to fully satisfy my thirst for knowledge. It became evident that I

required a more structured and comprehensive approach to my learning. It was during this time that I came across the Doctor of Ministry program at Tyndale University, which offered the ideal opportunity for furthering my education. During my time at Tyndale, I discovered the profound value of drawing wisdom from those who came before us. Their aspiration throughout history upheld the core characteristics of Christ's life and formed a variety of spiritual traditions (Foster 1988, xvi). These traditions led them to experience God's power, glory, and love for them as they lived in this world. Although the diversity of traditions sometimes divides God's people against one another, I believe that God wants us to enjoy His gifts and use them for His glory and the common good of His body, and also to seek unity in Christ. Collectively, these many traditions provide a variety of practices that are all valuable tools for growth and maturity (Jones 2005, 29). Teachings and practices that have been established and preserved in each tradition can complement each other to guide Christians on their journey towards Christlikeness, through the gracious work of the Holy Spirit.

While exploring the various spiritual practices that our forebears employed to become more like Christ, I sought to learn fundamental spiritual disciplines to nurture my inner life. I hoped they would balance my evangelical roots with wisdom from other traditions, help me to engage in a dynamic relationship with God, and teach me to conform to the image of Christ throughout my life journey.

During my DMin studies, I experienced rediscovery of my identity as a beloved child of God. This realization awakened within me a deep understanding that this privilege is meant to be enjoyed in every aspect of my daily life. I learned

that my relationship with God is not determined by my actions, but rather on the truth of who I am in Him. As I embraced this truth, my spirituality began to flourish on a deeper level. I discovered the richness of enjoying God's presence and the Holy Spirit working within me to guide me in every dimension of my life. With this newfound understanding, I eagerly anticipated that the character of Christ would flow naturally through my daily life as a result of my ongoing spiritual formation. To facilitate this transformative process, I thought I would need disciplined practices that would foster attentiveness to God's presence, while relying on the indwelling guidance of the Holy Spirit. In my exploration, I found that silence and solitude played a vital role in experiencing and enjoying God's presence. These practices brought me comfort, allowing me to rest in the presence of God. Drawing from my learning and experiences, I developed a spiritual formation model that placed a strong emphasis on the transformative power of silence, as described in the third chapter of this portfolio.

I believe that a life lived in constant awareness of God's presence throughout every moment of the journey will naturally grow and mature, like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither (Psalm 1:3). Just as a tree thrives by absorbing sunlight, water, and nutrients from its surroundings, a Christian will grow and mature in the nourishing soil of God, bearing fruit through the transformative work of the Holy Spirit (Phillips 2015, 205). Just as the plant enriches the soil it grows in, those who bear fruit through God's grace shall enrich the soil of the community where

others may root themselves. In the same way, I want to enrich my soil in my own community, contributing to its growth and flourishing.

For over seventeen years, I have served as a missionary in Cambodia, dedicating my efforts to teaching and preaching God's Word and encouraging people to follow all that Christ has commanded us. However, I sensed a deep calling to offer something more to those in my mission field—something that would help them develop effective prayer lives, discern God's will, walk closely with Jesus, grow in Christlikeness, and nurture their relationship with God. I wanted to share with others what had transformed my own life and how they too could experience spiritual formation and grow in their relationship with the Triune God. Driven by this desire to share what I had learned and experienced, I embarked on a research project that was detailed in the fourth chapter of this portfolio. Through this endeavour, I sought to develop practical methods that could effectively guide new believers or those with limited exposure to spiritual disciplines on their journey toward Christlike transformation. It is my hope that these methods will be instrumental in helping individuals cultivate a deeper spiritual life. Understanding that I cannot lead others into spiritual formation unless I myself have been transformed, I have made it a priority to establish a solid foundation of spiritual formation in my own life as the cornerstone of my ministry—I can minister out of what I am. That is why this portfolio is important for both my Cambodian friends and me.

In the next chapter, I will discuss my spiritual journey in more detail through a spiritual autobiography.

CHAPTER II:

A SPIRITUAL AUTOBIOGRAPHY

My life has been abundantly blessed in every way by the boundless grace of God. Once lost in the depths of darkness, but God illuminated my path. In His providential care, God's love embraced me even when I did not acknowledge His presence. Despite my transgressions, God protected and preserved me. Whenever I stumbled, the merciful God prevented me from being completely crushed. His boundless grace touched my heart and shaped me into a believer who aspired to be like Christ and serve as a missionary for His people. Like a tree nourishing by streams of water, I blossomed in the fertile ground of God's grace. The Lord worked in me, like a farmer tending to his trees, sowing seeds, watering, weeding, and pruning. This chapter serves as a testimony of how the gracious God blessed and guided my life's journey.

Beginning in Obedience

My life began in an ordinary family in South Korea. I was raised in the midst of Korean culture—a patriarchal, Confucian society with a Buddhist influence. During my childhood, most people in the war-torn country struggled to survive, and their children were left unattended. Very few parents could afford a kindergarten education for their children. My childhood playground was a street with heavy traffic. One day I was hit by a bicycle while playing with other boys

on the street. They took me to a clinic nearby to get a few stitches on my forehead. Practically no playgrounds were available for children in this poverty-stricken country. I now wonder if churches might have allowed children to play in the churchyard. However, I cannot recall any church around my house. Nobody around me, including my family, was a Christian as far as I knew. The word church was not in my vocabulary at that time.

The beginning of my school days brought me a sense of liberation. The huge school playground fascinated me, although it was crowded with children. The crowdedness extended to my classroom. Teachers frequently found it difficult to pay attention to or control children in classrooms that were packed with more than eighty children. However, I was happy that I could come to school every day. The crowdedness of the classroom did not bother me. I accepted whatever situation was given to me. It is no wonder that I was unable to understand what was good and what was bad, since I had never experienced or imagined any better system. I knew very little about what was happening in other parts of the world or even in the neighbouring villages. Perhaps I was too young to complain about the circumstances I was in. I was an obedient child, partly due to my father's discipline. Like other fathers in Korea, mine taught me that obedience to adults was a virtue for children. Never did I dare to harbour any ideas that were rebellious to adults. It was my holy duty to comply with the rules and adjust myself to the circumstances. My grandfather taught me to read and write. He frequently took me to a riverside and encouraged me to practice throwing pebbles into the river with my right hand. He wanted to change me from

left- to right-handed, for he believed that I should comply with the norms within a society where right-handers were dominant.

Fortunately, the educational system at that time was in better shape than in other societies. Most teachers were filled with a sense of mission and worked hard to teach students despite poor facilities and insufficient government support. I recall most of my teachers having warm hearts: they were kind and considerate, although a few teachers sometimes chose to flog children to control the crowded classrooms. I have warm memories of teachers whose encouragement strengthened me. People respected teachers in Korea, which gave them confidence and self-esteem in their work. There is an old saying: teachers, parents, and the king should be respected equally.

Impoverished But Not in Despair

My younger days were stricken by poverty. The elementary school I attended had many children from orphanages—as much as a third of the students. This was one piece of evidence that the shadow of war was still darkening many parts of the country. The school was a good example of that reality. The children were mostly from low-income families, including mine. Nevertheless, my school life was enjoyable and smooth in every way. Even the financial difficulties of my parents did not bother me much. I just accepted that life was supposed to be like that. I thought my family just happened to live in poverty. I did not covet what my few wealthy friends had, although I might have had a little sense of envy. The sixth graders usually took a three-day field trip, which was an activity that every child loved. When I received a notice of the field trip from school, I did not

inform my parents. I had already decided that I should not participate in the field trip when my parents could hardly afford it. This was all right with me, for I was aware that my family was poor, and I could do nothing about it. I might have felt slightly disappointed with my situation, but it never seriously hurt me. Later, my parents heard about the field trip and discovered that I had not told them about it. My parents said nothing about it, but they must have been hurt, not by my decision but by the reality of their financial situation. Early in the morning on the day of departure, however, my mother put a roll of money into my palm and let me pack my stuff and go to school to join the field trip.

My situation worsened in my high school days. Like most people, I believed that the only way to get out of poverty was to be educated at a renowned university and get a decent job. Since achieving an excellent academic record in high school was crucial for admission to the university, I made myself busy wrestling with a pile of books. Since I did not have my own room in my house, I usually stayed at school to study by myself until very late—say, eleven o'clock in the evening. I sometimes went to a private study room where I rented a desk to study overnight. I slept only three to four hours a night, leaning over the desk. The school did not provide lunch—I doubt any school in Korea did at the time—so students had to bring their own from home. Since I had no pocket money, whenever I spent the night in the private study room I had to give up lunch. Skipping a meal was never a happy occasion, but I thought it was all right, for I presumed that it was inevitable to sacrifice the present day's comforts for a

brighter future. I now believe God's gracious hand comforted me so I wouldn't lose hope, even though I was not yet a believer.

Then, my goal of earning a college admission hit a wall. It happened while I was preparing my college application. I was going to apply to Seoul National University (SNU), which was undoubtedly the best university in Korea. However, my father wanted me to study in my hometown, which was 300 km away from Seoul. He thought he could not afford my living expenses if I went to Seoul, where the living costs were much higher. Moreover, he thought I would have a better chance of getting a scholarship if I chose a school in my hometown. I stubbornly insisted that I would be able to take care of myself if he only paid the tuition for the first semester. I was disobeying and defying my father's authority. Our argument drove him into fury. My father said, "It is not a school that makes a man great. It is how you perform, whichever school you may study in, that determines your future. You can achieve what you want at any school." SNU was such a prestigious school in Korea that admission there was the dream of every high school student. Most parents would be willing to do whatever to help their children get accepted by SNU. My chance to pass the entrance exam was high, I thought; nonetheless, my father disapproved of my dream.

Disappointed and saddened, I did not know what to do. My brother, who was running a small business in Seoul, came home after hearing the story and talked with my father all night. The next morning, he returned to Seoul, saying to me, "Father will be all right. Don't worry. Prepare yourself for the entrance exam." My father did not say anything, which I took as silent approval.

Fortunately, I got accepted by SNU. My father said, upon hearing my acceptance, “Well done, son. Now, take some rest.” I believed that this was the kindest thing that he could ever say. I was so happy to hear those words from him. For a while he was busy receiving congratulations from his friends because of my success. He must have felt proud of himself and me. He seemed to regret what he had said to me a few months before. I believe now that God was at work in those days even though I did not know Him. God protected me from irreversible despair and prepared my way.

However, my first year at SNU was a tumultuous journey through the depths of hardship. It was my first time living alone away from home, and a big city like Seoul was a tough place for an inexperienced young man to survive without anyone’s help. My brother was struggling with his business and could not help me. I had to work to support myself—tuition plus living expenses. There were many things in college life that I wanted to experience, but my financial situation did not allow me to even dream of it. I worked hard but was not able to control things well enough. Furthermore, I lost my part-time job in the middle of the first semester, which was a disaster for me. It caused me to lose my shelter and food.

One of my friends kindly allowed me to share his room until I found a new place, but he could not offer me food. All that I had left in my pocket was about one quarter of a dollar. I tried to buy as much food as the money would allow, and I decided to buy a loaf of bread. It was good for one or two meals for an active young man, but I lived on that bread for seven days! I stayed in my room all day

long, forgetting about school the entire week. I had no money left to take a bus to school, and no strength to commute on foot, which would take three hours each way. Most of all, I had no more desire to go and sit in the classroom. The only thing I was concerned about was how I could successfully get through the financial crisis I was facing.

However, I did not resent or complain about anyone or the circumstances. I only asked myself what I should do to control the situation. I went to the school to look for friends who lived in the area, hoping that I could get help from them because it did not seem like there was any other option for me to overcome the crisis. The money I borrowed from them saved me from starving to death. Finally, I found a new job before it was too late. What a relief that was. I believe that God's loving touch kept me from giving up or falling into complete despair. However, throughout this hard time, it never occurred to me that I should give thanks to God, or that I could pray whenever a crisis threatened me. Nothing filled up space in my mind except seeking a way to survive as an inexperienced young student in a strange city. The spiritual realm never arose in my mind. Even dreaming of being a scientist—a dream of mine since elementary school—seemed like a luxury to me, considering the hardship I faced. A little physical comfort and security was the only thing I sought. The animal instinct for survival was controlling my mind and heart.

When I advanced to my sophomore year in college, my exterior life stabilized because I maintained a steady job to support myself. I also progressed academically, which I thought was essential for my career development. A

scholarship in my junior year helped to make my journey smoother and more comfortable. College life became enjoyable in many ways.

I believe God's grace kept me safe in harsh living conditions, even when I was far from believing in Him. God gave me the strength to overcome financial hardship without despair or deep hurt and to study hard without complaining so I could move forward toward my life goal. The experience of financial hardship trained me not to be afraid of living in poverty. I became confident that financial difficulties would not be a major problem blocking my way forward. This confidence helped me to pursue my goals in life without fear and, later, to courageously follow God's calling when He invited me to become a missionary, leaving financial security behind. Thus, through the trials of suffering, hope arose and established itself, providing me with the strength to persevere, and through that perseverance, my character was moulded (Romans 5:3). God must have had a merciful plan for my future even before I knew Him.

My Dream of Science

The public and school library systems in South Korea were so poor that most students did not have many opportunities to read books. When I was in elementary school, I sometimes rented books from private stores that rented out comics and other kinds of books. The books that attracted my interest were those about the natural sciences. Although the knowledge I obtained through the books was rudimentary, it introduced me to a captivating new world of science. I read books on physics, chemistry, biology, and geology. Astronomy was the most exciting subject to me at that time. The scientific knowledge I obtained from these

books was not the only thing about them that brought me joy; the photos of Nobel Prize laureates printed on the inside of a book cover caused me to adore the heroes of science. It was then that I made up my mind to make myself one of them in the future. The dream of becoming a scientist settled deep into my heart at that time and did not deteriorate for decades. When I reached the point where I had to decide on my future career, I never hesitated: I chose the path that would lead me to become a scientist. A few years later, I heard the news about Neil Armstrong, who left the first footprint on the lunar surface. Naturally, I was much more excited than any other boy my age at the news.

Science appealed to me not only as an academic interest but also as a crucial opportunity for social success in a developing country that offered scientists a wide range of choices. As I prepared for the college entrance exam, I studied hard to achieve an excellent academic record, especially in the last two years of high school. Studying at SNU was an excellent opportunity for my career development as a scientist. My academic achievements at SNU led me to continue studying for a master's degree. My dream of becoming a scientist was coming along smoothly, and my financial situation no longer bothered me. Studying in advanced countries like the U.S. was a dream held by most Korean students; I actually got to experience that dream. God opened a way for me to study for a PhD at The University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, Michigan. I enjoyed the science as well as a joyful life in Michigan. After completing my studies at Michigan, my dream of being a scientist came true. I moved to California to work at The Scripps Research Institute. Then, my career as a scientist continued in

Korea. Working as a scientist was joyous, and teaching students at a university was satisfying. God prepared a way for me even before I knew Him.

God also utilized my experience and background as a scientist for my missionary work. I started my service as a missionary by teaching students biological science at a university in Cambodia. It was an excellent way to get to know young adults, who trusted me as a teacher. The science I taught fascinated them, since they had never learned top-end science. Once they had accepted me as a trustworthy science teacher, they trusted me and listened when I told them about non-science subjects, including the gospel. Science became a helpful tool for my ministry in Cambodia. God used what He had prepared in me for His ministry.

Raised in a Non-Christian Culture

There was not a single Christian in my family, as far as I knew. I had never been exposed to Christian culture or environments until I was in college. Although there were a few prior encounters, none of them significantly impacted my perspective on Christianity. During my sixth-grade year, a friend invited me to attend his church, sparking a brief debate between us. He said everyone must believe in Jesus to go to heaven, which did not make sense to me at the time. I argued that if I had to choose a religion, I would adopt Buddhism because it fit best with our culture and tradition. He countered that it would be absurd to worship a big rock or an old tree or any image made of such materials, referring to Buddhism mixed with shamanism, which was the popular version of Buddhism in Korea at that time. I agreed with him that this was absurd, but I did not accept

his invitation to church. I thought religion was unnecessary for me. I was in the darkness, away from God's saving light.

If I had chosen to get involved in a religion of any sort, it would have been Confucianism, which constituted a significant part of the moral and social foundation of Korea. Confucianism is not a religion per se; it is a philosophy or set of ethics. At any rate, I was taught Confucianism by my parents and society, including school teachers. Confucianism taught me what my goals should be and the attitude I should have toward society: to become a good person who was obedient to my parents, willing to take responsibility for my family, trusted by my friends, and hopefully capable of contributing to society's welfare.

Around fifth grade, I began to understand what churches and other Christian groups did, at least in part. I heard about the church groups operating the orphanages that cared for some of my friends. I realized that there were a few churches in the villages nearby. They must have been there for a long time, but I did not notice them. I saw a Carmelite Monastery on my way to school, which they said was a cloistered monastery. It made me curious, but I could never imagine what was happening in the monastery. It was not surprising that there were many things in the world that a young child like me could not understand. Sadly, what really surprises me is that nothing has substantially changed in me after half a century—there are still so many things in the world I cannot understand, perhaps more than before.

I also found out that some of my friends attended churches on Sundays. They sometimes sang hymns at school, but I had no idea what the songs were

about and why they were singing them. Through them, I heard about the name of Jesus, whom the churchgoers believed in. I, of course, did not understand what it meant to believe. I just thought they liked the man named Jesus, who must have been a great man, or that Jesus was someone like Buddha to whom many people around me prayed. The existence of a divine being did not seem true to me and was beyond my comprehension, even though I was sometimes scared by a ghost story that my brother made up and told me. Around that time, in the late 1960s, the Christian population in South Korea was about 5% of the total population, and nominal Buddhists were about 70% (Kim 2002, 12).

Christianity still did not have much influence on me. Since my grandfather was the oldest member of our extended family, our house became a popular meeting place for visiting relatives. Many relatives would come to our home, giving me the opportunity to meet them. During these visits, I often sat next to my grandfather as he conversed with our guests. One thing that I found peculiar was that neither my grandfather nor the guests ever talked about church or Jesus. It was as if the two words never existed in their dictionary. Looking back, I have concluded that there were no Christians in my family. It was amazing grace that I became the first Christian in my entire family a decade later.

During my high school years, I had more chances to meet Christian friends. On one occasion, a friend of mine invited me to the library of the church he attended. We had a good time together, reading books and casually discussing various school-related matters. However, he did not invite me to attend a worship service or discuss the teachings of the gospel with me. On another occasion, I

happened to overhear some of my Christian friends talking about their churches and the various activities they were involved in. Some of the activities sounded like intriguing opportunities for social engagement, and I was interested in getting involved with them. However, unfortunately, no one invited me to join them. I was utterly ignorant of spiritual life. Worldly success was my only concern. The only way for me to escape from the pit of poverty seemed to be to get a degree at a good school and find a decent job.

As I entered college and went through tough times, my concerns began to broaden and shift to things beyond physical wealth. My inner self sought answers to some fundamental questions, such as the meaning and value of life. However, I could not afford to pay much attention to philosophical or spiritual matters because I was so absorbed in the pursuit of worldly success. Around that time, I was introduced to the gospel by a classmate for the first time in my life. However, a lengthy debate with the friend led me to conclude that the gospel did not resonate with me. It did not seem to provide the answers I was seeking regarding the meaning and value of life. I, therefore, refused the invitation to church. However, there was one thing that impressed me during the dialogue. When I asked the friend what had happened to the good and respectable people who did not have a chance to hear the gospel, the friend said, “I don’t know exactly. But I believe my Father in heaven has handled that matter in the right and fairest way because my Father is good and righteous.” The answer did not satisfy my expectations. However, the answer made me wonder: “Ah, that is how she trusts her God. Is that what they call faith?” Although I vaguely tasted what faith meant

to a Christian, I was not touched strongly enough to change my thinking or belief system.

My struggle with self-identity and the ultimate purpose of my life continued. In fact, it was a time of spiritual turmoil and a desperate search for absolute truth. However, I did not recognize the core needs of my inner being. My mind became disoriented, lured by a worldly dream that grew stronger as I witnessed Korea's prosperity through its flourishing industries. Self-trust led me to rely solely on my own decisions, which were derived from my own reasoning. I accepted things only when they seemed understandable and reasonable to me, although I still acted unreasonably at times. Intellectualism was a kind of religion to me in many ways.

I admitted that I had fallen short in many ways, but it never occurred to me that I was a sinner. I reasoned that all human beings were in a situation like mine, and it was natural for most people to live this way. I even thought I was better than the people around me, although I knew I was far from perfection. Everyone around me seemed to seek only pleasure and happiness in their own way. I convinced myself that religion was just one way for people to seek mental peace and satisfaction. I agreed with the view that weak, weary, and scared people are eventually led to creating their own gods. I adhered to an ego-centric way of life. However, I could not deny that the thoughts and decisions of my ego could turn out to be wrong at any time. Thus, the ideas and beliefs I held did not give me absolute confidence. I knew that there were things that needed fixing in my life, but I did not know what to do.

Let There Be Light

I had an enlightening experience in my junior year of college. Getting up late on a Sunday morning, I strolled down the road in front of my house to buy something to eat from a convenience store. On my way back, I stopped when I heard a group of people singing over a brick wall. I noticed that the singing was from a church over the fence. There was a worship service being held, and it was a hymn that I was hearing. I stood there frozen, listening to their singing. After a while, I asked myself, “What are they singing, who are the people that are singing, and who am I, listening to their singing over the fence? Are they different from me? What makes them different from me?” My thoughts whirled slowly, leaping from one idea to another without a clear understanding. Yet in the midst of the confusion, a subtle but powerful feeling began to stir within me. When I look back, I realize that it was a gentle touch of the Holy Spirit. However, I did not notice or perhaps ignored it and resumed walking home. Nothing more took place in me that day. A few months later, I moved into a dormitory, where I met a Christian roommate. He and I became very close to each other. I talked with him about what I was seeking and struggling with: deep-seated suspicion about the reliability of my reasoning and worldview. I struggled with deep uncertainty, questioning whether the pursuit of earthly pleasures and worldly success really held the key to my ultimate happiness and contentment. He listened to me. I talked with him whenever we were both available. He shared the gospel with me, but I did not respond to it. One day he advised me to go to church, telling me it could help me find the answers I desperately sought. Surprisingly, I did not argue

or debate with him, unlike my prior responses. I said, “Yes.” I answered without hesitation as if I had been waiting for his invitation.

My first church experience, led by my roommate, occurred on the first Sunday of my senior year in college, and it went much smoother than I expected. Everyone around me was kind and considerate, and the sermons during the worship service seemed quite interesting and very informative to a beginner like me. As I attended the church regularly, I collected knowledge about God through the sermons, yet I was far from having faith in Jesus Christ.

I was quite successful at developing my career over the next few years. I received a Master of Science degree from a renowned institution and found a job at a research institute. I joined a Bible study group at the workplace. The Bible study group leader was a good man, and I enjoyed his leadership. The other members of the group were friendly. However, the leader left the group a year after I joined because he had to move to another place. Surprisingly, the other members persuaded me, a beginner, to take the leader’s place. Trusting the experienced members who promised that they would help me lead the group, I hesitantly said yes. From that day on, I piled up and read as many books as possible that might help me prepare to lead the Bible study. I studied hard. Not only did I learn much through self-guided study, but I also became increasingly interested in Scripture. Not very long after I had begun to study Bible carefully, the Holy Spirit led me to a revelatory moment. The pieces of knowledge about Jesus I had been collecting intertwined with one another and began to make sense to me. All of the dots became connected. It was as if the disconnected pearls I had

in my pocket were becoming connected one after another to form a beautiful necklace. Salvation through Jesus became crystal clear to me. Continued independent study accelerated my understanding of the Bible. It became a joy to read the Bible. Answers to my questions were revealed one by one. God created faith in Jesus in the soul of one who had once been completely secluded from Christian influence and the gospel. Although I had not yet experienced a personal encounter with Jesus or the intimate presence of God as a loving Father, the conviction of my salvation brought forth an overwhelming sense of joy and contentment. Water gushed forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert (Isaiah 35:6). God had a plan for me and guided me into His plan from the time before I knew Him. Numerous brothers and sisters joined together to lead me to Jesus. I had nothing, but God created in me what He wanted me to have.

Not surprisingly, the road for this young believer's journey was not smooth or question-free. However, any time I faced a hurdle, God's Word brought me the solution and better understanding. For example, I once struggled with a question about the duties that a believer should carry out. As my conversion to Christianity brought about a profound shift in my worldview and perception of life's value, I reasoned that believers must be substantially different from non-believers in their deeds and thus that they must be legally righteous at all times and do something for God in appreciation of the gift of salvation. I thought that if a believer did not show clear evidence of their faith through their works, they did not deserve the love of God. Therefore, I searched for things to do to prove that I was worthy of being loved by God. However, nothing that I did

seemed good enough to prove my worthiness. I was at a loss. I kept struggling until I encountered a phrase in the Epistle of Romans and meditated on it.

“Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation. However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness.” (Romans 4:4-5)

The Holy Spirit led me to a new understanding: “Even if I do nothing, I can come righteous before God because God counts me as righteous due to the faith I have in Him, who justifies the wicked. I just have to be His child and stay under His wings without having to prove my faith by doing anything.” It became clear that God already loved me, and I did not need to prove that I was worthy to be loved. It was a moment of new freedom and a quantum leap in my faith journey. The light of truth shone upon me, who had been living in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide my feet onto the path of peace. God’s Word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path (Psalm 119:105).

A New Journey with a New Companion

Around that time, God blessed me by allowing me to meet an excellent partner in my spiritual journey, like Mr. Faithful was for Christian in John Bunyan’s *Pilgrims Progress*. This partner was my wife, KyungYon. She was born to a Christian family and trained by the Navigators since her high school days. She taught me about the Bible as well as church life. She also shared my vision of being a missionary in the future. I moved to the U.S. right after I married her to pursue my dream of becoming a scientist, which I had held since elementary school. As I studied at the University of Michigan, I enjoyed being part of a church with her. We had many opportunities to worship and fellowship with

friends in the church. She was a great teacher and guide in my church life. Furthermore, she was my best prayer partner and later became a good companion in my ministry and my spiritual formation journey.

My church life in Michigan was a blessing, full of sweet memories with lovely church members and a variety of activities. I spent full Sundays at church, from early morning till evening. Most Saturdays involved enjoyable activities alongside church members, such as picnics, canoeing, baseball, volleyball, shopping, potlucks, and preparing for Sundays. I led three different Bible studies on weekdays. Although I was busy—perhaps too busy for a PhD student—with church activities, God blessed me with success in my studies. I completed the degree in just four years, which was a big surprise to my friends. Church life in Michigan nurtured my faith in Jesus. Joy filled my heart as I learned about Jesus and served Him and His church. With each step, I was assured that God was guiding my path with His abundant blessings.

God's Calling and Preparation for Ministry

I was on a retreat meeting in Michigan when the Lord called me to be a missionary. A minister from California was invited to be the speaker for the retreat. He regularly visited mission fields in many different regions to help missionaries and their ministries. He told us the challenging situations missionaries faced in these mission fields as they preached the gospel to unreached or less privileged people. He said they needed more missionaries to come and serve and invited us to participate in this holy duty. For unknown reasons, I felt I must be one of them. I thought I would be happy if I became a

missionary. I stood up and pledged to serve as a missionary, and my wife did the same. I did not know when God wanted us to leave for the mission field, but I was sure that the Lord would lead us in His time. My wife and I talked together at night with our newborn child cradled in my arms, and we both thought that God would send us to the mission field around the time that this child entered college. In the meantime, we thought that God would prepare us for the mission.

After completing my studies in Michigan, I moved to California to work at The Scripps Research Institute. I met a friend in a city near my workplace who was pastoring a newly planted church with a multicultural congregation. He asked me to join the church and help with his ministry. I agreed to do so and enjoyed it very much. Over time, as I was involved in various activities within the church, I noticed a deep longing within me—a fervent thirst for a deeper connection with God. This longing grew stronger with each passing day, revealing itself as an unquenchable desire to know God intimately and to enter more deeply into the wisdom contained in His Word. I felt that I could not overlook or suppress this overwhelming longing. I looked for help, but there was no one around me who knew what to do with this growing thirst for God and His truth. I needed someone who would guide me in learning God’s Word and experiencing Him on a deeper level. Reading the Bible by myself did not seem sufficient. I felt lonely. I thirsted. Now I see that the Holy Spirit made me feel this way.

There seemed to be only one solution. I said, “If I find no one who can help me, I have to help myself.” I thought the only option for me was to go to school to learn what I needed to address these feelings. Around that time, I

received an offer for a research position in Korea. My wife and I prayed, seeking His guidance. While I felt a calling to utilize my scientific expertise for the betterment of my homeland, my wife longed to be reunited with her family in Korea. We interpreted this as God's direction. As soon as I got to Korea, I registered for a Master of Divinity (MDiv) program in a seminary. I did not want to become a pastor; my initial plan was to serve as a layman missionary in the future. I enrolled simply to quench my thirst for God. At any rate, I enjoyed learning at the seminary. Looking back, I now understand that God had intensified my longing for Him to prepare me for my upcoming ministry, although I remained uncertain about the specifics of what and where God intended for me to serve.

God's Guidance and Shaping a Missionary in Me

After completing my MDiv, I started serving as a youth pastor in a local church part-time, and I also took a job as a scientist and professor. I enjoyed teaching young adults in the church, and new friends made my church life more abundant. I was given opportunities to make many mission trips, both domestic and abroad, widening my view of the mission field. Meanwhile, I enjoyed my science work. It was reasonably fruitful, and educating the next generation of scientists was satisfying. My success as a scientist sometimes tempted me to succumb to worldly values. However, what motivated me most was the desire for scientific accomplishments that would contribute to the welfare of people, which I believed was the duty of Christian scientists. God allowed me to enjoy what I

wanted to do since elementary school and see it as a part of my mission to serve the world that God loves so much.

In this way, God prepared me for cross-cultural ministry for nearly nineteen years. One day, I felt the time had come when I, like Abraham, should leave my country, my people and my father's household and go to the land God showed me (Genesis 12:1). The time had come to leave comfort and security behind, switching to another type of mission. I do not recall anything in particular that made me change my course. I just felt that it was time. My wife, after sharing what was happening in me, responded by quoting a Bible passage from the fourteenth chapter of First Samuel, where Jonathan wanted to attack the Philistine garrison alone. Hearing Jonathan's bold plan, his armour bearer said, "Do whatever you have in mind. I am with you heart and soul." The passion and conviction I felt on the day that I pledged to serve as a missionary never waned. It was in the center of my heart throughout the years. I had just been waiting for the day when God would tell me the right time to wrap up one chapter of my life and begin the next. The Holy Spirit rekindled my desire. I suddenly realized that the time had come. God guided me into the next stage of my journey. I began to wind down my work as a professor, which took three years. Hence, the Lord gave me the desire to make disciples from less-privileged people, baptizing them and teaching them to obey everything Jesus commanded (Matthew 28:19-20). All that I wanted was that God's will would be done in my life.

Around that time, the Lord sent me a great helper, an older man named Moses, who influenced me regarding my spiritual life. He was born and lived in

Korea when the country was going through political, social, and diplomatic turmoil due to the Japanese colonial regime and the Korean War. He graduated from high school, but he had learned little at school during those turbulent days. He became a nominal Catholic out of obedience to his mother. He had no faith, no knowledge, and no real interest in becoming a Catholic. After a long while, however, he had a mystical experience. Although he did not share all the details of the experience, he told me that he received an amazing gift of grace from God. God quickly filled him with faith and knowledge. He was given a deep understanding of the Bible even though he had never received theological education, not even a Bible class at a local church. He gained the power to heal the sick. Later, he was recognized by the Catholic Church of Korea as the leader of the Layperson Spiritual Revival Movement.

I often met with Moses to ask for advice and guidance. I once was praying for God's guidance about a decision for quite a long time. I wanted to hear God's voice. However, I could not hear any answers and felt that time was running out. I decided to go to see Moses and ask for help. I asked, "I prayed about this, but God did not give me an answer. What should I do?" After being silent for a time, Moses said, "You can choose whatever you feel like doing as long as you are determined to do God's work. God will take care of whatever you choose. Even if you end up making a wrong choice, don't you think God can take care of it for you? You may choose to take whichever way you feel like going. It is the gift of freedom you may enjoy in God. God is your Father." This was very encouraging for me to hear and helped me recognize my freedom in the Lord. He refreshed my

spirit every time we met. Moses was a great helper to me. I believe that God sent him to prepare me for the mission field.

Cambodia as My Mission Field

Although I had decided to leave for the mission field, I did not know where I should serve. Many countries were among the candidates, but making the decision was not easy for me. I prayed that the Lord would lead me to the right place and asked my wife to pray about it with me. At first, I became interested in Cuba. I thought the Cuban government would not welcome American missionaries since the two countries were not on good terms then. A Korean missionary like me might have a better chance of working there. Since I worked as a researcher and professor in the field of immunology for decades, I could serve as a missionary in Cuba while disguised as a scientist. This seemed like an excellent way to gain entry into the communist country. I looked for research institutions I could work for in Cuba and found a suitable candidate. I began to take a Spanish class.

One day a friend from my prayer group suggested I serve in Cambodia, which she had some knowledge of after having paid it several missionary visits. She said that another prayer group she was part of was supporting the Cambodian mission. They had sent a young missionary to Cambodia a year before, but her performance was not satisfactory. While they were struggling to find a strategy to reinforce the endeavour, an old missiology professor suggested that she could visit Cambodia and help the team discern a better way to serve. This professor, Dr. Chun Jae-oak, had been the first female missionary in Korean church history,

serving in Pakistan in the 1960s. She wanted someone to go with her to Cambodia. My friend asked me to go with the professor. At first, I did not want to accept her invitation. Having made several trips to mission fields in Central and South America, I could imagine what the situation in Cambodia was like. It was well known that Cambodians were suffering from financial and social difficulties and political turmoil. If I saw their suffering with my own eyes, I thought I would not be able to turn my back on them. I did not want to choose my mission field based on my emotions; I wanted God to decide whom and where I should serve. However, I could not find a good excuse to refuse their invitation. I talked with the support team about their vision for Cambodia and found out that they wanted to help with education. They were graduates of Ewha University and were working there as professors. Ewha University was established by a missionary from the U.S. in the late Nineteenth Century, and as such, they believed they were beneficiaries of the sacrifice and devotion of U.S. missionaries. They wanted to pay their founders back by educating people in other developing countries. The missiology professor and I visited Cambodia for two weeks in 2002. We met thirty-eight missionaries, who taught us about Cambodia's current situation and the programs they were carrying out. At the end of my visit, I produced a report and a proposal for the support team. In addition to this written report, I made a presentation on my findings at their request. At the end of the presentation, I closed with, "This is your project," and I left the room. I did not expect to have anything more to do with Cambodia.

However, a few days later, the same friend visited me. She said the presentation room was filled with excitement after I left. They loved my proposed plan. However, they could not answer the question, “Who will go there and carry out the plan?” After a lengthy discussion, they concluded that the one who prepared the report and proposal should complete the work. Thus, they asked me to go to Cambodia as a missionary. My friend said, “You are the one who set a fire in our hearts, so you must take care of it!” Although I had no interest in Cambodia as my mission field at that time, I promised her that I would pray about it. So, I prayed to ask the Lord if Cambodia was the mission field He was preparing for me. Although I prayed with a sincere heart every day, I received no answers from the Lord in the subsequent three months. But I did not fret about not receiving a response. I thought I could sit and wait for God’s guidance if I had to. I believed that God would reveal His will in His time because it was His work, after all.

A few months later, something happened one morning when I was doing my daily Bible reading. I sat alone on a chair in my office, a quiet place. I felt quite comfortable and relaxed. As usual, I prayed for the Holy Spirit’s help before I began to read the Bible. In accordance with my reading schedule, the passage I read was the sixteenth chapter of Acts. Verse nine drew my attention as I read. Paul had a vision of a Macedonian man standing and begging him, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.” I meditated on this verse, trying to hear from the Lord. I do not remember how long it took before a shift occurred in my mind. All of a sudden, the passage “Come over to Macedonia and help us” came to me with the

wording changed: “GO over to Macedonia and help THEM.” I felt odd. Not long after, I wondered if this was God calling me to go to Cambodia. I prayed and meditated on the verse for a few more weeks. Every time I did, it brought peace and joy into my spirit. Sharing what I felt with my wife and others made me more confident. I was especially reassured by my wife’s unwavering support for my decision. I found peace knowing that she was willing to accept Cambodia as our future home. Finally, I concluded that God was calling me to Cambodia. The Holy Spirit working in me led me to Cambodia.

As I prepared for my departure to Cambodia, a fear came upon me: “What will I do when I face hardship and tribulation in Cambodia?” I could imagine various difficulties that might occur in the mission field. I was sure that I could handle any physical hardship that would come during the ministry since I trusted God’s helping hand to sustain me. However, there was one thing I feared more than anything: “What if the love I have now for the lost souls of Cambodia grows weaker and weaker? How can I keep sustaining myself in such a situation?” For weeks, I prayed and sought guidance from God. And then, one day during my prayer, God reminded me of a passage in the Epistle of Romans:

For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. (Romans 8:20-21)

As I meditated on this passage, many thoughts came to me. I realized that I might become angry or disappointed with the Cambodians, or I might lose the passion I had in the beginning stages of the ministry. The people I love might even turn away from the truth and return to their old ways. My concern expanded to

encompass the whole of creation during my meditation. It reminded me that the fall of humanity caused the world to be broken and distorted. I considered the fact that sin brought about every kind of pain we may experience now—natural disasters, diseases, conflict and violence, mental pain, spiritual loneliness, and death. Everything in the universe is still in great pain. The hatred between people can be found wherever one might go. Because of sin, violence has become the primary solution for conflicts. Some people are ready to kill their neighbours to satisfy their greed. Nature suffers in a similar way. While a lion chases an antelope, a cheetah attacks the lion's cubs. Under the shade of tall trees, small trees cannot grow. Invisible bacteria spit out chemicals to kill neighbouring bacteria. A human being collapses under the attack of tiny viruses. We are all struggling. We are all subjected to frustration. The Cambodians whom I was going to meet were no exception.

The question I then asked myself was, "What should I do when I see them floating away from the truth after a while? Can I love them in the same way I do now?" However, the Bible tells me that it is not by its own choice but by the will of the one who subjected it (Romans 8:20). This verse was difficult to understand, despite my efforts to seek understanding through various commentaries. I persisted in meditating on it for an entire month, longing for a deeper understanding. Finally, the Holy Spirit spoke to me, shedding light on the meaning that was relevant to me. I heard, "Yes, I'm the one who made creation subjected to frustration. You can do nothing about it. What will you do while you live and work with people who are also subjected to frustration?" I meditated

again until the Holy Spirit gave me an answer to the question: “If I am capable of doing something valuable through any small occasion, by any chance, in my whole life, the only thing I can do is to embrace and love those who are subjected to frustration. They are subjected to frustration, not by their own choice, but by the will of the One who subjected it.” Comfort came back to me. The fear was gone. The Lord encouraged me to dispel my fear and remain steadfast. “All I hope to see is that we all will be liberated from our bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God” (Romans 8:22). I was given peace about my journey to Cambodia by God’s grace.

God Prepared a Place for My Ministry

My first ministry endeavour in Cambodia, at my wife’s suggestion, was teaching at the Royal University of Phnom Penh (RUPP). I had already arranged for a volunteer teaching position at the department of biology before I left Korea. In this role, I taught senior-year students using English as the medium of instruction, and I found great pleasure in sharing my knowledge of the biological sciences. I chose to teach at RUPP because a university is an excellent place to meet young adults. The primary goal of my ministry was to raise up young adults as church leaders and, hopefully, leaders within the broader society. I chose young adults as the primary target of my ministry because Cambodia was a relatively young country in terms of age distribution. People between 15 to 24 years represented 18.3% of the total population in 1998. Those under 14 years made up 42.8% of the population in 1998 (National Institute of Statistics 1998).

RUPP assigned me an office, which was a treat, for most lecturers did not have private offices. It was a great privilege to sit in front of a desk in a tiny dusty office to begin my day with prayer and reading the Bible. My office was located at the corner of the building where there were few passers-by, which provided me with a calm space most of the day. It also brought me joy that I had very few phone calls to disturb the quiet space—I used to have too many phone calls when working in Korea. Solitude was an unexpected blessing, which helped me to settle down.

The Lord blessed me through these quiet times at the office. Reading and meditating upon God’s Word helped me experience His grace. Once I was reading the last chapter of John’s gospel in my office. After the resurrection, Jesus met His disciples, who were still in despair, making their own way through life. The Lord ate with them. As they finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon, son of John, do you truly love me more than these?” Peter said, “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you” (John 21:15). Jesus repeated the question three times. Peter might have thought that Jesus was punishing him with repeated questions. It must have been an awkward and embarrassing moment for Peter as he recalled the night when he had denied Jesus three times. I meditated on this passage. I sensed Jesus asking me the same questions as Peter: “Kilhyoun, do you truly love me more than these?” I said, “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you,” because I already knew the answer I was supposed to give. Again, Jesus said, “Kilhyoun, do you truly love me?” I answered in a way that I had already learned from the passage. I was expecting the third question and was ready to answer.

However, the third question differed slightly from the one I was expecting. Jesus said, “Kilhyoun, do you truly, verily, genuinely love me?” I could not answer. I did not dare say, “Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you.” I knew my love for Jesus was feeble, frail, and fragile. I disappointedly asked myself, “Why can’t I love Jesus with all my soul and with all my mind and with all my strength?” I realized that the only desire I should have was to love Jesus truly. The Lord intensified the fire in my heart.

God Prepared People for My Ministry

RUPP became the base camp for the initial phase of my ministry in Cambodia. Some of the young men and women whom I met at RUPP (and their friends from outside RUPP) joined the Bible study group I led. My position as a professor played an important role in facilitating their participation because my students trusted and respected me, which encouraged them to join the group without hesitation. It was a miracle that they believed what I told them about Jesus. I knew from my own experience that it was not easy for a young man or woman to take up a new belief system, and it was harder than usual in Cambodia, a strongly Buddhist country. The Lord blessed the students in my Bible study group, and they later became wonderful colleagues in my ministry.

The first fruit God brought about in Cambodia came from among the students. Samuel was my tutor for the Khmer language, the official language of Cambodia, and he joined our Bible study. He was born to an impoverished farming family with a strong Buddhist tradition. Although almost half of Cambodians were illiterate, he graduated from the most renowned university in

the country. Samuel was a diligent and wise young man with a patient and responsible character. It was a joyful experience to watch him grow in Christ. Once he understood and experienced the truth of Christ, he willingly changed his lifestyle. He refused to comply with his parents' wish for him to become a government official. They knew that becoming a government official was a shortcut to becoming wealthy in the corrupt, poverty-ridden country, but he did not want to take advantage of people this way.

Instead, Samuel chose God's way. He became my first Cambodian ministry partner. We started planting churches together, along with some other members of the Bible study group. In a few years, we also built and opened an elementary school. Later, Samuel wanted to become a pastor, and the Lord opened the door for him to study at a seminary in Korea. He finished his MDiv and became an ordained pastor. Now Samuel is a PhD candidate and has returned to Cambodia. He has taken over the churches I was serving. We will continue to work together to serve the Lord in Cambodia, and he will remain a faithful companion in my ministry. My vision for him is that he will become the top leader of the Christian community in Cambodia, which needs new bottles for new wine (Matthew 9:17). Not only does he possess an excellent academic background—he will probably become the first Cambodian with a PhD in theology—but he also has great potential as a spiritual leader. I thank God that Samuel, who came from a hopeless, impoverished family, has made this giant step. I look forward to a new Cambodia filled with the brightness of God's grace

and led by Christ's truth. God created something great out of nothing for Cambodia in Samuel.

God Extended the Mysterious Touch of His Hand

A major challenge to my ministry is the presence of Buddhism, Cambodia's national religion. This Buddhism is mixed with shamanism, which is the belief in an unseen world of gods, demons, and ancestral spirits. Every rural village has a shaman as their spiritual leader. As a result, people are familiar with sorcery and experience the influence of demons. I have confronted people who were possessed by demons several times. My first experience was when we had a group Bible study in the church in Phnom Penh on a Sunday evening. Groups of six to eight people sat together. A college student who always loved to talk merrily with her friends was among them. In the beginning, she chattered much as usual. After a while, she became silent and did not respond to others. Then, suddenly, she began to weep for no apparent reason. Her weeping became louder and louder and turned into wailing. Nobody could help her. She was screaming. I asked other church members to stand around to pray for her and sing praises to God. I prayed, holding her by the hand. After praying for about ten minutes, I forced her to open her eyes. With my eyes contacting her hazy eyes, I commanded the demon to come out of her. After about ten minutes of prayer, she calmed down. I told the victim to pray the Lord's Prayer. At first, she shook her head to show her refusal. I commanded the demon to come out a few more times. Eventually, she was able to speak the Lord's Prayer and was completely healed. On another occasion, a college student in the dormitory I ran got overwhelmed by

fear. She was afraid because she saw a ghost in her room. She was trembling. Again, I asked her housemates to pray together and sing praises while I prayed and chased the demon out. Her innocent smile came back soon. I experienced evil spirits on several other occasions. Not only did I witness the vicious work of demons, but I also experienced the power of the Holy Spirit, who enabled me to cast them out in the name of Jesus. I had never had this kind of experience before I served in the mission field. My ears had heard of the power of His name, but now my eyes saw His dominion (Job 42:5). God created in me an unceasing longing for His abiding with me.

Throughout my ministry in Cambodia, the Lord taught, guided, and protected me in many ways. I once had an extraordinary experience of God's protection. On my way home from the church in Phnom Penh, I had to pass through an area that was said to be unsafe and a place of occasional violent crime, especially at night. Two church members usually escorted me home, riding a motorcycle behind me. They watched over me until I safely entered my house and closed the gate. It was about a four-kilometre ride on my motorcycle. The road I took was broad and mostly straight, with a few traffic lights. It was the shortest way home. One night, I left the church for home late at night after Bible class. No escort was arranged for me that night because the church members were engaged in other work. I rode on my motorcycle by myself. I was slowly approaching the first traffic light on my motorcycle and saw the signal had just turned green. I needed to go straight, but for some reason, the road I was supposed to take seemed new to me. I wondered when they had built a new road. There was no

good reason for me to be confused about the way, for I had been on that road hundreds of times. But that night, the road looked like one that I had never been to before. Perplexed and puzzled, I made a right turn and took a detour home.

When I got home, I realized something extraordinary had occurred to me. It became clear to me that the Holy Spirit blinded me at that moment and made me turn right at the crossroad. If I had taken the path straight ahead as usual, I might have been involved in an accident or crime. God saved me by leading me to a safe path. God struck the Aramean armies with blindness by Elisha's prayer so he could lead the enemy to the wrong place (2 Kings 6:18-20). When Jonathan and his armour-bearer courageously went up to the Philistine camp, God blinded the Philistines to strike each other with their swords (1 Samuel 14:13-20). In another story, invaders from Ammon and Moab and Mount Seir were also blinded by God and destroyed one another (2 Chronicles 20:22-23). Like these stories, I believe that God blinded me, although in my case, it was to save me from an unknown danger. His unfailing love always abides with me and creates delight and reverence in me, who deserves nothing.

God Worked Even in Our Sorrow

God was also there with me on a heart-breaking occasion. When I had just come home from a four-day retreat, I received a phone call telling me that one of the church members, a twenty-one-year-old girl named Sophath, had gotten involved in a traffic accident and was in critical condition. She was on the way home after cleaning up the church, sitting on a motorcycle behind her roommate. It was already dark, and her roommate, Sreynith, saw another motorcycle with

two boys trailing her. She was afraid that something bad might happen if she allowed the boys on the motorcycle to come closer. She stepped on the gas in fear. Unfortunately, her motorcycle collided with another motorcycle crossing the street. Sreynith was injured, but her condition was not serious. However, Sophath was not wearing a helmet and hit her head on the curb hard. She was immediately transported to a hospital.

When I got to the hospital around midnight, I found her unconscious with a severe head injury. Her blood pressure was rapidly dropping, but doctors said there was nothing they could do for her. There was no neurosurgeon, even though it was the largest hospital in the country. I decided to bring her to Ho Chi Minh City in Vietnam, which was a five-hour drive away. I arranged an ambulance, which took quite a long time because the doctors did not help us. I was angry with their lack of concern and frustrated by the terrible medical services in Cambodia.

I asked one of the church members to go to Vietnam along with her, telling him to get her in the surgery room as soon as they arrived. I was going to follow them later because I had to get some money from the bank for medical expenses. However, less than two hours after the departure, the ambulance turned back. Sophath did not need to go to Vietnam anymore; She had passed away. I told the ambulance to go to her hometown, Pailin, which was about an eight-hour drive away. There, her parents were anxiously waiting for their beloved daughter. After Sophath's funeral, I returned home and began preparing a sermon for the following Sunday. I asked God what I should tell the church members about why God did not protect His loving child and took her so young. I prayed. In my

sermon, I proposed that we seek God's will together in our loss. Then I announced that we would plant a church in Sophath's hometown, which was what the Holy Spirit told me in response to my prayers the other night.

We began to raise funds for the new church. It took four years to do so. We dedicated the church to her memory. God revealed more of His plan two months after the funeral. Sreynith, her roommate, gave a testimony in the worship service. She said, "I wanted to share my testimony sooner than this, but I could not because I was afraid." I wondered what kind of testimony could make her afraid. She continued, "Every time Sophath and I prayed together in our room, Sophath always shared a prayer request for the salvation of her parents, who had never heard the gospel. I was so frightened when I heard the pastor's announcement that he would plant a church in Sophath's hometown because I realized it was God's answer to Sophath's prayer." Through her testimony, the Holy Spirit touched our hearts and comforted us with the hope of our eternal home. God was with us, even in our sorrow. God created something gracious in Sophath's hometown, where no one had ever preached the gospel.

God Heard Our Prayers

Almighty God revealed His love for His church while I planted a church in another area. Sokun used to be a college student in Phnom Penh and trained in the church where I ministered. When he returned to his hometown of Kampong Ch'ngang, about 100 kilometres away, he began to preach the gospel to his neighbours. He invited people to worship together. They had no worship space other than the shade under a mango tree or a small floor in a member's house. I

thought I had to prepare a building when I visited them. I asked Sokun to look for a suitable piece of land. He called me a few weeks later to tell me that he had found a small plot for the church. The land was big enough, but it was elongated rather than square. Although I was not satisfied with the shape of the land, I thought I had to respect Sokun's recommendation to avoid hampering his authority over his congregation.

When all the paperwork was done and payment for the land was made, one of the church members invited me to her house for lunch. This was a sweet surprise because it was not common for locals to invite foreigners to their homes. After lunch, she asked if she could share her testimony. Yan was twenty years old when the communist revolution destroyed her life in the 1970s. She fled to Thailand to escape from the Killing Fields and spent several years in a refugee camp. One day she got seriously ill. The doctor at the camp could not do much to save her life. She said, "I died." I thought I had a problem with my Khmer language. I asked, "Did you say you died?" She said, "Yes, I died. I saw my body lying on the floor with people standing around me. They were talking to each other. They wanted to remove my body." She continued:

I did not know what was happening. I did not know what to do. It was a perplexing situation. Then, a man clothed in white approached me and said, "My girl, your time has not yet come. Go back." And I came back to life. The miracle was that when I came back to life, I was free from the disease that had caused me to die. After I regained consciousness, I immediately knew that the man in white was Jesus Christ. That was how I came to believe in Him as my saviour. He indeed saved my physical life. I returned to my hometown fifteen years later. I attended a church in another village about seven kilometres from my house. I had to walk to the church to worship. On my way to church, I always prayed that God would bring a church to my village. Today I see that God answer my prayer. I am so happy to expect a new church building in front of my house.

I bought the land to build the church twenty years after Yan began to pray for a church in her village. I felt ashamed when I realized that I was foolishly complaining about the shape of the land without knowing that someone had been praying desperately for a church in the village. Since I did not have enough funds to construct a full church building, all I could do for them was build a small hut as a temporary worship place. It was not long before God answered our prayer for the construction funds. Twenty-three years after Yan began to pray for a church in her village, God established one. The Lord had created a church when nothing was there before. This was a blessing for me and the congregation. It reinforced our conviction that the Lord hears our prayers and protects us under any circumstance. Indeed, the Lord is faithful at all times.

Looking Backward and Forward

God had brought about not a tide but a sea change in my life. An ignorant boy born and raised in an entirely non-Christian environment changed into a believer and a servant of God. He worked for my soul even when I did not know Him. He sent numerous helpers to change, cultivate, and sharpen my soul. My teachers warmly encouraged me not to despair. A college classmate shared the gospel with me for the first time, which planted a seed in my soul, although she did not see the seed sprout. A group of people sang hymns in a church over the fence, which touched my heart. I met a roommate in a college dormitory and began going to church with him, which caused the seed to germinate. A Bible study group at my workplace convinced me that Jesus was my saviour. And then there is my wife, who was the most crucial among the cloud of helpers. She

taught me the Bible and how to participate in a church and was with me throughout the ministry in Cambodia. She was a good prayer partner. God also sent Moses, my spiritual director, who opened my eyes to spiritual formation. These heroes all worked together to shape me into a believer and a missionary according to God's plan. Most of all, my Cambodian colleagues were used by God to grow me further. Every step I took in Cambodia trained and educated me to rely solely on God and to cultivate a love for His people through God's touch upon my heart, transforming me into a better child of God. Every experience I had in Cambodia made me humble and grateful for His guidance and protection, understanding His enduring love. My ministry in Cambodia has been a blessing for me. God sent me to Cambodia to teach and train me to be a better child. God prepared the best way for me.

My life experiences, both as a Christian and as a non-Christian, made me into God's instrument to help Cambodians. My experience as a non-Christian helped me understand non-Christians in Cambodia and Korea better and learn how to approach them. God used my background as a scientist to reach young Cambodian adults at a university. My scientific knowledge helped me earn their trust. My experience of growing up in poverty enabled me to confront material shortages without fear, and it became a testimony that gave courage and hope to others who suffered from poverty. The story of South Korea's economic development also encouraged Cambodians. Learning how God blessed South Korea spiritually and economically in the past half-century led them to pray for their country with a new vision. God used even my clumsy baseball skills, giving

me an opportunity to train young Cambodian men physically and mentally and make them proud first-generation baseball players. God watches over every step I take, making them into instruments for His Kingdom.

I have spent seventeen years in the mission field. As I go through my mid-sixties, I sense the time is drawing near for me to retire from missions or at least look for some better ways to serve the Lord in the next phase of my ministry. The sweetest fruits of my work over the last seventeen years are my students, who have now become pillars of their churches. The first fruit was Samuel, who has taken over many of my duties since he returned from his studies in Korea. My vision for Samuel is that he will become the leader of Christians across Cambodia. Another young man, Chankry, serves the Lord as a politician. He says his dream is to witness Cambodia change through the grace of Jesus Christ. He sees frequent corruption and violence in the political and governmental sectors, which causes chaos to permeate the whole society. Serving as a politician in a land of political turmoil means risking his life, primarily because of threats from opposing parties. Chankry hopes to replace the current government because it has restricted political freedom, freedom of speech, and freedom of worship. I pray that young Christians like Chankry become influential political leaders, boldly bringing about changes in their society. There are many other young members of the church who are determined to serve their church and country. They have been excellent co-workers in my ministry. They were with me to plant churches in four different locations, establish a Bible school and a secular school, and pursue many other charitable endeavours. I believe that my role in the next phase of my

ministry should be to support and help these young leaders rather than focusing on preaching as I did before. Since most Cambodian Christians do not have much influence on their society, it seems crucial to raise Christians to become influential leaders in various sectors of the nation.

As I get older, I realize that I have come to a watershed moment in my journey. I, as an individual Christian, have been living a life without effective self-examination. I need to take an objective, deep look at my life. Self-reflection reveals that I am still far from mature. My most crucial task is to mature my soul in Christ. I need to learn more about Jesus. I need to sharpen my soul and discern God's will, for there are always false voices that compete with Jesus'. The more I know God, the clearer His message will become. Knowing God is a lifelong pursuit. All I want is to know God better than before.

I have been trained mainly in the Presbyterian tradition, but I do not want to be restrained by it. What I desire is to experience God in a variety of ways. I never know on which occasions God will show His glory to me. God may reveal Himself in the Bible. He may come to me while I read and meditate on the Word in a familiar manner or using different methods. God may reveal Himself through communal worship, the sacraments, group prayers, solitary prayers, a prayer walk, or an unexpected moment while I serve people. I need to expose myself to different Christian traditions to learn more about how to come nearer to God. I want to make myself fully open to God's will and guiding hands.

Now I am old enough to be called to eternity anytime. It could be tonight, or God may allow me another thirty years to serve His kingdom and to experience

deeper intimacy with Him on Earth. Either way, blessed be the Lord's name.

Every step I have taken was under His guidance, even when I was unaware of it. Despite my transgressions, faults, and sins, God has always been good to me. His amazing grace has delivered and will continue to deliver me from ignorance, wickedness, selfishness, and the transitory nature of this life. As I draw nearer to eternity day by day, I pray that my time will pass delightfully and pleasantly. I live conscious of God's favour, making discoveries on the way, being content with the good things God has given me, and freely and cheerfully enjoying them, remembering what the Preacher said in Ecclesiastes 5:20: "He seldom reflects on the days of his life, because God keeps him occupied with gladness of heart." The Lord's mercy led me to this day, and He will continue to recreate me in His mercy. What I want to say when the death dew lies cold on my brow is, "If I have ever loved thee, my Jesus, it is now," as William R. Featherston sang in his beautiful hymn, *My Jesus I Love Thee*. In silence, I gaze upon the beauty of the Lord. Maranatha!

CHAPTER III:
A MODEL OF SPIRITUAL GROWTH FOR BEGINNERS
WHICH INVOLVES PRACTICING SILENCE AND
RELATED SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES

My journey toward Christlikeness was full of God's grace. Grace came upon me when I did not know Him and flowed throughout my life. This was especially evident in my ministry in Cambodia. His grace nudged me to mature spiritually and become more like Christ. This desire drove me to learn the fundamentals of spiritual formation, which led me to construct a spiritual formation model that leads to Christlikeness. I believe this model will also help my Cambodian friends walk on the path to Christlikeness as I share it with them.

Spiritual formation begins with paying attention to what Jesus taught, learning from Him, and participating in His life. Jesus taught us crucial elements of how we should live, such as worship, prayer, preaching the gospel, and caring for our neighbours. We strive to follow His teaching, principles, and patterns as the Holy Spirit guides us. By doing so, we can hear His voice and experience a spiritual life characterized by vitality and wholeness. Although hearing Jesus' voice is a common desire, it is challenging for most believers. Our spiritual ancestors also struggled to hear His voice and discern His will. They left us a precious heritage that teaches us how to engage in spiritual development. In my

personal journey, God has guided me to explore ancient spiritual practices that have been cherished for generations. Recognizing their potential to nurture my spiritual growth, I sought to construct a spiritual formation model that reflected my ongoing journey of learning and understanding.

Understanding Spiritual Longings

Learning the fundamentals of spiritual formation begins with understanding the reality we face. While we have many questions about life, including the value of life, the goal of life, and what we hunger for spiritually, perhaps the most fundamental question for all human beings is, “What are human beings made for?” This question becomes more relevant when one is in agony or feeling restless. Those who deny the divine creation of the universe and God’s providence believe they are to follow only their own desire and satisfaction. Their hearts long for pleasure and contentment on their own. To be human is to have a heart that must love something, Christians and non-Christians alike. The heart is the chamber of our love, and it is our love that orients us toward our telos. The question, therefore, evolves into: “What do we love foremost?” We are what we love (Smith 2016, 7). Non-Christians will be restless until their hearts acquire what they love.

When it comes to Christians, the question of what we love can be further modified: “What does it mean to live life in the Spirit of Jesus Christ?” This question constitutes the foundation of our spiritual life: reaching towards our innermost self, fellow human beings, and God. Christians take on this question throughout life’s journey, which leads us to face and explore our inner

restlessness, mixed feelings toward others, and deep-seated questions about the providence of God. The spiritual life does not allow bypasses; we must face reality and discover the path on which we must walk. This quest takes us through struggles, deepening as it proceeds, and follows them to their roots, which finally leads to the formation of one's own spirituality. As pilgrims, we carry this quest alone in the world, alone before God, to discover our own lonely way, and the answer, how imperfect it might be, will bring us joy, freedom, and peace. We are being formed in the right direction when we sincerely seek to conform to the likeness of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has become the firstborn among many brothers and sisters.

St. Augustine pinpointed the epicentre of human identity: “You have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in You” (Augustine 2002, 1.1.1). Augustine concluded that human beings were made by and for the Creator that was made known in Jesus Christ. Irenaeus put it similarly: “The glory of God is a human being fully alive” (2016, 4.20.7). Augustine also noted that human beings were teleological creatures. Humans always pursue something; we are as good as dead without pushing ourselves toward something. It is innate hunger and thirst embedded in the heart that drives humans to strive for something. Longings and desires make humans restless (Psalm 42:1–2). Augustine, in his *Confessions* (2002, 13.9.10), explains the origin of restlessness:

A body by its weight tends to move towards its proper place. The weight's movement is not necessarily downwards, but to its appropriate position: fire tends to move upwards, a stone downwards. They are acted on by their respective weights; they seek their own place [...] Things that are not in their intended position are restless. Once they are in their ordered position, they are at rest.

As for people, they find rest in God, the Creator. Those who do not have God remain restless either because they have the wrong gods—who do not have truth to save them from restlessness—or because they rely on something unceasingly wavering.

However, it is not a straightforward and easy thing to find rest in the Creator. We struggle to find the right way. Jesus asked the question in a different way: “What do you want?” (Matthew 20:32). At another point He asked, “Will you come and follow me?” (Matthew 4:19). Similarly, He asked His fallible disciple, Peter, “Do you love me?” (John 21:16). This question applies to every Christian who seeks the truth about life. Jesus taught that love is the ultimate goal of life: “Love your God and neighbours as you love yourself, and love others as I have loved you” (Mark 12:30-31; John 13:34). Although we will not understand love perfectly until the day we get to eternity, we all live to love and be loved. Augustine said in his *Confessions* (2002, 13.10.17), “My weight is my love. Wherever I am carried, my love is carrying me.” Love carries us in a particular direction. If we love something worldly and short-lived, we will end up restless. However, if we love that which is eternal, it will draw us to a place of heavenly peace.

Our longings and desires, when they are not appeased, turn into hunger and thirst. Jesus knows what we hunger and thirst for. He invites us to embark on a journey seeking the ultimate satisfaction, toward a destination of absolute freedom and eternal peace. However, the pilgrim’s path is often obscured by an ignorant and unfaithful heart that lacks a true understanding of love and becomes

distorted by deceitful desires and temptations that lead to the love of worldly glory. To walk along the right path, we must reflect upon what we really love and what our telos should be. Christians must identify their longings to accomplish fruitful spiritual lives.

Conforming to the Likeness of Christ

Christians' hunger and thirst for God turn into a particular purpose of the Christian life: to be like Jesus. What does it mean to be like Jesus? The call to conform to the likeness of Christ recalls the first chapter of Genesis that reveals God made humankind in God's image. It was an intentional and elaborate act of creation which demonstrated God's love. The image conferred upon humans represents a participation in God's character and nature. We are God's representatives on earth and God's counterpart. Diane Chandler wrote, "Humans are God's representatives on earth and are like God in having dominion over the earth (Gen. 1:26, 28-30). God created humans with spiritual capacity, as evidenced in Adam and Eve's intimate relationship with God in the Garden" (2014, 79). As the image of God, Christ is the place where God Himself, the invisible, is known (Barrett 1973, 135). Hence, being conformed to the likeness of Christ restores the *Imago Dei* that has been corrupted through the fall of humanity. We are continuously conformed to Christ's image by God's grace, and the process of transformation into Christ's likeness becomes our very life. Paul wrote, "We are being transformed into His likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit" (2 Corinthians 3:12-18).

The phrase, “to be conformed to the likeness of His Son” (Romans 8:29), has many different dimensions to it. As believers, we are destined to be transformed into the likeness of the Son, not only spiritually but also in our physical bodies, conforming to His glorious body in preparation for His Kingdom (Philippians 3:21; 1 Corinthians 15:49; 2 Corinthians 3:18). Our hope lies in the redemption of our physical selves (Romans 8:23), for our destiny is to be fully Christlike, even in our bodily form. Physical conformity is inevitably connected with conformity to the Son’s eschatological glory, which is to attain the fulness of His Sonship through the resurrection (Romans 1:4; Colossians 1:18). The physically resurrected body also entails an expectation of returning to Adam’s pre-fall physical state (Goranson 2018, 5). This expectation naturally envisions the reality that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed (Romans 8:18).

Christians’ conformity with Christ will eventually lead them to share in His suffering and become like Him in His death (Philippians 3:10). Sylvia Keesmaat wrote, “The glory of Adam, the image of God, is revealed in the One who came into this same suffering creation and saved it... His way of exercising His dominion over creation was to stretch out His arms and die for it. This image of suffering is the image to which believers are conformed” (1999, 124). This notion that conformity with Christ refers to participation in His sufferings (Hebrews 2:10) can be found in Romans 8:17, where suffering with Christ is considered a prerequisite for being glorified with Christ. Believers are conformed to the image of the Son as they pass through the valley of suffering, and it comes

to completion in the resurrection, at which point the believer is glorified with Christ. Douglas Moo wrote, “It is as Christians who have their bodies resurrected and transformed that they join Christ in His glory and that the purpose of God, to make Christ the ‘firstborn’ of many to follow, is accomplished” (1996, 534).

Another way of understanding conformity to the likeness of Christ is functional conformity; that is, when believers are conformed to the image of the Son, they are conformed to His status and function as the Son of God who rules over creation (Goranson 2018, 10). As we know, Christ rules through self-sacrifice and servanthood. Thus, even this conformity has implications of suffering and death. However, the most common interpretation of conformity to Christlikeness is spiritual or moral conformity, that is, sanctification. The general assumption is that to be made like Christ is to be holy like Christ—a present, spiritual conformity rather than a future, physical conformity (Goranson 2018, 5). A progressive renewal of the believer into the likeness of Christ, who is the image of God, leads to sanctification. Frederick Bruce wrote, “Sanctification is progressive conformity to the mind or image of Christ here and now (2 Cor. 3:18; Col. 3:10); glory is perfect conformity to the image of Christ there and then. Sanctification is glory begun; glory is sanctification consummated” (2003, 168).

God chose us in Christ before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in His sight (Ephesians 1:4), and the Holy Spirit works in our hearts to transform us into the image and likeness of Jesus. However, the transformation process requires some time. A prayer of commitment to God does not bring out the transformation instantaneously; it is merely the beginning of the sanctification

process. We put on the new person who is being renewed gradually, progressing from one stage of glory to another (2 Corinthians 3:18). One day, when we see the glory of Christ, we will be fully conformed to Him, including both our body and our soul.

Jesus prayed, “All of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one” (John 17:21-22). Jesus indicated that the purpose of the believer’s life is a life of loving union with God in the depths of their being. The one who used to be unlike Christ is changed into His likeness, and such Christlikeness is the consequence of a loving union with God. As our loving relationship with Christ grows and deepens, our desire for this union becomes the primary context of life (Mulholland 2016, 17). Thomas à Kempis remarked in his book, *The Imitation of Christ*, “‘He who follows Me, walks not in darkness,’ says the Lord. By these words of Christ, we are advised to imitate His life and habits if we wish to be truly enlightened and free from all blindness of the heart. Let our chief effort, therefore, be to study the life of Jesus Christ” (2004, 4). Imitating Christ’s life to share Jesus’ love, character, vision, and endeavour is the Christian’s ultimate goal. Every step we take involves striving to be nearer to the way of Jesus, and to be formed into the likeness of Christ. However, we humbly recognize that it is the Holy Spirit who initiates and facilitates this transformative process, leading us to its fulfillment.

Being Spiritually Formed

Christians who are to be conformed to the likeness of Christ need to cultivate their spiritual life. Susan Phillips (2015, 10) employed a beautiful metaphor of agriculture to describe the cultivation of spiritual life. Farming includes working the soil, planting seeds, watering, weeding, pruning, harvesting, and enriching the soil. Just as a tree in a garden needs cultivation, our spirits need nurturing and care. As Christians, we are like trees firmly rooted in the soil of God's grace as we live on earth. Much like a tree absorbs sunlight, water, and nutrients to grow, our spiritual growth is intimately connected with God's grace that comes through the Holy Spirit. By nurturing and caring for our spirit, we establish ourselves in the fertile soil of God's grace and love, which leads us to bear fruit and enrich our community (Phillips 2015, 205). Similar to trees, we do not have control over the life-giving elements that sustain us. As Christians seeking transformation, we humbly reach out to God through prayer, seeking to receive the vital elements necessary for our spiritual nourishment. In addition to prayer, engaging in spiritual disciplines provides us with pathways to deepen our connection with God and experience His grace more deeply. These disciplines serve as channels through which we invite the transformative work of the Holy Spirit into our lives. By actively participating in spiritual disciplines, we create space for God to shape us, guide us, and bring forth growth and transformation in our spiritual journey. Furthermore, those who are sustained by God's grace and bear fruit in their lives have the ability to enrich the environment in which others can thrive. Their love and care for others mobilize their energies and talents,

leading to the betterment of the community around them (Phillips 2015, 34). Trees exemplify resilience as they withstand the hardships of heat, cold, and drought, yet still manage to bear fruit and enrich the soil. In a similar way, Christians are called to exhibit patience and perseverance in the face of obstacles and temptations. It is through these trials that our faith is refined and strengthened, allowing us to bear fruit and serve others.

The root of a tree, though invisible, plays a vital role. It acts as an anchor, providing stability and preventing the tree from toppling over. Through the root, trees absorb water and essential nutrients from the soil. Root hairs increase the contact area of the root, enhancing the absorption of water and nutrients. The root cap protects the root tip. In addition, roots store food produced by the leaves during photosynthesis, benefiting both the tree and others. The soul of a Christian, though intangible, is the most crucial aspect. A Christian's soul seeks to absorb the life-giving elements from the soil of God's grace. The 'root' serves as the foundation that connects to God's caring hand, providing support and nurturing spiritual growth, ultimately bringing glory to God. Through prayer and spiritual disciplines, the root hairs of the soul reach out, fostering intimacy and deepening the connection with God. Like the root hairs of a tree navigating obstacles, a Christian's longing for more of God's grace stretches out and perseveres through challenges. In the midst of difficulties, the root cap of faith shields the soul and provides strength to endure hardships. Just as the growth of a root begins with a seed germinating and continues to grow, the soul with an innate longing for God's grace continues to grow until eternity. As roots lengthen, they naturally extend

downward to the ground. Even when a plant is uprooted, its roots instinctively seek to grow downward. Similarly, a soul seeks God's grace and yearns for a closer connection with the Creator, consistently seeking spiritual growth. Furthermore, just as roots store the food produced by the leaves, a soul reserves the spiritual nourishment gained through its connection with God for personal sustenance and the benefit of others.

Our relationship with God is closely tied to our spiritual growth, just as a tree depends on its environment for nourishment and growth, drawing from the soil and sunlight (Psalm 1:3, Jeremiah 17:8). Just as a tree finds contentment in its environment, which provides everything necessary for its growth, we too find contentment in the presence of God, our ultimate provider. Moreover, our spiritual growth is not an individualistic journey but rather a communal one. Just as the growth of a single tree in a field differs from that of a tree in a forest, where the protection and contributions of others are available, our own spiritual progress depends on our relationships within our community.

While our growth ultimately depends on God's grace, we can actively contribute to our spiritual development by engaging in spiritual disciplines. These disciplines may vary depending on the season of life we are in, just as trees experience different seasons. Our spiritual journey includes periods of active growth, blossoming, as well as rest and dormancy. During different seasons, we can choose appropriate spiritual disciplines that meet our needs and desires. In the midst of our daily responsibilities, work, joys, and pains, we can make the most of each day by practicing spiritual disciplines and allowing the Holy Spirit to use

them for our growth. As we progress in our spiritual journey, we may discover the need to explore new disciplines that foster growth in different areas. This ongoing cycle of growth and discipline enhances our self-awareness and empowers us to make choices that lead to a more fulfilling and progressive spiritual life.

Spiritual cultivation has been practiced in various ways. All of the practices are focused on how we seek God and how we open ourselves to God and our deepest selves. We should engage in regular practices that enable us to open our hearts and cultivate our souls. Every small, mundane act in life, such as taking a shower, having a meal with family and friends, or taking the subway home, might become an immense playground to experience God's presence and receive His peace and love, which vitalize our souls. This is true even concerning stressful daily routines. The Holy Spirit, who dwells in our hearts, leads every step of our walk on the path of spiritual formation. Chandler defined Christian spiritual formation as an interactive process by which God fashions believers into the image of His Son through the empowerment of the Holy Spirit by fostering development in the various dimensions of life, such as the spirit, emotions, relationships, and intellect. (2014, 18).

Transformation into Christlikeness takes place in the heart of a believer. In the New Testament, the heart represents the sphere of God's influence in human life (Zodhiates 1992, 820). The heart is the place where body, soul, and spirit come together as one, and as such, it is the source of all physical, emotional, intellectual, volitional, and moral energies (Nouwen 2010, xvii). It is the seat of the will that makes plans and decisions. The heart determines our personality and

is the place where God dwells. However, it is also the place against which the evil one directs fierce attacks, causing us to fear, doubt, and despair (Nouwen 2010, xvii). It is in the heart that natural knowledge of God has its seat (Romans 1:21); faith springs up, dwells, and works (Acts 15:9; Romans 10:9); and God makes His light shine to give us knowledge of God's glory in the face of Christ (2 Corinthians 4:6). However, an unbelieving heart may turn a soul away from the living God, and the sinful desires of the heart may make a soul blind to God's truth (Romans 1:24).

Although the heart may hide from the light, God searches and tests our hearts (Romans 8:27; 1 Thessalonians 2:4). We must want a heart that is right before God. A pure heart can be obtained by faith as a gift from God Himself (Ezekiel 36:26). Thus, to live life experiencing God's presence requires constant prayer for a righteous heart, in response to which God continues to form us into the likeness of Christ. Spiritual formation is about the movement from the mind to the heart through prayer that leads us to unite with God and our true selves (Nouwen 2010, xvi).

The Holy Spirit touching our hearts plays a crucial role in spiritual transformation. We experience the Holy Spirit dwelling within us and working with and for us. A new heart is being created in Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17), whereby God's love that the Holy Spirit has poured out transforms the heart that is stubborn and unrepentant (Romans 2:5). The Holy Spirit helps us persevere in the pilgrimage through life's trials of affliction, sorrow, and doubt in order to sanctify us until we attain eternal victory over sin. The process is ongoing, a

continuing response to the reality of God's gracious presence that results in growth in our relationship with Him (Wilhoit 2008, 23). We grow "in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and men" (Luke 2:52).

While our spiritual formation is indeed dependent on the work of the Holy Spirit, there is a role for us to play in the process. Our efforts and intentional actions can facilitate and support our spiritual growth, even though they may not always guarantee immediate success in becoming more Christlike. It requires discipline to form a spiritual habit so that Christ's character is inscribed into our souls. James Smith remarked, "Those habits will become 'second' nature and operate in the same way the biological nature works: they are as natural for us as breathing and blinking. You don't have to think about or choose to do these things: they come naturally" (2017, 17). Our persistent and diligent Christ-imitating practice will eventually become part of our character. This is a fulfilment of what the Psalmist said: "May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight" (Psalm 19:14).

Various Christian traditions provide valuable resources for nurturing one's relationship with God and being transformed inwardly. Among them are worship, prayer, study, meditation, sabbath, solitude, and fasting, to name a few. Notably, practicing silence and solitude plays a foundational role in spiritual growth. Jesus recognized the value of silence and solitude, while He devoted much of His ministry to speaking and teaching. He actively sought out moments of solitude and silence to engage in prayer, reflection, and other profound experiences that might transcend our comprehension. Christians, inspired by Jesus' example, also

pursue silence and solitude as a means to hear from God and deepen their spiritual connection. One of the primary reasons for seeking silence and solitude, as demonstrated by Jesus, is to create an opportunity it provides to listen to God's voice. By disconnecting from the constant stimuli that surround us in the world, we can gain a deeper understanding of ourselves and our inner thoughts and emotions. Tony Jones said that the practice of silence is highly regarded as a universally necessary spiritual discipline, and by embracing silence, individuals can foster a deeper connection with themselves, others, and God (2005, 23). Among spiritual disciplines, the practice of silence is highly valued and recognized as essential by various traditions.

Given that establishing a right relationship with God is our core longing, living in the Spirit of Christ is how we pursue that relationship. This brings us to a life of inner peace and satisfaction. It is the love we were taught to manifest in our lives and the way that we can proclaim His praise (Matthew 22:37-39; Isaiah 43:21). However, we know that this is a challenging task. Our journey in search of inner peace, creative relationships with ourselves and others, and the experience of God frequently stumbles due to our spiritual blindness and brokenness.

Henri Nouwen suggests that the stumbling block is the innate loneliness that lies deep within us and becomes a source of spiritual blindness and brokenness (1975, 172). Loneliness comes from spiritual hunger. Loneliness does not disappear until we turn it into fruitful solitude. The movement from loneliness to solitude is the movement from outward-reaching cravings to inward-reaching

searching. This is the beginning of the spiritual life. Such change requires courage to face the reality of our loneliness and gentle and persistent effort to move into a new experience of solitude (Nouwen 1975, 32). When we embrace solitude within our heart, we can listen attentively to the words coming from our true selves and from God. However, when we are afraid of loneliness, we tend to do whatever brings immediate satisfaction to our cravings. A lonely soul has no time to rest, wait and listen to the inner self. However, in solitude, we can face the reality of ourselves, and with God's initiative to reach out to us, we can bring ourselves into genuine fellowship with God by moving our restless senses to the restful Spirit (Nouwen 1975, 32).

Solitude sometimes means being alone to live the life of a recluse, withdrawing to remote places such as deserts, mountains, or deep forests. But the solitude that really counts is the solitude of the heart. This is an inner quality or attitude that does not depend on physical isolation (Nouwen 1975, 35). The solitude of the heart strengthens the believer to resist the distracting stimuli of the world and enables them to listen attentively to the word of God from a quiet inner center. The development of this inner sensitivity is the beginning of a spiritual life (Nouwen 1975, 35).

The Path to Spiritual Formation

Generally, Christians want to maintain a lively spirituality and zeal for God's word. They want to hear God's voice and experience God's guiding hand. They also want to serve and inspire fellow believers. However, we know that we live in a dark world that is filled with temptations, unfaithfulness, and self-

centeredness, and our spirits experience hunger and thirst. The darkness in this world has been attempting to destroy us from the beginning (John 3:19-20). In response to this, we recognize that nurturing and strengthening our spirits through the empowering work of the Holy Spirit is essential. It is through the transforming presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives that our spiritual hunger and thirst can be alleviated. Then we dedicate ourselves to living by the truth and stepping into the light as we witness the saving power of Jesus Christ.

The authentic spiritual life is a life in which we are set free by the work of the Holy Spirit to enjoy life in all its fullness. The Holy Spirit allows us to move freely and live with peace and joy even when conflicts and suffering surround us. We are spiritually formed to move away from our sorrows, fears, doubt, dryness of spirit, and feelings of helplessness and serve the world with confidence and joy. Spiritual formation guides us to see the face of God in the midst of the darkened world (Nouwen 1981a, xxix).

There are many ways to describe what spiritual formation is. By combining various descriptions of spiritual formation, I have arrived at the following expression:

Spiritual formation is the process of transforming the inner dimension of the human being. It is being shaped in such a way that the character of Christ is expressed naturally by the power of the Holy Spirit in every dimension of human personality, resulting in participation in the divine nature and escape from the corruption of the world caused by evil desires (2 Peter 1:4).

This transformation involves clothing ourselves with Jesus Christ (Romans 13:14) and putting off our old self—that was corrupted by its deceitful desires—to be

made new in the attitudes of our mind (Ephesians 4:22-23). Hence, true Christlikeness is established in the depth of our being.

Spiritual formation is rooted in God's grace; God initiates the process (Romans 5:6-9) and enables us to continue the process (Titus 2:11-14). Spiritual formation relies on our relationship with the Triune God. This relationship manifested in the relationship between Jesus and His disciples and was illustrated as a vine and branch relationship (John 15:1-17) and a father-child relationship (Romans 8:12-17). This relationship can be formed only through Jesus Christ. Establishing such a relationship is a lifelong journey, and Christians have not arrived at the destination but are on a journey. Spiritual formation comes with time by pursuing increased experiential knowledge of Christ. The believer is entirely dependent on God, and the power of His will and grace intensifies when the believer follows the pathway God provides. However, there is no simple formula for spiritual formation. Gordon MacDonald remarked, "What I discovered was that there are no shortcuts, no gimmicks, no easy ways to cultivate an intimacy with God and attain the resulting passion that should carry one through life's journey" (1986, 11). Spiritual formation occurs through spiritual battle, conflict, trials, and suffering. The believer is called to passionate and deliberate engagement and willful perseverance in this journey. Yet this process entirely depends on God's grace.

Spiritual formation is holistic, for all of life is spiritual. The Lordship of Christ applies to every aspect of life. The Lord is pleased to reconcile Himself to all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven (Colossians 1:20). All

authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Jesus Christ (Matthew 28:18). This includes all aspects of ordinary life such as work, finances, education, family, and physical health. Therefore, the believer has to be developed as a whole person—not only spiritually but also physically, mentally, emotionally, and socially. Spiritual formation calls for integrating all aspects of life into the process. The whole person, not just the intellect, perceives and interprets the world. James Smith points out that our concrete, embodied practices, whether sacred or secular, shape not only our thinking but also our feelings, our perceptions, and our way of being in the world (2013, 35). Since God meets us in and through our creaturely conditions, the body is also vital to our formation (Smith 2013, 33). Paul exhorted us: Whatever we do, we do it all for the glory of God (1 Corinthians 10:31) and all in the name of the Lord Jesus (Colossians 3:17). Our deeds, not just our beliefs, are essential to our formation as Christ’s followers. We understand that the spiritual life involves the senses (Tippens 2014, 2). We “taste and see that the Lord is good” (Psalm 34:8). Since spiritual formation takes on a physical character, our bodies are inherently sacramental (Tippens 2014, 3). We are temples of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19), and we participate in the sacraments by “presenting our bodies as a living sacrifice” (Romans 12:1).

The embodied aspect of spiritual formation can be observed in the lives of some of the most famous followers of Christ. While St. Augustine inspires us with his dramatic conversion story, his spiritual formation came in many ways. He was greatly influenced by his mother, Monica, and friends, including Bishop

Ambrose, Nebridius, Verecundus, and Alypius, whom he called his “heart’s brother” (Augustine 2002, 9.7). Augustine’s spiritual formation involved other things as well. For example, reading was a crucial spiritual practice to him. Athanasius’ biography of Abba Antonius played a critical role in his conversion (Augustine 2002. 8.12.29). Music also seemed to contribute to Augustine’s spiritual formation (Tippens 2014, 4). Augustine loved singing, and he was overwhelmed by the singing of Ambrose’s church. He confessed, “Those voices flowed into my ears, and the truth was distilled into my heart, which overflowed with my passionate devotion” (Augustine 2002, 9.6.14).

Although many believers desire a holistic transformation, it cannot be easily realized because the power of sin deeply penetrates human nature. We frequently experience moral failure and spiritual defeat (Romans 7:14-23). The sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Holy Spirit, and they conflict with each other so that we do not do what we want (Galatians 5:17). What we do is not the good we want to do but the evil we do not want to do (Romans 7:19). It seems impossible for us to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with God (Micah 6:8). However, we also know we should not hide behind the excuse that “the human spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak” (Matthew 26:41).

The flesh is not necessarily evil; it is a good creation of God and needs only to be kept to its proper function in life before God (Willard 2008, 81). Since the flesh works by desire and cares for nothing else but its own satisfaction, we need spiritual disciplines to conquer the flesh and its sinful desire and make it the servant of the Spirit in Christ. Sin then loses as the desires of the flesh are ordered

under the goodness and power of God in us (Willard 2008, 85). Hence, we walk by the Holy Spirit and will not carry out the desires of the flesh anymore (Galatians 5:16). We who are in Christ have crucified the flesh with its passion and desires and will live by putting to death the misdeeds of the body with the help of the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:13).

Anyone who wants to be spiritually formed must exercise disciplines that are deliberately chosen and intentionally practiced. The disciplines are essential for us to be attentive to God, receive God's transforming grace, develop habits of godliness, and sustain us in the journey of faith. By practicing them, we sow persistently in order to reap a harvest at the proper time (Galatians 6:8) and endure hardship like a good soldier of Christ (2 Timothy 2:3).

Spiritual discipline does not necessarily lead us to an accurate understanding of God and His will. It is a process of emptying our minds to the incomprehensible things of God and opening our hearts to receive life as a gift, which fills our being with the Holy Spirit and develops the heart of God in us (Nouwen 2010, 4). It enables us to see what is hidden from ordinary sight. The Holy Spirit leads us to make changes in our relationship not only with God but also with nature, with time, and with people. Nature that used to contain hidden truths begins to reveal its true being and tell us the great story of God. Nouwen wrote:

When we receive in our hearts with gratitude and awe what God has created, we see nature as it truly is—a transcendent reality that asks for reverence and respect. The plants and animals with whom we live teach us about birth, growth, maturation, and death, about the need for gentle care, and especially about the importance of patience and hope. Food and drink, clothes and homes, mountains and rivers, oceans and skies—all become

transparent when nature discloses itself to those with eyes to see the loving face of God. (2010, 7)

Time is also converted in the process of spiritual formation. When we experience time as *chronos*, our life is filled with a randomly connected series of incidents and accidents over which we have no control. Time enslaves us; time is running out, and life is exhausting. Time becomes our enemy (Nouwen 2010, 9). When time is converted from *chronos* to *Kairos*—God’s time when He interrupts our routine and touches us deeply—we have an opportunity for a change of heart. When our time becomes *kairos*, new possibilities and opportunities open up to our vision. When “the time has come” (Mark 1:15), Christ liberates human history from mere chronology to *kairos*—God’s time, where past, present, and future merge in the present moment (Nouwen 2010, 9). When this happens, even hard and painful times can be converted into occasions for learning, sharpening our spirit, and shaping our being.

When we are transformed, our neighbours also become new creations for us. We recognize every person we meet in our lives as a great gift from God (Nouwen 2010, 9). We see beyond the limits of the individual and look at a greater purpose of God in their life. The progressive formation of the heart results in service to God and others in the Christian community and the world. The Great Commandment, according to the Lord Jesus, is “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind,” and it also includes, “Love your neighbour as yourself” (Matthew 22:37-39). The Christian disciple will have the love of Jesus for his neighbours, and the life of Jesus will flow through the disciple toward this neighbour. There can be no wholeness in the

image of Christ that does not show up in relationships with others (Romans 12:5). Love for others through acts of service is a vital link in the spiritual formation process. Gratitude for the finished and continuing work of Christ for us inspires us to cooperate with His commitment to serving others.

Methods of Spiritual Disciplines

Christian spirituality is the realm of a Christian's lived experience, where every aspect of life is lived before God through Christ in the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit (Scorgie 2011, 27). Spiritual discipline serves as a pathway that leads us to spiritual formation, gradually shaping us to become more like Christ in our daily lives through the work of the indwelling Holy Spirit. Spiritual formation, however, does not occur automatically or effortlessly. Those who desire spiritual formation must seek methods that meet their needs and find guidance and direction from others (Helland 2017, 24). Just as an athlete cannot achieve physical strength and agility without a deliberate plan of training, diet, and sweating, we cannot expect to experience spiritual formation without commitment to regular and persistent spiritual disciplines. While this spiritual formation is entirely dependent on the work of the Holy Spirit and a manifestation of God's grace, it is at the same time a human responsibility. Paul mentioned the importance of combining God's grace and human responsibility: "Continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to His good purpose" (Philippians 2:12-13). Paul also encourages us to train ourselves to be godly (1 Timothy 4:7). This means taking

up our cross and following Jesus (Matthew 16:24) and embracing the easy yoke of Christ (Matthew 11:29-30).

Engaging in spiritual disciplines leads us to participate in the life of God's kingdom and allows us to experience the intimate companionship of Christ (Willard 1998, 26). These spiritual disciplines involve a process of reducing our self-centeredness and becoming more attuned to God's work and purposes (Jones 2005, 35). We can begin this process by closely examining our thoughts, speech, emotions, and actions in every moment of our lives. Through this process, the Holy Spirit will direct us to conform ourselves to the character of Christ in all aspects of our lives. Hence, it becomes essential to discover and utilize appropriate methods of spiritual discipline, which serve as tools to mould and shape our hearts and minds, guiding us toward a life that reflects the virtues and values of Jesus Christ.

Solitude: The Foundation of Spiritual Discipline

If spiritual discipline begins with a careful examination of our physical, emotional, and spiritual lives, it requires that we set aside time and create opportunities for self-reflection. One valuable way is to intentionally seek out moments of solitude and silence where we can be alone with our thoughts and in communion with God. While solitude and silence may resonate with some people, it is important to recognize that different people may find alternative methods of discipline more beneficial to their spiritual journey. The key is to discover the practices that foster a connection with God and nourish our inner selves. Each person's path of spiritual discipline may vary, but the underlying principle

remains the same—to devote time and attention to fostering a deep and meaningful relationship with one’s deepest self and God. Blaise Pascal remarked in his *Pensees* that “all the misfortunes of men arise from one thing only, that they are unable to stay quietly in their own chamber” (2014, 33). The practice of solitude and silence is to free oneself from the distraction of noise in order to open oneself to God and listen to God in quietness.

We learn about what solitude and silence can bring us from the dramatic story of Elijah, who was forced to take a lonely journey through a desert to Mount Horeb (Kings 19). Although Elijah had experienced great success as a prophet, he had to face the threat of being killed by Jezebel, the queen of Israel, who was intimidated by the power of his prophetic work. Jezebel caused Elijah to run for his life and suffer from fear and depression. Elijah left his servant behind and walked into the desert alone. Exhausted and downhearted, Elijah collapsed under a lonely broom tree. He felt helpless and hopeless. Elijah must have struggled with doubts, questions, fear, and discontentment. He was so discouraged that he grumbled at God that He might as well take his life. However, God’s loving care inspired and encouraged him to enter into solitude and silence. God began by taking care of Elijah’s physical weariness and exhaustion. He let Elijah sleep. Then He woke Elijah up and provided food and water for him. He allowed Elijah to go back to sleep again. God wanted Elijah to take a rest and be strengthened enough to take the next step. When the time came, God inspired him to embark on a journey into the desert of solitude and silence.

Elijah regained energy and perhaps became clear about what he needed: an encounter with God. Elijah walked away from his success and prominence as a great prophet, most importantly giving up his ego, which constantly wanted to control everything. He was hungry for a genuine experience of God's presence. Even the experience of God's enormous power, displayed in the fire that consumed the altars of Baal, did not fully satisfy his hunger. Elijah walked through the empty desert for forty days and forty nights. This time of solitude and silence in the desert allowed God to guide Elijah to a path he had not walked before. He walked into the emptiness of the desert in order to find what he was looking for. Finally, Elijah settled into a cave on the side of Mount Horeb. There he waited for God's revelation. He had been through chaos and now stood empty-minded before God's presence in an empty place. A great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks, but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind, there was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake, a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. After the fire, there was a still, small voice. Elijah heard God and had a dialogue with Him. He experienced God's transforming presence. There was no need for loud words. The still small voice was full of the loving presence of God. God did not want Elijah to stay in solitude forever. Elijah, revitalized more than ever, returned to his prophetic ministry. Many pilgrims after Elijah experienced God's presence in solitude and silence. To do so, they withdrew from the noise and busyness of their lives (Nouwen 1981a, 19).

In solitude, we not only enjoy the freedom to be away from people but also hear God's still small voice better. Jesus lived in inward heart solitude and also frequently experienced outward solitude (Foster 1978, 97). Jesus began His ministry by spending forty days alone in the desert, conversing with the Father and rejecting Satan's scheme (Matthew 4:1-11). Furthermore, Jesus frequently withdrew Himself to a lonely place and prayed. He spent the whole night alone in the desert before He chose the twelve disciples (Luke 6:12). Each day when Jesus taught at the temple, He went out to spend the night on the Mount of Olives (Luke 21:37). Following one long night of work, "very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where He prayed" (Mark 1:35). When Jesus heard that John the Baptist was killed by Herod (Matthew 14:13), and after feeding five thousand people (Matthew 14:23), Jesus withdrew Himself to a lonely place. When the twelve disciples returned from a preaching and healing mission, Jesus told them to go to a quiet place and get some rest (Mark 6:31). When crowds of people came to hear Him and were healed of their sicknesses, Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed (Luke 5:15-16). With three disciples, He went up to a lonely mountain as the stage for the transfiguration (Matthew 17:1-9). Finally, as Jesus prepared Himself for the impending Cross in the Garden of Gethsemane, He was alone while His disciples, despite His request for them to join Him in prayer, were unable to remain by His side (Matthew 26:36).

Solitude is more a state of mind and heart than it is a place (Foster 1978, 96). Even when we are not living in a monastery or in the desert, we can seek

God's guidance to create our own sacred space of solitude, the solitude of the heart. We can remain attentive inwardly even in a crowd; we may fail to experience solitude even when alone in a desert. In the midst of noise and confusion, we can settle into a deep inner solitude. Whether alone or in the crowd, we can always build a sanctuary of solitude within our heart. We enter into solitude to meet our Creator, be with Him alone, and keep the eyes of our mind and heart on Him. The solitude of the heart can be maintained at any time.

In my approach to spiritual formation, I prioritize the solitude of the heart rather than relying on physical seclusion. This is because the opportunity for solitude through physical seclusion is rarely available to the majority of people in the modern church. By emphasizing the solitude of the heart, individuals can cultivate a deep sense of inner solitude, regardless of their external circumstances. This form of solitude transcends physical limitations and allows individuals to nurture their spiritual growth within the context of their everyday lives.

The significance of seeking solitude goes beyond mere isolation. In the depths of solitude, we come face to face with the unfortunate aspects of human nature that give rise to conflict, arrogance, violence, injustice, hatred, greed, lust, and self-deprecation. We recognize that these qualities also reside within our own hearts. Thus, solitude fosters compassion within us, becoming the foundation of our ministry (Nouwen 1981a, 33). Through the struggles we may encounter in solitude, our hardened, rebellious, and closed hearts are transformed into ones that are softened, contrite, and receptive to the suffering of others. As we undergo purification and inner transformation in solitude, compassion flourishes because

we learn to set aside our own interests in order to serve others (Nouwen 1981a, 34). We no longer pass judgment on them but accompany them to the places where they are broken, weak, lonely, and helpless. This journey of compassion requires a deep transformation within ourselves. Richard Foster remarked, “The fruit of solitude is increased sensitivity and compassion for others. There comes a new freedom to be with people. There is a new attentiveness to their needs, new responsiveness to their hurts” (1978, 108).

Hence, once we have learned and experienced the beauty of solitude, our inclination is to extend our care to our neighbors. Thomas Merton attested that his solitude cultivated love for his neighbors: “It is in deep solitude that I find the gentleness with which I can truly love my brothers. The more solitary I am, the more affection I have for them. [...] Solitude and silence teach me to love my brothers for what they are, not for what they say” (1953, 261). He also depicted the Desert Fathers and Mothers as individuals who swam to save themselves from drowning in the sinking ship of their society. He wrote, “They knew that they were helpless to do any good for others as long as they floundered about in the wreckage. But once they got a foothold on solid ground, things were different. Then they had not only the power but even the obligation to pull the whole world to safety after them” (1960, 23).

Solitude is the place we desire to help others discover and experience the beauty and significance of solitude themselves. Dietrich Bonhoeffer emphasized that the fellowship and accountability of others make our practice of solitude secure. He wrote: “Let him who cannot be alone beware of community [...] Let

him who is not in community beware of being alone [...] Each by itself has profound pitfalls and perils. One who wants fellowship without solitude plunges into the void of words and feelings, and one who seeks solitude without fellowship perishes in the abyss of vanity, self-infatuation, and despair” (1978, 97).

Our encounter with the beauty of solitude empowers us to live a spiritually balanced life, fostering loving relationships with others. Abba Antonius left the desert after spending two decades there, carrying with him the secret of solitude, which he shared with all who sought his guidance. Those who met him described him as “balanced, gentle, and caring. He had become so Christlike, so radiant with God’s love, that his entire being was ministry” (Nouwen 1981a, 32). Thus, the profound impact of solitude extends beyond ourselves and leads us into meaningful participation within a community.

Silence: The Reality of Solitude

Silence is the way to make solitude a reality and deepens the experience of solitude. Without silence, there is no solitude. Silence is an indispensable spiritual discipline in the spiritual life (Nouwen 1981a, 44). The Apostle James described the tongue as a stumbling block to many: “We all stumble in many ways. If anyone is never at fault in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to keep his whole body in check” (James 3:2). Speaking without sinning is very difficult, and thus, silence is one of the central disciplines of the spiritual life. The Psalmist said, “I will watch my ways and keep my tongue from sin; I will put a muzzle on my mouth as long as the wicked are in my presence” (Psalm 39:1). Speech is

difficult to control and easily leads us away from the right path. The Bible teaches that “when words are many, sin is not absent, but he who holds his tongue is wise” (Proverbs 10:19). Sometimes, our many words are more an expression of doubt than of faith. Although the networks of words—discussions, debates, and arguments—are valuable for deepening our thoughts, our words’ creative power is not always as forthcoming as we expect. Even among Christians, experiencing God’s presence is frequently disregarded in favour of the sophisticated articulation of words, which we call theology. In monasteries centuries ago, theological education was born out of silence and could lead trainees deeper into silence. Although monasteries are no longer the most common places for theological education, silence is still an indispensable discipline today, as it was in the past (Nouwen 1981a, 48). We need to revisit the value and power of silence in our noisy world.

In silence, we not only withdraw from the exhaustion of always having to communicate with others but also quiet our chaotic thoughts and compulsions so we can be attentive to the Holy Spirit who speaks. Silence opens our hearts and allows us to go deeper into inner spaces that we may not have been or did not even know existed in the midst of our busy day-to-day life (Calhoun 2005, 213). Silence is a way to rest in God. We expect that being with the Lord in silence will transfer us from the outer world to the inner self, although silence can also reveal profound insights about the outer world, reminding us of God’s transcendent power that surpasses our understanding. While the Holy Spirit helps us seek

God's message, we need to cooperate so that we can listen to Him carefully. This is done by being alone with God in silence.

Silence allows us to clear our souls. Our soul is muddy and turbid, like a jar of river water, all shaken up with evil desire, false pride, unnecessary worries, groundless fear and any piece of frustration and anger. What we need is to sit still long enough that the sediment can settle down and the water can become clear (Barton 2010, 28). The sediment that swirled inside the jar can be the busyness, the emotions, the thoughts, the inner conflicts that often elude our control. To be still long enough so the swirling sediment can settle, the waters of our soul will become clear. In this clarity, we may perceive that which needs our attention, and discover a deeper level of certainty in God (Barton 2010, 30).

Clearing the soul by sitting in silence takes time. In the beginning, we may feel that our souls are disturbed and frustrated for quite a long time. However, if we can stay with our frustrations long enough and not give up, we may find that our souls begin to reorder. Then, we will begin to understand that the things that we most need to know and figure out are not going to be discovered or solved by thinking; they will be heard by listening (Barton 2010, 74). At this point, we are ready to hear God's voice through our spirit. Human wisdom cannot understand what God speaks to us. Only a spiritual person can listen and understand God's Spirit: "The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Corinthians 2:14). John Climacus wrote in his classic *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, "The lover of silence draws close to

God. He talks to Him in secret, and God enlightens him” (Mack 1999, 61).

Humble silence opens our ears and leads us to hear what God speaks in His silence. Randy Reese said, “We must all go through a season of preparation—a time of cultivation which raises our awareness that ‘something is going on’ or that ‘God is up to something good’ with us” (2012, 1150). As we respond to God’s call to follow, we may reflect in silence on the signs of God’s work.

Silence may lead to a significant boundary event, a transitional period of disorientation, brokenness, and refinement (Reese 2012, 1473). This is a heightened time of learning. Robert Thomas refers to such life-shaping situations or transitions as crucibles. He defines a crucible as “a transformative experience from which a person extracts his or her ‘gold’: a new or an altered sense of identity” (2008, 5). During this experience, people often prayerfully look back on their life; this is a time of facing and embracing the past more honestly. Having reflected in this way, one may then look upward; this is also a time for discernment. It is only after a believer honestly looks back and prayerfully surrenders the self and the situation to God that they are ready to enter the next stage of the boundary time: looking ahead (Reese 2012, 1553). When we pass through the boundary event of silence, overcoming threatening distractions, we can enter into a deeper spiritual experience.

Silence is a sacred and effective spiritual discipline by which God’s inner fire is kept alive in us (Nouwen 1981a, 52). In silence, we pay attention to the Holy Spirit and what He brings to our souls. When we make room for silence, we also make room for ourselves. We create space for the Holy Spirit’s activity in

silence rather than filling every minute with our own activity (Barton 2010, 34). Silence guards the warmth of the Holy Spirit working in us. Sometimes our many words shrink the space for the Holy Spirit in our life and quench the fire of the Holy Spirit in us. We must faithfully care for the inner fire through silence so that it can warm up our souls and offer warmth and light to our neighbours. Nouwen spoke about those who had forgotten words:

For the Desert Fathers and Mothers, the word was the instrument of the present world, and the silence was the mystery of the future world. If the word is to bear fruit, it must be spoken from the future world into the present world. From that world their words could bear fruit, because there they could be filled with the power of God's silence (1981a, 49).

They considered living in the desert seeking solitude and silence to be the first step into the future world. For them, the desert was where they could be filled with the power of God's silence and their words could bear fruit. The Holy Spirit warms our hearts up through silence and enables us to go on a journey toward the future world and bring fruit to the present world.

Though silence frequently involves the absence of speech, it always involves the act of listening; it requires a heart that listens to God. Merton wrote in *Thoughts in Solitude*, "My life is listening, His is speaking. My salvation is to hear and respond. For this, my life must be silent. Hence, my silence is my salvation" (1956, 69). When we speak of ourselves and are filled with ourselves, or even when we repeat intimate words of God that have come out of our own selves, we cannot go into silence and listen. We must listen in silence before we speak. The silence of the heart is much more important than the silence of the mouth. Silence is primarily a quality of the heart that leads to ever-growing

purity. Inner solitude is inseparably connected with inner silence, and inner silence is linked with a listening heart. With ears that are open to the Father's still small voice, our souls find rest in silence. The Psalmist said, "Surely I have composed and quieted my soul; like a weaned child rests against his mother, my soul is like a weaned child within me" (Psalm 131:2).

However, the discipline of silence does not discourage us from speaking. In fact, silence teaches us to speak. A word with power is a word that comes out of silence. When a word being spoken comes from the silence that has experienced God's presence and His richness, it will ripen into a word through which God speaks (Nouwen 1981a, 56). A word that is not rooted in silence is a powerless, unfruitful word that sounds like a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal (1Corinthians 13:1). Much can be said without much being spoken, and silence generates true and fruitful words that come from the Creator. True words invite us to joyfully participate in the unfathomable richness of God's spoken silence that goes out into all the earth and to the end of the world (Psalm 19:4). Silence is also a time for prayer. As John Climacus tells us, "Intelligent silence is the mother of prayer, freedom from bondage, custodian of zeal, a guard on our thoughts, a watch on our enemies [...] a companion of stillness, the opponent of dogmatism, a growth of knowledge, a hand to shape contemplation, hidden progress, the secret journey upward" (Mack 1999, 60). Our prayer becomes empowered when it is spoken with words that have been purified and enriched in silence.

The Practice of Silence in Solitude

The practice of solitude and silence can foster a connection with God and the nurturing of our inner selves. However, we often find these practices radical because they challenge us at various levels of our existence (Barton 2010, 32). These practices require us to enter into what feels like unproductive time which involve little effort and thought on our part. They call us away from our human relationships for a while so we can be attentive to God with as little distraction as possible. The spiritual battle we may experience is intense; all the powers of evil and sin hinder our journey toward knowing God. Most of all, the busyness and demands of everyday life hardly allow us to set aside even a short alone time, let alone a long, solitary retreat. Many exhausted and stressed souls are forced to remain in that state. Some may not have the luxury to take a break for a brief period of solitude in their crowded surroundings. They may have to learn how to quiet themselves in a crowd. To be in solitude does not necessarily mean to sit quietly alone. Slow walking, jogging, or bike riding can be effective ways to practice solitude and silence. During physical activity, the mind and heart are less distracted and can be more fully attentive to God. In addition, some may find opportunities for solitude and silence even in a distracting environment—while standing in a crowded subway train, waiting in a long line to purchase a ticket, or even taking a shower. We can make ourselves attentive to God’s presence on various occasions.

Silence, on the other hand, is a laborious, disturbing, and demanding process. A beginner may feel uncomfortable as he faces the uncertainty of this

new experience. We confront the irritating and painful reality of our life during this practice. Silence makes us face our fears, longings, desires, and concerns. Silence may be perturbing if we fail to keep ourselves silent because of impatience, uncertainty, or a fear of giving up control and facing our own misery. Silence can be frightening because it strips us as nothing else does, throwing us upon “the stark reality of life” (Willard 1998, 163). Nevertheless, silence is the doorway to peace and transformation. When we settle down through silence, we can move on to deeper spiritual formation.

Detailed procedures to practice silence have been proposed by many authors (Barton 2010, 301; Calhoun 2015, 214). The practice of silence usually begins with allocating a predetermined time and quiet place so that one can focus without being interrupted by others or distractions. Settling into a comfortable yet alert bodily position is necessary. Our body, which is made in God’s image, is where the Holy Spirit dwells, and we participate in God’s ministry through our body. When we are physically ready, we open our hearts to God by asking for the Holy Spirit’s help and paying attention to what is happening inside us. However, distractions are inevitable. When they come, we simply let them go by like clouds floating across the sky (Barton 2010, 315). The purpose of time spent in silence is to be with God in whatever state we are in and to let Him be in control.

While practicing silence has high spiritual value in itself, silence has become a common element of many other practices. Calming oneself down before or in the middle of these other disciplines is required and establishes a ground to develop them further. Thus, silence is foundational to various spiritual practices.

Many spiritual disciplines include silence as a core element: prayer, meditation, contemplation, *examen*, *lectio divina*, fasting and so on. These practices require spending some time in silence to quiet oneself down.

Bible reading is a good example of a spiritual practice that requires a time of silence as part of the process. Bible reading is undoubtedly the basis of Christian learning and an essential exercise for a Christian's spiritual growth. It is imperative to know God and His will for our lives, and by reading the Bible regularly, we can find direction for our lives and learn how to serve the Lord best. Although we may learn and grow by reading someone else's reflections on the Bible, it is far more important to dive into the Bible ourselves. Bible reading requires careful and prayerful attention to the text as well as correctly applying the principles of interpretation. We should meditate and reflect upon the passage we read with an expectation that we will be sanctified by the truth of God's Word and become more like Christ. Thus, spending some time in silence is essential for the meditative reading of the Bible.

Seeking the God Who Speaks

When a believer desires to seek and communicate with God, he or she can begin with an awareness of God's presence, who is within us as well as transcendent over us. The eyes and ears of our hearts should open to hearing the word God always speaks (Payne 1994, 221). Many people can attest that seeking God is challenging, for God seems hidden from us. However, God is eager to reveal Himself to and communicate with His creature. It is His desire for us to seek Him and reach out to Him and find Him (Acts 17:27). The Bible is full of

stories of God speaking and God's people listening. The ancient Israelites heard the voice of God speaking to them out of the midst of fire (Deuteronomy 4:33). The angel of God appeared to Moses in flames of fire within a bush and spoke to him (Exodus 3:2-4). Prophets of all ages heard God's voice and proclaimed His messages with confidence.

God exhorts us to seek Him in many Bible passages (1 Chronicles 22:19, Hosea 10:12, Amos 5:4, Matthew 6:33). God speaks to us in a variety of ways so that we may find Him. A person who prays may experience a particular Bible passage coming to mind (Acts 1:20), a picture or vision (Acts 10:11-17, Acts 16:9-10), or a dream (Daniel 4:4-17; Daniel 7:1-14). God may also speak to us by messengers or angels (Acts 1:9-11; Acts 8:26), signs and wonders (Acts 5:18-21; Acts 9:36-42; Acts 12:6-11), a still small voice (1 Kings 19:12), or restriction of movement and speech (Acts 16:6-8). Even non-human creatures may speak of God's word: when Baalam's heart was full of earthly desire to please a Moabite king, God had his donkey speak God's message to him (Numbers 22:21-33).

The story of the birth of the Messiah through Mary and Joseph is a good example of God speaking. When Mary and Joseph took the divine infant to the temple to present him to the Lord, Simeon, who was righteous and devout, was there (Luke 2:22-40). The Holy Spirit revealed to him that he would not die before he had seen the Messiah. Indeed, Simeon witnessed God's salvation at the temple. He took the divine infant in his arms, praised God, and proclaimed a prophetic word over the infant. An aged widow and prophetess, Anna, joined the holy and wondrous celebration for the baby at the temple. Anna, who never left

the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying, instantly recognized the Messiah. Simeon and Anna received God's words because their hearts had long looked up to God in prayer. Hearing God involves waiting expectantly in silence. God's word filled their hearts because they were open to receiving wisdom from above. Mary and Joseph marvelled at what Simeon and Anna said about their child. They held onto the wondrous message that the angel Gabriel conveyed that she would bear the Son of God (Luke 1:27-35). The word of the Lord came again in the temple and reaffirmed what the angel Gabriel had told them in Nazareth. The words of Simeon and Anna strengthened them to obey the Lord.

When Stephen, a man of the Spirit, was being stoned, he looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God (Acts 7:55-56). Even complaints may bring God's response forth. Habakkuk cried out to God, "Why are you silent while the wicked swallow up those more righteous than themselves?" (Habakkuk 1:13), and waited on God, saying, "I will look to see what He will say to me" (Habakkuk 2:1). Then the Lord indeed replied. In these encounters, we witness the Spirit of God communicating with them and giving them insights. Cultivating the ability to hear God's voice is important for our spiritual growth and maturity. It allows us to receive transcendent wisdom that brings forth knowledge, understanding, consolation, and guidance. Thus, we are encouraged to wait upon Him in silence, opening ourselves to His divine communication.

One fear we may have while we seek to hear from God is how we know that the words or thoughts that have sprung up in our minds are from Him, not from ourselves or the devil. The Bible encourages us that the enemy is discernable: “We are not unaware of his schemes” (2 Corinthians 2:11). As we repeat the practice, we will recognize God’s voice more and more clearly, and our own delusions or desires will also become more easily recognized. The Holy Spirit will give us conviction when we truly hear God’s voice. Our general or rational knowledge of God’s Word also helps us—God’s voice will never contradict what we learn from the Bible. Help may also come from other people with experience; godly friends who also hear God’s voice can help us discern what’s truly from Him (Japenga 2019, 37). Thus, the involvement of a supportive community is vital in this journey of hearing and discerning God’s voice.

One frustration we might experience in our pursuit to hear God is that He seems to remain silent. If nothing seems to be happening in our prayer or silence, we may check whether we are going in the right direction. For example, we can ask, “Lord, is this really how I should be praying?” Alternatively, we may continue to remain in silence, waiting on Him persistently. Persistence and perseverance are an old tradition of God’s people, as we find in a passage containing Isaiah’s prayer for Jerusalem (Isaiah 62:6). Whatever our circumstances, we should not forget to return to the truth that we are not separated from God (Romans 8:39). Even when we may not hear a specific word, surely God is with us. Our part is to seek and wait faithfully in silence.

The road we take in hearing God may not always be smooth. We may face hurdles and hindrances along the way. Joanne Hillman articulates the discouraging aspects of hearing God (2013, 1003-1151). The first hindrance may come from our propensity to listen with our minds instead of our spirits. We may not be familiar with God's voice, but when we hear it in our spirit, we will know it with the help of the Holy Spirit who works with our spirit, just as sheep know the voice of their Lord (John 10:4). Busyness in our daily lives also hinders our listening. We will miss God's abundant blessings if we do not set aside a particular time for silent listening and receiving God's care. We need a quiet, solitary place to be able to hear God's voice—we need to truly “be still and know that He is God” (Psalm 46:10).

As we seek to cultivate our spirituality and experience the abundant life in Christ, we have a deep longing to draw closer to God and engage in meaningful communication with Him. In this quest, we are invited to engage in spiritual disciplines, including the practice of silence. The following chapter explores a research project aimed at introducing the practice of silence to individuals who may not be familiar with this spiritual discipline. In this research, *examen* and prayer walking were used as means to engage in the practice of silence. Although these spiritual practices are not designed solely for the purpose of silence, both involve a significant amount of time spent in silence within their respective processes. This research project sought to guide the participants in the project to practice silence through reflection, walking in silence, or praying in silence and to gradually become more comfortable with the practice of silence gradually.

CHAPTER IV:
RESEARCH PROJECT: THE USE OF *EXAMEN* AND PRAYER
WALKING AS INTRODUCTORY SPIRITUAL FORMATION
PRACTICES FOR CAMBODIAN CHURCH LEADERS

Believers strive to grow in Christlikeness and be spiritually formed so that the character of Christ is expressed by the power of the Holy Spirit in every dimension of their personality. This transformative process aligns with God's predestined plan for us, as stated in Romans 8:29. It is the transformation of the believer's inner life that results in them being clothed with Jesus Christ and made into a new person. In this journey, believers are called to cultivate their spiritual life with the help of the Holy Spirit, just as a plant grows as it absorbs sunlight, water, and nutrients. Spiritual formation has been practiced in many ways, as Christians throughout the millennia focused on learning how to seek God, how to open themselves up to God and their deepest selves, and how to sense and respond to God's presence. This journey is not one that individuals undertake alone, for it is initiated and guided by God Himself. God's desire is to reveal His transforming presence to His beloved children through the process of spiritual formation.

In particular, solitude and silence play a foundational role in cultivating spiritual growth. These disciplines are essential to be attentive to God, receive His

transforming grace, develop habits of godliness, and sustain those habits throughout the journey of faith. They give believers opportunities and time to focus on themselves. In silence, believers withdraw from the exhausting demands of life and quiet their chaotic thoughts and compulsions so they can be attentive to the Holy Spirit who speaks. Silence is a means of clearing the soul. Since many spiritual practices include silence as a core element, silence is a keystone of spiritual formation.

Silence can be an intentional choice for individuals to express their emotions, or it can be a passive state when words are deemed unnecessary. Furthermore, silence is often embraced by those actively involved in the transformative journey of spiritual formation. However, embracing silence can at times be a challenging and demanding endeavour. Beginners may feel uncomfortable as they confront the irritating and painful realities of their life during the practice. They may also experience distractions that can make the process even more challenging. Since I wanted to share this precious heritage of spiritual practices with Cambodian Christians, I attempted to construct a program suitable for them and examine whether the program was successful and effective in leading them to engage in and grow through spiritual practices. This research report describes how I constructed this spiritual discipline program and evaluated its adequacy for Cambodian Christians.

Introduction to the Research Project

Due to a lack of adequate pastoral training, many church leaders in Cambodia find themselves in need of enhancing their pastoral skills. While they

may possess substantial biblical knowledge, they often lack opportunities for training in spiritual formation. It is crucial for them to learn how to develop a personal relationship with God and encounter the loving care of Christ through the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Consequently, the implementation of a culturally relevant training program aimed at fostering spiritual awareness and maturity would greatly benefit these leaders.

In this project, I aimed to examine the feasibility of introducing and promoting the practices of *examen* and prayer walking as introductory methods of spiritual formation. This research focused on Cambodian Christians living in a non-Christian environment who had been part of the Church for a relatively short time. The participants were recruited from the Cambodian churches that I had planted and served in. Since the participants were mostly unfamiliar with these spiritual practices, the procedures were modified to make them more accessible for beginners. Questionnaires were taken before and after the spiritual disciplines to analyze how they adapted to the activities. Over the course of the project, their views on their relationship with God changed. Initially they saw themselves as defined by what they did; after they saw themselves as defined by who they were. Some participants chose to adopt the spiritual practices introduced in this program as routines moving forward. Participants had the opportunity not only to experience new spiritual disciplines but also to establish a foundation for pursuing deeper spiritual experiences in the future.

Context

This section describes the context in which my research participants and I live and serve.

Buddhism and Spirituality in Cambodia

Buddhism has been the dominant religion in Cambodia since the thirteenth century. It is now the state religion. The government promotes Buddhism through holiday observance, religious training, Buddhist instruction in public schools, and financial support to Buddhist institutions. Today the country is over 83% Buddhist. There are also two Muslim ethnicities, the Cham and the Malay, which make up 3% of the population (Operation World 2021). Before Cambodia embraced Buddhism, Hinduism was commonplace. Back then, Hinduism was one of the Khmer Empire's official religions. Although Hinduism is no longer practiced as a religion in Cambodia, it influences Khmer Buddhist practices, such as weddings, funerals, and the use of astrology to find auspicious dates for important events.

Cambodian Buddhism also integrates elements of ancestor worship, shamanism, and animism that predate Buddhism. Russel Ross, a researcher for the Library of Congress noted that most Cambodians see their world as filled with various invisible spirits, some benevolent, others malevolent (1990, 125). Lina Goldberg, an author, pointed out that almost all Cambodian homes and even Buddhist temples have spirit houses, small shrines to appease evil spirits and keep them away from their homes (2012, 22). In times of crisis or change, animal sacrifices may be made to placate the anger of the spirits. Illness is often believed

to be caused by evil spirits or sorcerers, and most villages in rural areas have shamans who contact the spirits to prescribe ways to treat the sick (Ross 1990, 125). These spiritual leaders have strong authority and influence in their communities, especially in rural areas. Those who refuse to obey the spiritual leaders may be alienated or punished by the shamans and their followers.

In my experience, many Cambodians believe they experience the power of evil spirits in their day-to-day lives. Although demonic activities are not clearly seen in the atmosphere of Western intellectualism, they are frequently evident in Cambodia. Many Cambodians see ghosts and feel the presence and work of spirits. I have observed that most of them fear ghosts that they think might harm them, while others believe that as long as they maintain a good relationship with the ghosts by negotiating with and bribing them, they can turn ghosts into their helpers (Kent 2020, 3).

Christianity in Cambodia

Bible translation started in Cambodia in 1923. The New Testament was translated in 1933, and the complete Khmer Bible was published in 1953. The Cambodian Church went through periods of growth and persecution. Cambodians suffered political turmoil from 1975, resulting in what is known as The Killing Fields when a quarter of the total population died during the communist revolution. The small Christian community almost completely collapsed, as many Christians, along with other ordinary individuals, died of starvation, diseases, or murder. Some successfully fled to neighbouring countries. Several hundred remnants survived the genocide.

Although over 30 years have passed since public Christian worship was restored in 1990, Christian influence in the country remains minimal. Some researchers say that 3.1% of the population are professing Christians, and 1.6% are Evangelicals (Operation World 2021). A new constitution in 1993 guaranteed freedom of religion for Cambodian citizens, providing an environment where preaching the gospel became partially permissible. Consequently, the Christian community is growing, particularly among young people.

In my experience, most Cambodian Christians are socially underprivileged, resulting in a limited influence on society. Furthermore, they face additional hurdles as they seek to be participants with God in the expansion of God's Kingdom. Since most Cambodians think that to be a Cambodian is to be a Buddhist, the hurdle for a would-be convert to overcome is the feeling that becoming a Christian is, in some sense, a betrayal of national tradition and their identity. Christians are frequently condemned by family members and forced to choose between family and faith. Remaining a Christian is a challenge in the face of social pressure. Moreover, a considerable number of new converts are not genuinely convinced of the truth of Christianity, even though they confess their faith in Jesus as the Lord and get baptized. They view the Christian God in the same way that they view other spirits: as the source of material blessings. They assimilate the Christian God into the Khmer worldview as the most powerful inhabitant of the spirit world. There is a great need for a deeper understanding of the Word of God (Coggan 2016, 2).

Since pastoral training for church leaders is primarily informal biblical and leadership training, and only a few are trained in full-time residential theological educational institutions, most ministers have minimal pastoral skills and biblical knowledge. Although some church leaders who obtained basic biblical knowledge through various educational programs are vibrant in worship and committed to the ministry, they do not have adequate experience to translate their biblical knowledge into spiritual maturity. While enhancing church leaders' biblical knowledge and outreach skills is vital, training them to experience Christ's loving care and develop a personal relationship with God through the Holy Spirit's guidance is crucial. With this in mind, this project sought to construct and evaluate a training program to nurture their spiritual awareness and maturity and provide primary data to learn how to effectively guide them along the path of spiritual formation.

Field and Scope

Spiritual formation is a challenging process, especially for beginners. Anyone who desires to cultivate one's spirituality must practice spiritual disciplines regularly and patiently until they eventually build up habits of reading the Bible, praying, meditating in silence, and examining themselves. A daily discipline of Bible reading, for example, will build up a habit of reading without finding it a burdensome duty. This habit will shape their spiritual life as they meditate upon the passage they read. Similarly, the trainees will also need to build up the habits of praying, examining themselves, and hearing God, which allows them to enjoy a far richer spiritual life.

Since this project aimed to introduce a spiritual training program to Cambodian church leaders, the prospective participants were selected from the churches I planted in Cambodia. They were active church members for more than four years, aged twenty to forty years. The participants had basic biblical knowledge and understood fundamental theological issues. However, they did not have experience in spiritual practices such as *lectio divina*, *examen*, or prayer walking.

A total of seventeen participants took part in the project, comprising nine females, four married and five unmarried, and eight males, four married and four unmarried. Twelve of them resided in urban areas, while five lived in rural areas. In terms of age distribution, there was one participant in her sixties, two in their forties, eight in their thirties, and six in their twenties. In regard to education, nine participants held college degrees, three had high school diplomas, two had master's degrees, two had doctorates, and one had completed middle school. As for their occupations, nine participants were office workers, five were professionals (including two preachers, one professor, one dentist, and one schoolteacher), two were farmers, and one was a self-employed businessman.

The participants attended the spiritual training program that I developed during this project. The program lasted for four weeks. Although a longer training period would have provided a better opportunity to evaluate changes that might occur in the participants, I chose to keep the program relatively short so that the participants would not feel too burdened. Considering that the participants were beginners in spiritual practices, I aimed to minimize the tasks assigned to them

and the overall duration of their commitment. While spiritual disciplines usually require dedicated engagement to achieve the best results, I took their limited experience into account and introduced only the most manageable and least burdensome tasks for them to undertake. I resided in Korea throughout the project. Nevertheless, I maintained regular communication with the participants via e-mail, phone, and other online methods since travelling and in-person contact were limited or prohibited due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Each participant performed the practices by themselves. Communication with the other participants was neither encouraged nor discouraged. For example, they were allowed to share their experiences as they wished during private meetings. My research focused on examining how easy it was for participants to adopt practices of silence and meditation and develop an intimate relationship with God. I hoped that they would grow spiritually during the course. They were invited to respond to pre- and post-program questionnaires. Their responses were analyzed and used to evaluate the effectiveness of the approach I used to introduce them to these spiritual disciplines.

Models and Other Resources

Human beings are innately spiritually hungry and thirsty, which makes them restless (Psalm 42:1–2). Christians know they can find rest only in God (Augustine 2022, 1.1.1). However, finding this path is challenging, and many struggle to discover it. Jesus, who understands our hunger and thirst, invites us to join Him on a journey toward complete freedom and eternal peace. As we walk along the path, we seek to be continually conformed to Christ's image by God's

grace. The process of being transformed into Christ's likeness becomes the story of our lives (2 Corinthians 3:12-18).

Christians who want to be conformed to the likeness of Christ need to cultivate their spiritual life, recognizing that God is the initiator and facilitator of the entire process. Although people strive to cultivate spiritual growth in various ways, they usually focus on how we seek God or how we open ourselves to Him and our deepest selves. The Holy Spirit touches our hearts, which plays a crucial role in spiritual formation. With the help of the Holy Spirit, a new heart is created in Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17), whereby God's love, poured out by the Holy Spirit (Romans 5:5), transforms the heart that is stubborn and unrepentant (Romans 2:5). Christians experience the Holy Spirit dwelling within them and working with and for them. Spiritual maturity develops with an increasing awareness of God's presence in our day-to-day life. In this process, individuals are gradually conformed to the likeness of Jesus Christ.

Various church practices provide valuable resources for nurturing one's relationship with God and seeking inner transformation. These include worship, prayer, study, meditation, sabbath, solitude, fasting, and so on. Notably, the disciplines of silence and solitude play a foundational role in spiritual formation. When we live in the solitude of our hearts, we can listen attentively to the words of our true selves. Silence in solitude leads us to face the truth about ourselves and eventually brings us into genuine fellowship with God. The practice of silence frees us from the distractions in the world around us in order to open us to God and listen to Him. In silence, we pay attention to the Holy Spirit and what He

brings to our souls, and we create space for God's activity rather than filling our souls with our own thoughts and desires (Barton 2010, 34). When we make room for silence, we also make room for ourselves.

As discussed in the previous chapter, the tradition of silence and solitude is found throughout the Bible. Jesus spent forty days in the wilderness preparing for His ministry. He later, during His ministry, withdrew Himself frequently to a lonely place and prayed. Many disciples followed the example of Jesus. Spiritual writers, ancient and modern—the Desert Fathers and Mothers, John Climacus, Thomas Merton, Henri Nouwen, and many others—are unanimous in saying that silence and solitude lead to a love of God, a love of self, and a love of others (Jones 2005, 41). The Catholic Encyclopedia emphatically states, “All writers on the spiritual life uniformly recommend, nay, command under penalty of total failure, the practice of silence” (Obrecht 1912, 790).

We need quiet time alone with God. In being silent, we realize that we do not need to respond to every word and request that comes our way and demands that we do too much. The discipline of silence invites us to leave behind these competing demands for time alone with Christ Jesus. Silence helps us notice that we need to avoid giving in to emotions such as anger, sadness, impatience, resentment, or loneliness. These unhealthy things interfere with our desire to be with God.

When the silence settles in, but nothing seems to be taking place in our hearts, we often struggle with the feeling that we are wasting time (Calhoun 2015, 213). This struggle can lead us into prayer. While we continue to remain silent,

the inner noise and confusion will begin to settle. Clearing the soul by sitting still in silence takes time. Silence reveals what we have in our hearts, allowing us to access ourselves and God more deeply than at other times. Silence puts us in a space alone with God. In that space we offer our body and attention to God as a prayer. Then the silence sharpens our souls to become more sensitive to God's voice. Silence provides us with time to rest in God and lean on Him, trusting that being with Him will loosen our roots in the world and plant us by streams of living water (Calhoun 2015, 214). Silence guides our troubled and disturbed souls into peace and transformation. We can move on to deeper spiritual experiences when we are settled down through silence.

Many Evangelical churches have not acknowledged or practiced silence and solitude as a spiritual discipline (Jones 2005, 25). In my experience, many of those in Cambodia have rarely learned about these crucial practices. Beginners may find practicing silence and solitude challenging since practicing silence is a laborious and disturbing process. Even some mature believers find it difficult (Nouwen 1997, 1027). Because we live in a wordy society, many of us wrongly believe that our words are more important than our silence. Since we are so accustomed to the dominating power of the word, silence is an unfamiliar and even fear-inducing thing. For most people, silence is empty and hollow, creating nervousness and even hostility when imposed. Silence challenges our cultural attachment to loquacity, amusement, noise, and alarms. Silence asks us to be patient; the apparent unproductiveness of patience makes us uncomfortable.

Silence often takes us beyond discomfort. As Dallas Willard (1988, 163) put it, “Silence is frightening because it strips us as nothing else does, throwing us upon the stark realities of our life. It reminds us of death, which will cut us off from this world and leave only us and God. And in the quiet, what if there turns out to be very little between us and God?” However, though we may have to struggle with distractions and spiritual attacks during our silence and solitude, it is a sacred time for the Holy Spirit to stir our hearts and minds to greater faithfulness and healthy spiritual hunger. Since our Lord is the God of love and peace, silence should bring us into a restful encounter with the loving Father. Silence invites the Holy Spirit to dwell within us and allows us to experience the power of God’s healing hand.

However, because we live in an age of technology and information, it is not easy to carve out silent time every day. Every part of our life is inundated with words, including trivial words, random words, urgent words, informative words, and religious words. In the midst of superfluous, inauthentic, and shallow words, it becomes difficult to know which messages are truly important. We need to retrieve transformative words out of this flood of words.

Introducing the spiritual practice of silence to those who have not yet experienced it can offer an opportunity to encounter God’s presence and enter into communion with Him. This spiritual practice will complement their knowledge-based or intellectual traditions and allow them to learn from other traditions. Our ministry should point beyond our word to the mystery of God. This is the task that Jesus has given us (John 14:10).

Nonetheless, one challenge remains: How can we successfully convince people to explore the practice of silence? One way is being prepared to guide those who have never experienced spiritual disciplines in a manner that they can participate in comfortably, with the hopes that they pursue deeper spiritual exercises afterwards, eventually living a life of loving union with God at the depths of their being (John 17:21-22). The discipline of silence requires allocating a predetermined time and quiet place so that one can focus on oneself without being interrupted or distracted. A trainee needs to choose the right place for silence in solitude. Being still before God in solitude is an essential element of many spiritual practices such as *lectio divina*, *examen*, and prayer walk.

Examen is a practice of prayerfully reflecting on the events of the day, creating a deeper awareness of the God-given desires in one's life. There are many variations of the *examen* practice. In general, it involves a series of steps that guide the individual to become aware of God's presence, to review the day with gratitude, to pay attention to one's emotions, to pray about some aspect of the day, and to look forward to tomorrow. The practice usually begins with finding a quiet and undisturbed place where one can reflect on the events of the past day and seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The individual then asks himself a series of questions to examine the day's experiences (Scorgie 2011, 436). In this particular research project, I tailored the questions to be suitable for the Cambodian participants. Examples of these questions include: "What happened during the day? What did I feel? How did I react? What moments of the day am I grateful for? Where did I feel God's presence throughout the day? Was

there a moment when I felt that I had received a gift from God? What are the moments of selfishness and unkindness?” Prayer can be interspersed throughout this process, allowing individuals to communicate with God whenever they feel prompted. They can ask God to reveal anything they missed or did not pay attention to during the day. Finally, the *examen* seeks perspective and direction for the future. This practice involves listening attentively in silence to where and how God has manifested Himself during the day and engaging in prayerful interaction with Him (Calhoun 2015, 98).

Examen is a crucial procedure to guard one’s heart, as Solomon admonished: “Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life” (Proverbs 4:23). The Lord said to Israelites, “Give careful thought to your ways” (Haggai 1:5). Jesus challenged the Pharisees to examine their hearts as well as their actions (Matthew 23:25). Paul also exhorted his followers to watch themselves (Galatians 6:1). In light of these teachings, the spiritual leaders of the Church urged continual self-examination. St. Ignatius developed “some spiritual exercises by which man is led to the possibility of conquering himself and deciding on a way of conducting his life that is free from harmful attachments” (Wolff 1997, ix). Silence during the *examen* can allow us to enter into interaction with God and receive insight and direction for the future from God (Calhoun 2015, 99).

Prayer walking also includes a time of silence. Prayer walking is a slow and deliberate walk through places with the purpose of deepening in prayer. Prayer walking typically involves walking in the company of Jesus through a

specific place, such as a home, church, or other place that needs prayer. While walking, they pray for each room or space, reflecting on what is happening there or praying for the people associated with those places. They may also pray for those attending events of interest to them. They reflect on how recognizing Jesus' presence in these places redirects their interactions or provides insight into God's heart for that particular place. Throughout this practice, they always seek the guidance and direction of the Holy Spirit for their prayers (Calhoun 2015, 521).

In this research project, however, the focus was not on praying for specific places or people associated with those places. Instead, participants were encouraged to focus their attention on practicing silence and seeking Jesus' presence with them. During the silence, they could pray for themselves and their personal life issues as they felt led. Occasionally, meditation on a Bible passage was incorporated into their walking practice.

Prayer walking brings our prayers and desires into God's presence. The course and time of walking become a time when we hear God. The walking is to bring the body and mind into sync with one another. Some people do their best to pray while they are moving. Prayer walking can be an excellent practice for those who like to get up and move around while praying (Calhoun 2015, 520). A beginner may find it difficult or even painful to stay seated in a particular position and become easily distracted after a while. In order to guard oneself against distraction—or at least reduce how difficult those distractions are to overcome—some physical activities can go along with practicing silence and solitude, such as walking along a quiet trail. Daily prayer walking can easily be integrated into our

schedule since walking is something most of us do every day. Walks can be done at any place. A walk in nature while praying, connecting with all its sights, sounds, and scents, is refreshing to most people. The stillness of a natural landscape, if available, can help minimize distractions, too. However, a busy place in the city may also serve as a place for walking in silence. One can keep one's mind and heart focused on prayer even in the midst of a crowd. Prayer walking is good for building up a habit of focusing on God and the inner self. The act of walking can evolve into a pilgrimage when individuals purposefully traverse a sacred site with a prayerful intention that surpasses mere tourism. Throughout this pilgrimage, individuals are expected to cultivate a heightened awareness and attentiveness to the movements of the Holy Spirit within themselves (Calhoun, 2015, p. 115).

Methodology

I invited Cambodian Christians from the churches I planted to participate in a program that would guide them so they could experience the spiritual discipline of silence by practicing *examen* and prayer walking. These practices have been exercised for centuries in various Christian communities (Calhoun 2015, 426). However, many evangelical communities have been alienated from this precious heritage, and because of the unfamiliarity, it has become challenging to get people to embrace these deep and rich practices. Since the participants in this project had never experienced these disciplines, I modified the processes to make them more comfortable for unfamiliar parties while keeping the core of each practice intact (Calhoun 100 and 215; Wilhoit and Howard 2012, 445).

Furthermore, I replaced the terms “*examen*” and “prayer walking” with more commonly understood terms such as “self-examination” and “walk-in-silence.” This modification has been made to ensure better understanding for participants who may not be familiar with the specialized terminology, while maintaining the core content unchanged.

While neither the *examen* nor the prayer walk is intended solely for the purpose of practicing silence, both activities do involve a substantial amount of time spent in silence during their respective processes. Furthermore, these two activities—self-examination and walk-in-silence—complemented each other well, creating habits of silent meditation. In case a participant found either practice particularly difficult, the other might work for them. I intended to guide participants to practice silence through reflecting, walking, or praying in silence, and hoped that the participants became more comfortable with silence despite it being uncomfortable for many people (Willard 1988, 163). This project expected that spiritual benefits would be obtained through self-examination and prayer as well as the practice of silence. The participants were invited to respond to two questionnaires: one at the beginning of the program, to assess the participants’ perspectives on their relationship with God and the routines they used to nurture their spirituality, and the other at the end of the program, to evaluate the participants’ performance and the effectiveness of this program.

Ernest Stringer wrote, “A fundamental premise of participatory action research is that it commences with an interest in the problems of a group or community. Its purpose is to assist people to extend their understanding of their

situation and to resolve significant issues or problems that confront them” (2014, 14). Given the participants’ lack of familiarity with the practices of *examen* or prayer walking, they had no prior basis to assess the potential benefits or difficulties associated with these spiritual disciplines. In my personal experience, I observed that they faced challenges in maintaining silence, even for short durations. Moreover, the concepts of “spirituality” or “nurturing spirituality” were unfamiliar to them. Instead, their desire to deepen their connection with Jesus was expressed in terms of “becoming more faithful” or “strengthening their faith.” This awareness of their spiritual needs motivated me to provide teaching and training in specific spiritual practices to foster their spiritual growth.

The qualitative nature of this research required me “to gather information about participants’ experiences and perspectives and to define the problem or issue in terms that ‘makes sense’ in their own terms” (Stringer 2014, 101). This research methodology helps participants experience and gain a better understanding of their actions and use that new understanding to come up with effective ways to solve their problems (Sensing 2011, 56). I hoped this would be true in regard to participants’ relationship with God. I sought to use culturally specific and contextually relevant methods and answers that would help both individuals and the Church. Although the spiritual practices were performed by individual participants, they developed a sense of community as they performed the tasks, which lines up with Stringer’s observation that “community is not a place; it is a state of mind” (2014, xxi).

Methods

This project taught spiritual disciplines to those who had been trained through Scripture-based learning to help them learn and grow in the practice of silence. The disciplines taught in this program consisted of self-examination and walk-in-silence. These include a considerable amount of silence. I expected that the participants would learn to nurture their spirituality in the four-week program. They received weekly instructions during the program and were given assignments three days a week. In the first week, however, assignments were only given on two days in order to make the start of the program less burdensome. Their assignment always consisted of one session of self-examination and one of walk-in-silence, adding up to two spiritual disciple sessions on each of the assigned dates. The participants were advised to practice silence at the beginning and middle of each practice. An instruction manual (Appendix A) containing full details on the implementation of the practices was provided to each participant.

For the first week, they engaged in the exercises on two separate days. The task for each of those days was to sit in silence for five minutes and walk in silence for fifteen minutes. When sitting or walking in silence, no other specific activities—self-reflection or prayer—were assigned. By handling things this way in the first week, I intended to help beginners gradually become familiar with being silent. From the second week on, the duration of the practices was extended to fifteen and twenty minutes, respectively, and they participated in the exercises three days a week. On each of the assigned days, they practiced self-examination and walk-in-silence at separate times. Participants were allowed to choose to pray

during the walk-in-silence, although a considerable part of the walk was to be done in silence; the participants might have learned to combine prayers with their silent walks. The assignments for the rest of the program were given in a similar way, as summarized in Table 1. The entire set of instructions is in Appendix A.

At the beginning of the program, participants were invited to respond to a questionnaire (Appendix B) to assess their existing spiritual habits and their views on their relationship with God. When the four-week program was completed, they were invited to fill out another questionnaire (Appendix C) to evaluate how well they performed the assigned tasks and how effective this program was in helping them become familiar with the practices that they were introduced to.

Table 1: A summary of weekly assignments

Week	Assignments
Week 1	Day 1 and 2: Silent sitting (5 min.) and silent walk (15 min.)
Week 2 to Week 4	Day 1, 2 and 3: Self-examination (15 min.) and walk-in-silence (20 min.)

The participants were recruited from the churches I planted in Cambodia. A church leader other than myself communicated with the congregations to invite people to participate. Each individual who expressed their intention to join the program was provided with an invitation letter and a consent form with descriptions of the purpose and nature of the program, an overview of the schedule, and the benefits expected to be gained. They were given a week to consider their participation before making a decision. The potential participants

were encouraged to contact the administrator or me with any questions they had. Only those who returned signed consent forms were selected as participants.

The selected participants were asked to complete a questionnaire (Appendix B) before beginning the assigned practices. After collecting the responses to the pre-program questionnaire, I gave the participants their instructions, sending out updates every week. The instructions contained full details of the processes so the participants could follow them comfortably. While participants followed their instructions, I communicated with them to provide whatever help they needed.

When the four-week program was over, participants were asked to complete another questionnaire (Appendix C). These questionnaires aimed to gain insights into the participants' perceptions of their relationship with God and the methods they employed to nurture their spirituality. The analysis focused on identifying keywords and phrases used by the participants in both the pre- and post-program questionnaires. Additionally, attention was given to their descriptions of the program's effectiveness of the program and the benefits they experienced. Any challenges or difficulties encountered by the participants were also assessed. The questionnaire explored several points to assess the program's impact of the program on nurturing their relationship with God: 1) How did they view the development of their relationship with God, and did their view change after completing the four-week program? 2) Did they become more intimate with God through the program? 3) How much did they enjoy self-examination and

walk-in-silence as spiritual disciplines? 4) Did they have any spiritual fruit during the program? Completing each questionnaire was expected to take about an hour.

Ethics in Ministry-Based Research

This research was intended to provide an opportunity for the participants to learn how to grow spiritually and have transformative spiritual experiences. In particular, they learned to silently examine themselves and their daily lives, and in so doing become more attentive to the presence of God. Recognizing the importance of mitigating potential risks that could arise during the program, I endeavoured to address and minimize them throughout the course of the program. Several areas of concern were carefully examined, including privacy, power imbalances, and fairness in participant recruitment. As the researcher, I understood that all the participants should be treated and respected equally, and no individual participant should be unfairly burdened by the research.

The potential risks that might be encountered during the process of this research and the measures to reduce and minimize the risks were:

Firstly, the Cambodian participants might feel uncomfortable refusing to participate due to their personal relationship with me as their pastor. On the other hand, our personal relationship could help encourage them to participate and attempt exercises they were not accustomed to. Nonetheless, since it was important to minimize the potential risks, the prospective participants were provided with materials that explained the need for their consent, the benefits of this program to individual participants as well as the church as a whole, and that they were free to decide whether to participate or not and would not face

manipulation or pressure by others. The consent materials also mentioned that there would be no penalty if anyone chose not to participate, and they would not lose any benefits to which they were otherwise entitled. In addition, the recruitment was done by a church leader other than me. The prospective participants were given a week to consider whether they wanted to participate or not.

Another potential risk was that some of the church members who were not invited to participate might feel that they were intentionally excluded, which might cause them to suspect that they would lose favour in the church. Since this program intended to help church leaders who had basic biblical knowledge and a certain level of church experience, only qualified participants were invited to participate. Each church member was informed of the purpose of the study and the requirements for participation and that anyone who met the requirements could participate. They were also told that they could participate in another similar program that would be offered at a different time for training purposes only, not for research.

Thirdly, some might be concerned that their performances or opinions expressed in this program could be shared with others. In order to ensure anonymity, each participant was asked to open a new e-mail account with a pseudonym of his or her own choice and use the e-mail to communicate with me without informing me of the pseudonym. The participants could close down the temporary e-mail account when the project was complete. Furthermore, the data taken from the participants' e-mail messages were stored securely on my

computer, and the original e-mail message was erased immediately to minimize the possibility that someone would intercept the e-mail through hacking. In this way, the possibility that participants' thoughts, opinions and personal information would be made available to others was minimized. No personal information concerning the participants was disclosed even when the research results were made public (Government of Canada 2018, 141).

Fourthly, some participants might find it burdensome to carry out the program tasks in the midst of life's busyness. Spending some time on the activities was unavoidable because the program required the participants to perform some activities. In order to minimize the participants' workload, the consent materials explained that the program was designed to minimize the amount of time required of them. They were informed that participation should take no more than two hours per week and that this time could be fit into their schedules at their convenience, without requiring them to come to a designated location at a specific time. They were also given ample time to consider their participation before making a decision.

Finally, this research was approved by the Tyndale Research Ethics Board on November 30, 2021. I communicated with the participants in a manner that complied with Canadian research ethics standards as well as Cambodian standards, which are less stringent than Canadian Standards.

Outcomes, Findings, and Interpretation

Seventeen people expressed their intention to participate in the project by turning in consent forms and later responded to the pre-program questionnaire.

Most of them completed the four weeks of exercises and their post-program questionnaire on time. A few participants took longer than the rest to complete the program. In the end, thirteen of the seventeen participants who completed the pre-program questionnaire completed the program and replied to the post-program questionnaire. The reasons why some people dropped out fell into three categories. First, one applicant stated that his living situation did not allow him to complete the tasks. While living in harsh conditions, it was a challenge for him to find the right time and a friendly place where he could perform the tasks. In fact, many of those who successfully completed the program also complained about distractions caused by their environment. Second, two of the participants who dropped out said they were too busy with other responsibilities, such as unexpected work overload or caring for COVID-19-stricken family members. Third, one other participant said that the practices were too difficult for her. She found them entirely new and demanding. Although I gave her more time to continue with the challenge, she could not overcome her struggles, and eventually, she gave up. When time ran out and I could not wait any longer, I agreed with her decision and stopped encouraging her to try and complete the program. It is not uncommon for certain spiritual practices, such as the practice of silence, to be arduous and unsettling, even for experienced believers (Nouwen 1997, 1027). Therefore, while some participants may have found the practices to be beneficial, it is understandable that others may have encountered difficulties. Each individual's experience and response to these practices can vary significantly. In this particular case, the participant's struggle with the practices

was acknowledged. Considering her situation and the limited time available, it was deemed appropriate to respect her decision and not insist on encouraging her to continue.

Analysis of the Pre-Program Questionnaire: Initial Spiritual Perspectives of the Participants

The participants' responses to the pre-program questionnaire were analyzed to understand how they viewed their relationship with God and the methods they chose to develop that relationship. Their responses also revealed how they sought God's guidance in their daily lives.

Understanding Their Relationship With God

When asked about their relationship with God, nine out of thirteen participants responded by listing what they felt they ought to do as Christians, such as worshiping, reading and meditating on God's Word, praying, singing hymns, and serving the faith community. Some regretted that they were not diligent enough in carrying out their duties or admitted that they did not know how to do it well. They appeared to think that what they did for God determined the nature of their relationship with God. These responses can be attributed to the education and training they received in their churches, which emphasized doctrines to believe and specific duties to perform. The focus on obligations and duties might have influenced their understanding of their relationship with God, leading them to believe that their actions and performance determine the quality of that relationship. Some of them worshiped and prayed to God out of fear rather than a loving heart. They served and loved God in their own way, but sometimes

it was more like trying to appease Him as they did with their local gods before their conversion to Christianity.

Through conversations with several participants, I realized that their perception of the relationship between God and humans was one-sided. God appeared to them as a strict and inscrutable master. Some participants expressed their fear of God, saying that disobedience to God's commandments would result in punishment or an inability to understand God's intentions. A few individuals regretted not being more diligent in reading the Bible or participating in other religious practices that they believed would have earned them God's favour. They considered their relationship with God fixed and unchangeable, not something to be developed. Establishing a bidirectional or loving relationship with God was an awkward concept because they believed such relationships could only be formed between two equal parties. In their relationship with God, only their duties as the subordinate remained—there was no mutuality to the relationship or how they communicated—and reward or punishment would follow based on how they performed. The omnipotent and omniscient God was beyond their comprehension, and they saw Him as a fearsome master. These concepts seemed to come from their previous religious experiences, such as Buddhism, Hinduism, shamanism, or a mixture of these. One said, "I am not afraid of the local gods because I know that I can appease them by performing rituals they favour and giving them what I know they want. I can even make them friendly." Their religious experience prevented them from creating a loving relationship with God

like parents, siblings, or friends. Rather, seeking such a relationship could be considered blasphemy.

Most participants knew of the Christian God from second-hand sources; they learned about Him from others through teachings or testimonies. They sought to learn what they should do to please God. As a result, they held the view that it was believers' duty to fulfill God's commandments, which was an extension of their old habits toward the local gods. Although they admitted that their connection to God was vital to their religious life, the connection was more like an inflexible Creator-creature relationship than a dynamic, communicable, and caring one.

However, four of the participants described having a father-child relationship or described their relationship with God as intimate. They sincerely trusted God and confessed that He was their Father who loved and cared for them, and He provided what they needed both physically and spiritually. One participant stated that she intellectually understood the concept of the father-child relationship and was in the course of building that relationship. Some regretted that they had been staying far away from God—they admitted that they should spend more time with Him. Although they described their relationship with God as a Father, some did not seem to have clear spiritual experiences of the Father—they had simply been taught that they were children of God. To them, the idea of being children of God may have remained more of a conceptual belief rather than a lived reality.

Methods of Seeking God's Guidance in Daily Life

Although the participants used a variety of ways to seek God's guidance, all of them chose to pray to Him for guidance and asked Him to reveal His will to them when they were making decisions. Their prayers were accompanied by other activities. Five of them said they read the Bible before praying for guidance. Three of those who chose reading the Bible as a means of seeking God's guidance believed that God's will, as manifested in the Bible, would be revealed when they read it. The other two believed they could find God's will while carrying out what God said in the Bible and striving to do His will. Some also consulted with other believers or church elders following their prayer for guidance. The majority of them did not seem to have the experience of hearing God's voice or other perceptible means of God's revelation. Two of them experienced what they considered to be God's intervention. They could discern God's will by waiting to hear His voice, during earnest prayer or reading and meditating on the Word, or by waiting for God to touch their hearts. Another person said that God's will would be spontaneously revealed as she lived out God's commandments. This seemed to mean that she trusted God's grace flowing into her life, although it was not clear how often she experienced such a revelation. One confessed that she was never sure what God's will was, and it was very difficult or impossible for her to discern what He wanted as she made decisions. Her choice sometimes resulted in joy, but at other times, she felt forced to do something because she could not identify any other choice. Another participant had a vague expectation that God would reveal His will, based on her indirect experience. It seemed that she had

heard many people testify that God answered their prayers and revealed His will. She accepted the consequences of her decisions with joy if things went well, which she took to mean that God had blessed her ways, or with tears if things did not go as she wished, which meant that her plan was not in accordance with God's will. Although only one participant voiced this opinion, based on my previous conversations with Christians in general, it seems to be a prevalent and common perspective among those who seek to discern God's will. Figure 1 summarises the participant's methods of seeking God's guidance. Note that each participant was asked to choose one or more methods by which they sought God's guidance from a variety of options available to them.

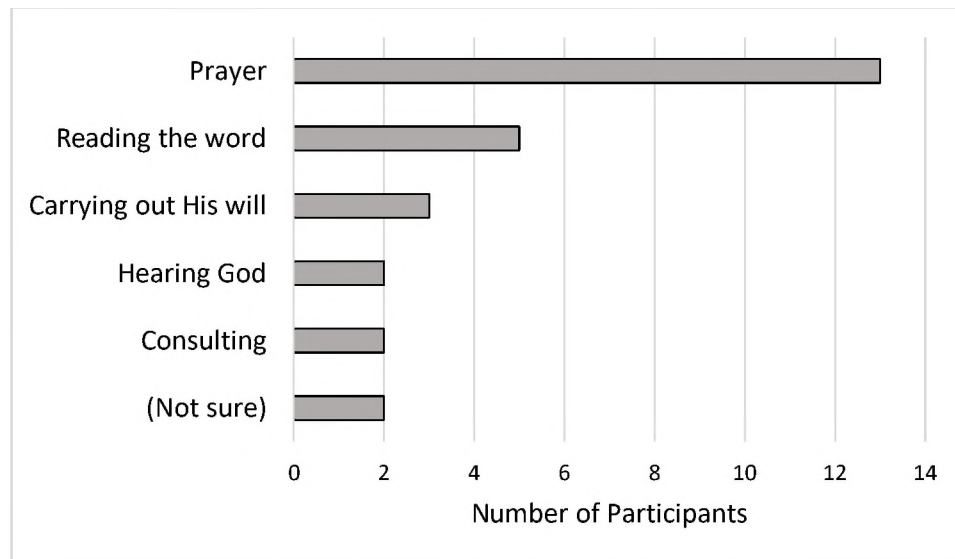


Figure 1: Methods of seeking God's guidance

Methods of Developing One's Relationship with God

The majority (ten participants) chose both prayer and reading or studying the Bible as their means of developing their relationship with God. They believed they needed more knowledge of God to become closer to Him. Reading was their

primary way of acquiring knowledge, and prayer was the way they expressed their requests for God’s favour. Those who did not describe prayer or Bible reading as their primary way to develop their relationship with God likely did not mean they did not pray or read the Bible. They only wanted to emphasize other activities, viewing praying and reading as too basic. Seven participants chose singing hymns as one of their ways to get nearer to God (see Figure 2). Singing was not only a way to praise the Lord but also to pray and seek God’s guidance. As Darryl Tippens pointed out, spiritual life and worship engage all the senses—olfactory and gustatory senses in the communion service and the auditory sense in preaching and prayer (2014, 20). Singing is especially resonant because it is obviously sensuous because of its auditory nature; singing offers a way to draw nearer to God.

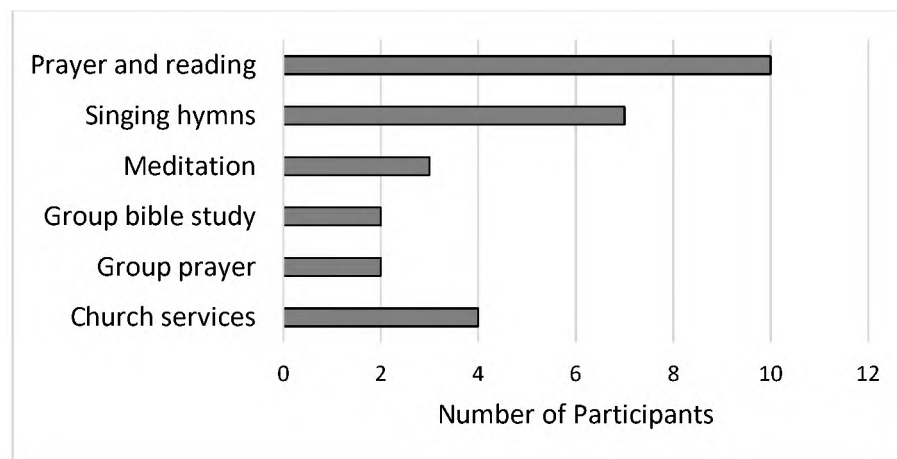


Figure 2: Methods of developing or maintaining one’s relationship with God

Some preferred Bible study or prayer in a small group rather than alone because it was an opportunity to share with others what they had received and gain new understandings or perspectives from others. Their desire to draw closer to God was also expressed in activities such as worship and other church

programs, including fellowship with other believers, helping those in need, and preaching the gospel to neighbours (four participants mentioned this). Three participants responded that they practiced meditation to maintain their relationship with God. Again, each participant was asked to choose one or more methods from a diverse range of options available to them.

Similar responses were obtained when they were asked what they needed to do to deepen their relationship with God. As shown in Figure 3, most of them replied that Bible reading and prayers were important for that purpose but that they should do it more diligently. Again, each participant was asked to choose one or more methods from a diverse range of options available to them.

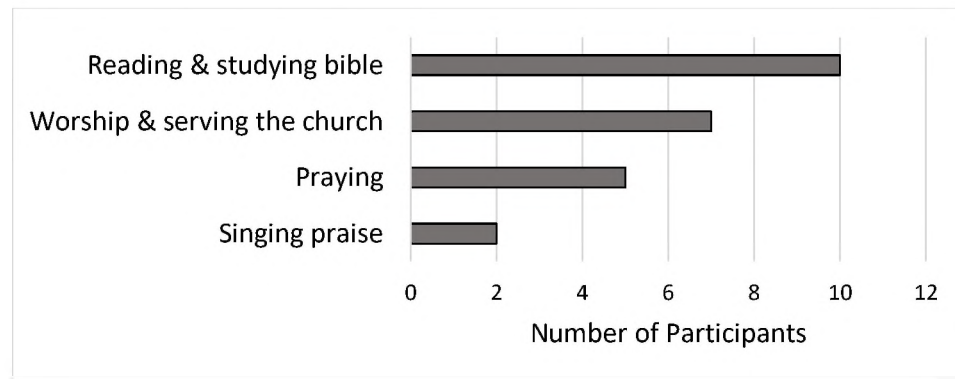


Figure 3: Methods chosen by participants to deepen their relationship with God

One participant responded that she needed to study God’s Word by reading books other than the Bible. She meant that she could not understand the Bible well enough and had to seek help from other books. She particularly wanted to learn about church history and reinforce the theological basis of her understanding. Church activities such as corporate worship, fellowship, teaching,

and preaching the gospel to one's neighbours remained important to participants' quest to deepen their relationship with God.

Analysis of Post-Program Questionnaire: Changes in the Participants' Spiritual Perspectives After Completing the Program

Participants' responses to the post-program questionnaire were analyzed to determine how their concepts of a relationship with God changed after completing this program. The questionnaire also examined whether they chose different methods to develop their relationship with God after completing the program and how the practices of self-examination and walk-in-silence influenced their approach to spiritual disciplines. In addition, other experiences that they had while engaging in these practices, such as hearing God's voice and difficulties putting aside distractions, were explored.

How Views on Their Relationship With God Changed

A significant number of the participants did not change their perspective on how they establish an intimate relationship with God. They continued to emphasize the importance of personal effort in shaping the nature of this relationship. Consistent with their previous responses, they outlined a number of specific actions they believed they should take to deepen their connection with God. They still thought that God was a transcendent being who was beyond their reach and understanding, let alone building a special relationship. However, one noticeable change was that many of them added meditation to their list of must-do activities after completing this program. The change seemed to be the result of their positive experiences of meditation during this program, although I could not

rule out the possibility that they used the word just because it was a new concept that sounded appealing.

Six participants said they could communicate with God through activities such as reading, praying, and meditating. Applying God's teaching to one's day-to-day life was also viewed as a way to build a relationship with God. Another appreciable description of the relationship with God was that God was "with them." In contrast to defining their relationship with God by what they did, they defined their relationship by who they were to God. Seven participants said, "I sense (មានអារម្មណ៍ដឹង: or "feel and be aware") His presence" or "God is near (គង់នៅ, or "by my side") me." Alternatively, they described themselves as being in a "father-child relationship (គូនរបស់ព្រះអង្គ, or "God's child"), "intimate (យ៉ាងជ្រាលជ្រៅ, or "deeply") relationship," or "connected (ទាក់ទង, or "related") with God." God was the One who forgave them, cared for them, protected them, and loved them. They were always connected to God and could remember the connection on every occasion. Compared with the pre-program questionnaire responses, the number of participants who described that they were in a special relationship with God or felt connected with Him increased from four to seven participants. In contrast, those who identified their relationship with God as being based on activities decreased from nine to six.

Establishing a meaningful relationship with God is closely tied to the perception of Him, who is both transcendent and immanent. Transcendence refers to God's existence beyond the physical world, emphasizing His incomprehensibility and separation from creation. Immanence, on the other hand,

highlights God's active presence and involvement within the world, emphasizing His accessibility and closeness to humanity. These concepts provide different perspectives on God's relationship with the world, acknowledging His vastness and mystery (transcendence) as well as His intimate involvement and care (immanence). The participants are relatively familiar with the transcendent aspect of God, but they cannot fully integrate the immanent aspect of God into their lives. In other words, there is an imbalance between these two aspects of God. Therefore, it is important for them to harmoniously integrate these two aspects of God into their daily lives so that they can develop an intimate relationship with God.

Methods to Deepen One's Relationship with God

When asked after completing the program how to deepen their relationship with God, some of them said they would continue doing what they had done, such as prayer, Bible reading, singing hymns, and corporate worship. Six participants also admitted that they needed to do the activities more consistently than before. In order to do so on a regular basis, they wanted to set aside a specific time for these activities, which seemed to reflect their experiences during the program. Practical application of or obedience to God's teaching was also seen as important for deepening their relationship with God. Seven participants included meditation or silence in their listed activities. Two of them wanted to continue practicing self-examination and walk-in-silence after the program was complete.

Sometimes, people hear God's voice or perceive His guiding hand during these practices (Merton, 1956, 69). Hearing God's voice is complicated; it is often

difficult to be sure of what one has heard (Hillman 2013, 1003). It requires experience or careful guidance from an experienced person. When participants were asked if they had heard God's voice while performing their tasks in this program, two participants shared that they had. One of them said that he heard an audible voice during prayer in addition to thoughts coming into his mind in the form of Bible passages. The other participant described God's voice coming into his mind during a walk-in-silence session. Others did not seem sure about their experiences. They agreed they could hear God's voice, but simply left it as a possibility they were open to. Six participants identified Bible reading as a medium for hearing God's voice. Other activities that they said helped them hear His voice included praying in silence, walking in silence, meditation, and singing hymns. They said His voice would come in the form of thoughts in their minds and hearts during these activities. One participant said that she had previously received counsel from other Christians through which she heard God's voice, underscoring the value of the community in her spiritual journey. Although most participants had never actively attempted to hear God's voice, two said they heard from Him during this program. Moreover, those who did not have a direct experience of hearing God's voice might have gained knowledge about hearing Him so that they can be more attentive to His voice in the future.

Self-Examination and Walk-in-Silence Appear to Have Been Helpful

In this research, the expectation regarding self-examination was that it would encourage participants to engage in deeper introspection and foster a heightened awareness of God. When asked about their experiences during the

self-examination process, three participants reported that they became aware of their sins or worldly desires as they reflected on their daily actions and habits, which led them to repent. One participant said she found peace, refreshment, and encouragement during her time of silence. Two participants indicated that self-examination provided them with a time to express the joys and sorrows they felt about the day and to recall experiences of God's grace from long ago. They found this both exciting and consoling. Two participants compared self-examination to a playground in which they could learn to follow God in an ongoing way and focus on and communicate with Him. One participant said she briefly talked to God as if she were talking to her own father or brother. Thus, self-examination appeared to help participants reflect on what they had done and seek God's guidance and teaching. It also taught them about praying and growing closer to God. Altogether, eleven participants responded that this practice helped them learn about self-awareness and their connection with God, while two responded that they did not experience much while practicing it.

The other practice explored in the research, walk-in-silence, was also found to help them perceive God's presence and meditate on God's Word as they walked. Five participants said they sensed God's presence during walk-in-silence—they said they felt that God was nearby or walking with them. The practice helped two participants understand God's will better, which they said made them humble before God and submissive to other people. Two participants said that meditating on the Bible while walking allowed them to enjoy the Word. One learned that walking was another exciting way of praying. Altogether, nine

participants indicated that this practice was helpful. However, four participants complained that they experienced distractions while on the road, which severely hindered their experience. Since it was impossible for them to change their external environment, they needed to learn the solitude of the heart, which would enable them to maintain a sense of inner solitude and practice silence even in a crowded or noisy environment.

Problems of Distractions and Issues for Improvement

Eleven participants experienced severe distractions during self-examination, walk-in-silence, or both, which prevented them from meditating and therefore hindered their experience. These distractions came primarily from their surroundings. Many of them lived in a place where it was difficult to find solitude, even for a moment. Continual noise and frequent interruptions from family members or neighbours were unavoidable in their living spaces. The roads they walked on near their homes were full of noise and passers-by, including acquaintances to whom the participants had to respond. The distractions also came from themselves. Their meditation was bombarded by many disturbing thoughts, including worries and anxieties about family, work, and other life issues. They were also distracted by evil thoughts and fear arising from within. One participant peculiarly responded that he experienced headaches, drowsiness, and fatigue during the self-examination. Eight participants complained that they experienced distraction both in self-examination and walk-in-silence. Three indicated issues only with walk-in-silence. Five participants described distractions that came from their surroundings in the form of noise or disruption from family

or neighbours. Six participants experienced distractions coming from both the environment and inside of themselves. However, despite these distractions, they appeared to benefit from self-examination and/or walk-in-silence. As they persist in these practices over time, they are expected to acquire the ability to overcome these distractions and find greater fulfillment in their spiritual endeavors. Eventually, they may grow to the point where they have a “portable cell that they carry with them wherever they go” (Nouwen 1981a, 65).

Although the participants expressed appreciation for this program, limitations and possible improvements were also identified. First, since the spiritual exercises they experienced in this program were somewhat physically and spiritually demanding, they found it challenging to perform them independently. They suggested it would be better to exercise the practices in small groups. Group exercises, where it was possible to share experiences and encourage each other, could have made the program more effective. Some wished more people had participated and benefitted. Second, although it was encouraging to see some participants endeavour to remain silent, even when they were distracted, every participant should eventually be able to overcome the issue of distractions. It will take time for them to develop the ability to make themselves feel isolated in the midst of busy and noisy surroundings. They need to grow to a point where they have a “portable cell that they carry with them wherever they go” (Nouwen 1981a, 65). Third, some of them were frustrated that I had to communicate with them online, although they understood that face-to-face contact was very difficult under the conditions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. It

seemed that the intermittent assistance and feedback, provided through in-person interaction, would have better supported their progress and helped them achieve the desired goals of the spiritual practices. However, as they continue to engage in these practices in the future, they will gradually develop the ability to communicate with God independently, without relying on the help of others.

Effectiveness of the Spiritual Practices

The pre- and post-program questionnaires had two questions in common: “How would you describe your relationship with God?” and “What do you think you need to do to further develop your relationship with God?” When asked to describe their relationship with God, some identified themselves as children of God or described it as an intimate relationship. On the other hand, others defined their relationship as being based on the activities they performed, such as prayer, reading or studying the Bible, worship, or other church functions. Since this research aimed to introduce spiritual practices involving silence as a way to develop their intimate relationship with God, it was important to know how their understanding changed after completing this program. I compared the participants’ responses before and after completing the program. Figure 4 shows both the number of participants who described an intimate relationship with God (the left panel) or chose practices involving silence as a method to deepen their relationship with Him (the right panel).

In the pre-program questionnaire, four participants responded that they were in an intimate relationship with God or recognized themselves as His children, whereas seven participants responded this way in the post-program

questionnaire. When they were asked in the pre-program questionnaire to choose a method to improve their relationship with God, three participants chose practices involving silence, such as meditation, whereas in the post-program questionnaire, seven participants chose practices involving silence such as self-examination, walk-in-silence, or meditation. These results suggest that engaging in self-examination and walk-in-silence changed their views on their relationship with God—from defining it as being based on their activities to understanding it as a state—and led them to choose spiritual practices involving silence as a method to deepen their relationship with God.

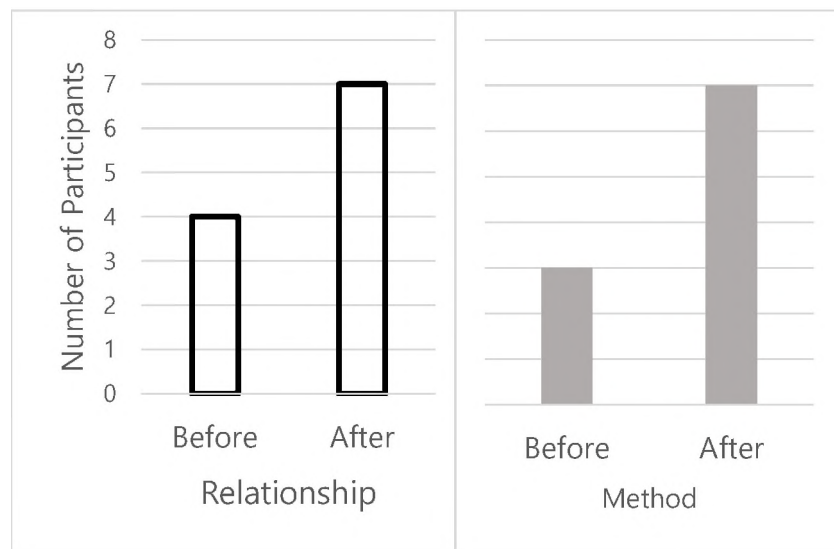


Figure 4: Change in the participants' views on their relationship with God (left panel) and their chosen methods to develop that relationship (right panel)

While it was interesting to note how many participants had changed their views on their relationship with God after completing the four-week program, it was also important to evaluate the change on an individual level. When a participant changed their view of their relationship with God, they might also

have adopted new methods to deepen that relationship. To explore this possible connection, I compared each participant's before and after responses to examine the relationship between changing their views and adopting new spiritual disciplines. Seven participants described their relationship with God using words including intimate relationship, special relationship, or sensing God's presence. Three of them did not use these words in the pre-program questionnaire but did in the post-program questionnaire, indicating that the spiritual practices performed in this program influenced the individual's understanding of the immanent presence of God. The results suggested a significant shift in their understanding of their relationship with God. Previously, their relationship with God was primarily defined by their activities. However, through the spiritual practices, their relationship with God evolved into a more intimate state similar to a father-child relationship. I cannot rule out the possibility that they used these words just because they became more familiar with them through the program. However, considering that the majority of the participants responded that the spiritual practices helped them deepen their relationship with God (see Figure 5 below for more detail), I think it is reasonable to conclude that the changes in their views reflected their realization of the immanent presence of God.

I examined whether the seven participants who said they had an intimate relationship with God chose the spiritual practices involving silence as a good method for developing their relationship with God. Six of the seven participants responded that they would practice self-examination, walk-in-silence regularly, or spend more time in silence and attempt an active dialogue with God, indicating

that they saw these spiritual practices as useful. One participant among the seven chose the same non-silent-based method as she did in the pre-program questionnaire. A noticeable change was that participants realized they needed to pursue God more actively and assign a predetermined time for regular prayer.

On the other hand, the other six participants did not change their views on their relationship with God after completing the program. They continued to understand their relationship with God based on their activities. Five of these six participants did not change their chosen method of developing their relationship with God. They chose Bible reading as their primary method, as they did in the pre-program questionnaire. The other participant chose a practice involving silence as her way of developing her relationship with God. Taken together, these results indicate that changes in individuals' view of the relationship with God exhibited a considerable correlation with changes in their chosen method of deepening their relationship with God.

I also looked to evaluate the effectiveness of self-examination and walk-in-silence. Nine participants responded that self-examination helped strengthen their relationship with God, while two responded that it did not help, as shown in the left panel of Figure 5. The other two participants were neutral or did not clearly express whether the practice was useful to them or not. As for walk-in-silence, eight participants responded that they found the practice deepened their relationship with God, as shown in the right panel of Figure 5. Four participants denied its effectiveness, primarily due to the distractions they experienced along the road. One was neutral. These results indicate that the spiritual practices they

performed were effective for most participants in developing their relationship with God.

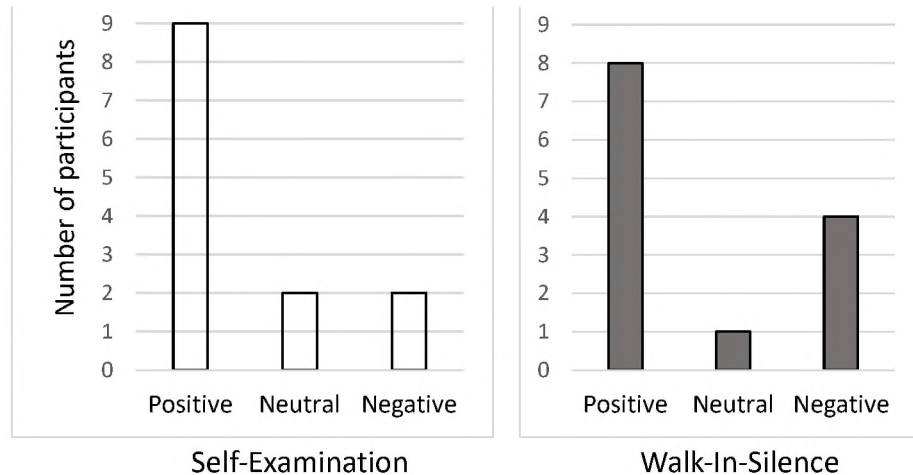


Figure 5: The effectiveness of self-examination and walk-in-silence for developing the participants’ relationship with God

Conclusion and Implications

Many evangelical Protestant churches do not teach and exercise spiritual practices that include silence and solitude (Jones 2005, 25). People in my mission field, Cambodia, have rarely learned about these precious practices. Even though they have a cultural background that involves meditation, lay Buddhists in Cambodia rarely practice it. This project introduced spiritual disciplines that involved silence to Cambodian Christians and helped them explore these unfamiliar practices. I selected self-examination and walk-in-silence as the exercises participants would engage in during this program in order to deepen their relationship with God. I guided the participants so they could experience these exercises.

At the beginning of this program, most participants identified their relationship with God as being based on the activities they performed, such as prayer, Bible reading, worship, and other church functions. They believed God would be pleased with such efforts and bless them accordingly. However, after completing the four-week program that I designed for this project, more than half of the participants came to recognize themselves as precious beings with a special relationship with God. They recognized that they are His children, which is an identity established by being, not by doing. The spiritual practices the participants experienced—self-examination and walk-in-silence—went over well with many participants. They indicated that these disciplines helped them to develop a more intimate relationship with God and improve their communication with Him. Some said they would practice self-examination and walk-in-silence regularly moving forward. Although they struggled with many distractions during the practices, they successfully discovered a new kind of spirituality. Others responded that the practices did little to help them develop their relationship with God. However, even they expressed the need to actively communicate with God and understood the importance of silent prayer, which suggests that their experiences in self-examination and walk-in-silence inspired them to begin developing their relationship with God. In addition, some of them heard God’s voice, although they had never actively attempted to hear Him before. At least they gained knowledge about hearing God’s voice so they can be more attentive to His voice in the future. This includes those who did not have a direct experience of hearing God during the program.

This project appeared to benefit the individual participants, at least to some degree. They learned how to nurture their spirituality, keep themselves silent, attend to God's presence, and examine themselves on a daily basis. The participants' spiritual growth will hopefully encourage others to undertake these challenging but rewarding practices. Furthermore, this study provides a methodology that can be used to help people learn and exercise spiritual disciplines.

CHAPTER V: CONCLUSION

Cultivating a close relationship with God allows us to discern God's will and be guided by His merciful hand. Experiencing this relationship causes us to become different, pressing on toward the goal of winning the prize for which God has called them in Christ Jesus (Philippians 3:14). The athletes of God, like Abba Antonius and many other heroes of our faith, had a single-minded devotion to pursuing Christlikeness. Antonius renounced possessions in order to learn detachment; he renounced speech in order to learn compassion; he renounced activity in order to learn prayer (Foster 1998, 25). He went into the solitude of the desert. His only desire was to discover God. As we endeavour to discover God, our ultimate life goal immerses us in the love, vision, and hope of the Lord. Every step we take is done so we can be more like Jesus; we are formed into the likeness of Christ by the help of the Holy Spirit.

While studying in the DMin program at Tyndale, I rediscovered the centrality of the goal of being conformed to the likeness of Christ. This task has long been a challenge for believers, and a variety of streams of Christian spirituality have formed over the millennia. Richard Foster classified these streams into six major Christian traditions: the contemplative tradition, which emphasizes the prayer-filled life; the holiness tradition, which emphasizes the

virtuous life; the charismatic tradition, which emphasizes the Spirit-empowered life; the social justice tradition, which emphasizes the compassionate life; the evangelical tradition, which emphasizes the Word-centered life; and the incarnational tradition, which emphasizes the sacramental life (1998, xvi).

However, not all of the traditions are available for everyone to learn and practice. Some of these streams have been cut off from one another for a very long time, and the precious teachings or vital experiences of each have been neglected by Christians from other traditions. However, no tradition is wholly separated from the others. These streams are not to be understood as independent. They are related to each other, and believers can benefit from more than one tradition as they cultivate an abundant spiritual life.

Although every tradition formed a variety of ways of nurturing individual, ecclesial, and social spirituality, all of the streams converge into one ocean: the imitation of Jesus Christ. Each stream finds its life and meaning in Jesus Christ and represents an aspect of His nature. Jesus Christ stands firm at the center of each spiritual stream, showing various methods of spiritual formation. Willard said, “Nothing less than life in the steps of Christ is adequate to the human soul or the needs of our world. Any other offer fails to do justice to the drama of human redemption, deprives the hearer of life’s greatest opportunity, and abandons this present life to the evil powers of the age” (2014, 11). We are to be inwardly transformed in such a way that the personality, character, and deeds of Christ naturally flow out from us at all times. In other words, true Christlikeness should be established in the very depths of our being. Countless believers have walked

the path toward Christlikeness and formed the community of Christ, although they might be part of different branches of Christian spirituality. They became salt and light in the world they belonged to, as Christ taught His followers to be.

Through my studies at Tyndale, I had the opportunity to explore and learn from various spiritual traditions that were previously unfamiliar to me. This exposure to diverse perspectives and practices broadened my understanding and enriched my spiritual journey. The course materials and books provided invaluable guidance, serving as a map to navigate my path. Furthermore, the teachings and insights shared by professors played a pivotal role in encouraging and supporting my progress. The fellowship with fellow students from diverse backgrounds further propelled me forward. These collective experiences have enriched my understanding and shaped and reworked my experience of and relationship with God. It was inspirational to realize that the Lord abides with me as a loving Father and to learn that this relationship is an evolving, growing, maturing one rather than a fixed, unchanging one. Practically speaking, I learned how to sense the presence of God and discern His will for my life. Perhaps every believer seeks to discern God's will. We endeavour to hear God's voice among many competing, distracting ones. Anyone who has established a special relationship with the Father and discerns His desires will blindly surrender to what the Father wills, as Jesus did at Calvary.

As a result of my prior education and training, I developed a tendency to measure my spiritual fruitfulness and Christlikeness by how much I knew and how much I served. I endeavoured to demonstrate my faithfulness and dedication

through wholehearted service. I thought this would make me more spiritual and lead to abundant life in Christ. I evaluated my faithfulness or spirituality by the amount of tangible work I performed. I thought this showed that I was favoured by God. However, my outward performance did not guarantee that I would experience inward spiritual transformation, and my wholehearted devotion did not always suggest that I had. I needed to learn more to widen my view of faithfulness and spirituality. My studies at Tyndale helped me bring the various streams of Christian traditions together to attain a balanced vision of life and faith, although I will need to learn more and more as I continue this journey.

There are a variety of practices that can be used for spiritual formation: worship, Bible study, sabbath, *examen*, meditation, contemplation, silence, solitude, community service, *lectio divina*, many types of prayer, and so on. Among them, I discovered that silence and solitude play a central role in spiritual disciplines for many. Writers, ancient and modern, are unanimous in saying that silence and solitude lead to a love of God, a love of self, and a love of others (Jones 2005, 41). Silence guards us from the danger of speaking unfaithful words. We often speak more than necessary to impress other people, neglecting the fact that it is God's Spirit that touches the people's hearts. Proverbs 10:19 says, "When words are many, sin is not absent, but he who holds his tongue is wise." Speaking easily leads us away from the right path. A word becomes powerful when it comes out of silence. A word that is not rooted in silence can become nothing more than "a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal" (1 Corinthians 13:1). Nouwen said, "Silence gives strength and fruitfulness to the word. We can

even say that words are meant to disclose the mystery of the silence from which they came” (1981a, 48). Silence allows us to speak words that bring forth the power of God’s word.

Silence is one of the ways to sharpen our souls to become sensitive to God’s voice. We can find God’s will by waiting to hear God’s voice, by earnest prayer, by reading and meditating on the Bible, by waiting for God to touch our hearts, or through the process of community discernment. Silence ignites the fire of the Holy Spirit and keeps it alive in us. Nouwen also wrote, “Silence guards the inner heat of religious emotions. This inner heat is the life of the Holy Spirit within us. Thus, silence is the discipline by which the inner fire of God is tended and kept alive” (1981a, 52). We must care for the inner fire so that it can offer light and warmth to ourselves and others around us.

Silence is a helpful discipline in many different situations: in teaching and learning, in preaching and worship, in visiting and counselling. Silence is a very useful and practical discipline in all our ministry tasks (Nouwen 1981a, 44). The way I chose to practice silence was primarily through *lectio divina*, *examen*, and prayer walking. These practices do not solely consist of being silent. However, they include a considerable amount of time for silence, which I emphasize in my private practice. After I had learned about these spiritual disciplines, the silent time in each allowed me to quiet myself, be attentive to God’s ongoing guidance, and become intimate with Him. This practice ultimately led me toward spiritual transformation. I no longer judged my faith, ministry, or spirituality only by outward performance, visible results, or self-righteousness. Now, I sought to

better myself by being intimate with God, sensing His presence throughout my day, hearing His voice, and discerning His will. Even when there was no outward fruit, I enjoyed my ministry and His presence, giving thanks to God for His guidance.

Since I experienced the beauty of silence and its related spiritual practices, I wanted to convey what I had learned and experienced to the people in my mission field. Those I served in Cambodia were mostly new believers with basic religious and spiritual experiences. Most of them were raised in Buddhist and shamanist environments. Their harsh living conditions made their life's journey challenging and tempted them physically. They needed to find an effective way to overcome these challenges and grow in Christ, becoming intimate with God. I wanted to share with them what I had learned and experienced.

I prepared a spiritual formation program to introduce and foster participants' ability to practice silence and meditation. I designed this program for Cambodian church leaders and examined how well it worked. The spiritual practices I chose to research included *examen* and prayer walking. Since the participants were mostly unfamiliar with these practices, I modified the procedures from how they are traditionally practiced so that beginners could engage in them more easily. Analysis of the questionnaires taken before and after the program suggested that some participants successfully adopted the disciplines. Their views on their relationship with God, which previously centred on what they did, changed to be defined by who they were. Some participants intended to make a routine out of these practices. Participants had the opportunity not only to

experience new spiritual disciplines but also to establish a foundation for pursuing deeper spiritual experiences, growing in Christlikeness, and becoming closer to God.

However, there are several areas for improvement in future studies. First, it would be beneficial to conduct the practices in small groups rather than individually. Allowing participants to come together and share their experiences with one another would allow for a progressive evaluation of how they have perceived the Holy Spirit's work. Engaging in dialogue and sharing insights would provide encouragement, foster mutual learning, and help participants navigate the challenges of the practices, ultimately leading to a deeper experience of the beauty and power of community. Performing the spiritual practices together will draw the individual into the richness of the spiritual heritage and foster genuine accountability to God through the community. The researcher's involvement in this communication would facilitate the participants' progress and help them achieve the desired goals of the program. In addition, it would be beneficial for participants to practice the exercises together or in groups at least once before engaging in individual practice. This would allow a standardized approach, ensuring that participants learn how to perform the unfamiliar exercises in a consistent manner. Standardization of methods across participants would help reduce bias arising from individual variations in understanding and interpreting the activities. Second, expanding the participant pool to include a larger number of individuals would strengthen the statistical significance of the questionnaire analysis. Increasing the sample size would enhance the reliability and

generalizability of the findings, providing more robust insights into the participants' experiences and perceptions. Third, incorporating journaling as part of the exercise may provide additional benefits. Journaling would promote greater self-awareness among participants and encourage deeper reflection throughout the activity. It would also enable participants to respond to questionnaires more specifically and precisely, thereby improving the quality of the data collected. Finally, the questionnaires need to be refined. Careful attention should be paid to the wording of the questions to minimize potential bias or leading responses. Participants may be influenced by the new information they have learned during the project, or they may be guided by the wording of the questions, affecting their answers. It is important to ensure that the questions are neutral and do not bias participants toward particular responses. In addition, participants should be encouraged to give genuine and honest answers rather than feel compelled to give a "good" answer that aligns with the researcher's perceived intentions for the project.

The research project encountered a significant challenge due to the language barrier, particularly in relation to the limited theological terminology in the Khmer language, especially regarding spirituality. This made it difficult to find accurate translations for certain words and concepts commonly used in academic discussions. For example, the term "spiritual formation" requires lengthy explanations to convey its meaning accurately because direct translations are not available. In addition, there is no direct equivalent in the Khmer language for terms such as "contemplation," which poses a challenge in defining and

explaining its meaning. While the Khmer Christian community uses the word “សង្កេតគិតជ្រៅជ្រះ” (meaning “to think deeply”) for meditation, this term falls short in fully capturing the essence of contemplation. In Khmer Buddhist practices, there are words like “សមាធិ” (which literally means “to calm feelings”) for meditation and “ការធ្វើកម្មដ្ឋាន” for “deep meditation.” However, these terms are not commonly used or understood by the general population, including Christians. Moreover, Christians are reluctant to adopt Buddhist terminology. Many theological terms in English do not yet have established equivalents in Khmer, and even when some translations exist, they are not widely used within the general Christian community. Overcoming this linguistic challenge will require time and effort to develop a broader theological vocabulary in Khmer and to establish a common understanding within the Christian community.

My time spent in Cambodia has been a humbling and gratitude-filled journey, filled with God’s guidance and protection. God, who had touched my heart in a mysterious way to instill a deep desire to share the love of Christ within me, continued to work in me throughout my Cambodian ministry. Every experience I encountered during my ministry in Cambodia has revealed the incredible power of our loving Father. Working with my fellow Cambodians has deepened my understanding of His enduring love. Witnessing their remarkable growth in faithfulness strengthened my own faith in return. Truly, my ministry in Cambodia has been an immense blessing to me. As I embark on a new phase of my ministry, my role is to support and assist young Cambodian church leaders in their growth, equipping them to become influential figures in various sectors of

the nation and within the church. One of the ways I can help them is by teaching the spiritual disciplines that I introduced to the participants in my research project. By sharing these disciplines, I hope to empower them and contribute to their spiritual development.

As a Christian, my most crucial task is to mature my own soul in Christ. I need to learn how to discern God's will. All I desire is to know God better and better every day. God may allow me to experience a deeper spirituality and intimacy with Him in this stage of my life. I have been trained mainly in the Evangelical tradition, but I want to learn about and experience God in new ways. I need to expose myself to different Christian traditions to learn more about how to come nearer to God, making myself fully open to His will and His guiding hand.

The Lord created a new life in me, a sinful person who had nothing but vanity. He made me want to turn my emptiness into life-transforming salt and light in a dark world. God has always been good to me despite my transgressions, faults, and sins. Every step I took was under His guidance, even when I was not aware of it. His amazing grace has delivered and will continue to deliver me from ignorance, wickedness, selfishness, deficiency, and frailty. I pray that my days will pass delightfully and pleasantly while I live conscious of God's favour, making discoveries on the way, being content with the good things God has given me, and freely and cheerfully enjoying them. The Lord mercifully led me to this day, and He will continue to re-create me in His mercy.

I hope that this portfolio exhibits what I have learned during the DMin program and helps and guides those who seek spiritual growth as I do—especially

those in my mission field, Cambodia. I am not afraid that I cannot choose the right way all the time, for God loves me and is merciful. “I may be mistaken. But the Lord does not ask us to be always right. What He asks is that we be always honest, always true to the best understanding of His will that we can attain to” (Green 1984, 67). All glory be to Christ.

APPENDICES

Appendix A

Practice Instructions

These instructions were provided to the participants in both English and Cambodian languages.

The Plan and Schedule

This program lasts for four weeks. You will be on assignment two or three days a week. The daily assignment consists of two sessions of spiritual practices. Each session will take fifteen to twenty minutes, totalling approximately two hours a week. I hope you can devote two hours a week to this program. I will tell you every week what to do. Just follow my lead; it is simple. You will do this program by yourself, without anyone involved.

Before we begin the program, I ask you to complete a questionnaire (Appendix B) provided and return it at your earliest convenience but no later than a week. It will take no more than an hour to complete the questionnaire; I ask you for an honest answer.

WEEK 1

Choose two days this week at your convenience. Any day will do. I ask you to read this instruction slowly and carefully before you begin. There are two activities in a day. I advise you to journal what you learn or what occurs to you; it will facilitate your learning. You keep the journal just for yourself, and I will not ask you to show it to me.

Day 1-1

(1) The First Practice: Silence for five minutes

The time right before bed is recommended to do this practice, although it can be done any time of the day. Just sit silently for five minutes. Setting a timer is suggested. Don't do anything. You don't need to try to do something like meditating or hearing God's message. Just let yourself stay in silence. However, it may not be easy for someone to remain in silence without doing anything; we have learned we must do something all the time. If you find it difficult to silence yourself, remember this verse: "Be still, and know that I am God" (Ps. 46:10). To keep silent is a simple exercise, but it is very important. You may choose to be silent for more than five minutes if you want.

(2) The Second Practice: Silent walking for fifteen minutes

Go out for a walk at your convenient time. It is a good idea to decide in advance where you will walk, although you may change the course as you walk. Be silent as you walk. Therefore, you need to find a place where you can walk silently. During the silence, many thoughts will pop up and disappear. Do not try too hard to remove the thoughts; just let them go as they come. If necessary, remind yourself of the verse: "Be still, and know that I am God" (Ps. 46:10). The purpose of this walk is to get used to keeping silent.

Day 1-2

(1) Silence for five minutes

Sit silently as before. You may be wondering what the benefit of sitting silent and doing nothing would be. Don't bother yourself: it's just five minutes. If

it still bothers you, recollect the verse: “Be still, and know that I am God” (Ps. 46:10).

(2) Silent walking for fifteen minutes

Go out for a walk as before. This time, please read Ps. 16:6-7 before you go out for a walk. You may take another path for your walk this time. Try not to be distracted too much by passers-by or the noise around you. If you see beautiful nature along the way, enjoy it. You may take a deep breath and give yourself a big smile. Sometimes you may feel like looking up at the sky. If the verse you have read before you set out comes back to you, give it a thought briefly. I hope you enjoy your walk in silence.

WEEK 2

From this week on, there are exercises for three days a week. You are advised to select the days in advance. Please read the following instructions before you begin the exercises. You may also need to return to the instruction in the middle of the exercises.

Day 2-1

(1) Self-examination in silence

You keep silent for fifteen minutes, not five, this time. During the fifteen minutes, you will examine your past twenty-four hours according to the procedure shown below. I advise you to print out this page for easy and quick access before starting the exercise.

1. Find a quiet spot where you can be undisturbed for fifteen minutes.

2. Take two to three minutes of silence to recognize that you are here with the Lord. Even if you feel nothing about God, don't be discouraged: it is quite normal for now. You may want to pray: "Lord, may you be with me in this time."
3. Keep yourself comfortable. Comfort is God's gift.
4. With loving God, reflect a little on the day that has passed. Review your past twenty-four hours. You may invite the Holy Spirit to help you: "Lord, help me to review the past day and learn from You."
5. Now you may ask yourself some questions: "What happened? Where did I go? Whom did I see? What did I feel? How did I respond?" Do not "judge" the day; simply retrieve your memories of the day with gentleness.

(2) Walk-in-silence for twenty minutes.

Go out for a walk as before, but for twenty minutes, not fifteen. Read Ps. 90:10-12 before you go out for a walk. Breathe deeply three times and start walking slowly. Breathing helps you bring your full attention to your body. Keep yourself in silence for a while as you walk. If the verse you have read comes back to you, give a brief meditation on it. Pray with the Lord's Prayer as you walk. You need to recite the prayer slowly in order to savour its meaning of it. Repeat the prayer and keep repeating. You may wonder what the benefit of repeating the same prayer would be, but I encourage you to repeat it. You may go back to silence at any time.

Day 2-2

(1) Self-examination in silence

Review the past twenty-four hours as you did previously. However, please note that there are some additional instructions. I advise you to print out this page for easy and quick access before starting the exercise. You will need to use it throughout this program.

1. Find a quiet spot where you can be undisturbed for fifteen minutes.
2. Take two to three minutes of silence to recognize that you are here with the Lord. Even if you feel nothing about God, don't be discouraged: it is quite normal for now. You may want to pray: "Lord, may you be with me in this time."
3. Keep yourself comfortable. Comfort is God's gift.
4. With loving God, reflect a little on the day that has passed. Review your past twenty-four hours. You may invite the Holy Spirit to help you: "Lord, help me to review the past day and learn from you."
5. Now you may ask yourself some questions: "What happened? Where did I go? Whom did I see? What did I feel? How did I respond?" Do not "judge" the day; simply retrieve your memories of the day with gentleness.
6. Here are new questions: "What in this day am I thankful for? Was there any moment that I felt I received a gift from God? Where did I sense God with me today?"

7. Some further questions: “What on this day might I be sorry for? What are the moments of selfishness and unkindness? You may want to pray to ask for forgiveness. God hears your prayer.
8. God is always with you, even when you do not sense Him. You ask God now to show you if there was something God was trying to tell you today when you were not paying attention.
9. Pray: “Lord, help me bask in the warmth of your love and your presence.” You may pray for something else as your heart tells you.

(2) Walk-in-silence for twenty minutes.

Enjoy your walk for twenty minutes as before. Read Ps. 103:13-14 before you leave. Breathe deeply three times and start walking slowly. As you walk, direct your attention to the movement of your feet and legs as it advances. Imagine that Jesus Christ is with you as you walk (In fact, He is!). Keep yourself in silence for a while. Then, pray with the Lord’s Prayer. Repeat the prayer. Let the Lord’s Prayer be a prayer of your own heart as you repeat. You may pause between the repeating Lord’s prayer and be silent for a while.

Day 2-3

(1) Self-examination in silence

Examine your past twenty-four hours as you did with the procedure of Day 2-2. It is not examining with a moral standard but trying to sense God’s presence in your mundane daily life. When was the moment that you felt His presence? What do you feel most regretful for? You may pray if you feel like doing so.

(2) Walk-in-silence

Enjoy your walk for twenty minutes as before. Read Lk. 12:29-31 before you leave. Breathe deeply three times and start walking slowly. As you walk, direct your attention to the movement of your feet and legs as it advances. Keep reminding yourself that Jesus Christ is with you as you walk. Keep yourself in silence for a while. Then, pray with the Lord's Prayer. Repeat the prayer. Let the Lord's Prayer be a prayer of your own heart as you repeat. Alternatively, you may just enjoy the silence as you walk without praying.

WEEK 3

Day 3-1

(1) Self-examination in silence

You may want to skim the procedure before you start. Review the past twenty-four hours as you did with the procedure of Day 2-2. Be reminded that you are not judging the day with a moral standard but trying to sense God's presence in your mundane daily life. When was the moment that you felt His presence? What do you feel most regretful for? You may pray if you feel like doing so. (It will benefit you much to write down what comes to your heart during or after every practice. Journaling helps with any spiritual disciplines.)

(2) Walk-in-silence

Enjoy your walk for twenty minutes as before. Read Ps. 23:1-6 before you leave. Imagine that Jesus Christ is with you as you walk. Keep yourself in silence for a while. Then, pray with the Lord's Prayer. Repeat the prayer. Do you feel that

the same prayer works differently in you as you repeat it? You may become aware of the benefit of repeating the same prayer.

Day 3-2

(1) Self-examination in silence

Examine the past day as you did with the procedure of Day 2-2. Give more thought to abiding with God and having an intimate relationship. When was the moment that you felt His presence? What do you feel most regretful for? You may pray if you feel like doing so.

(2) Walk-in-silence

Enjoy your walk as before. Read Lk. 18:10-14 before you go out for a walk. Be aware that Jesus is walking with you, even when you don't sense it. Keep yourself in silence for a while. Then meditate on the passage you have read. You may ask yourself what it means to you that God has mercy on you. Someone said meditation is a rumination of the Word with expectations and delight, like "a dog's delight for gnawing bones." You may return to silence whenever you want.

Day 3-3

(1) Self-examination in silence

Examine your past day as before. Taking three deep breaths always helps. If you feel like praying, you may do so. If you want to stay in silence doing nothing, it is also encouraged. When was the moment that you felt His presence? It is important to sense God's presence in daily routine.

(2) Walk-in-silence

Enjoy your walk as before. Read Ps. 131:1-3 before you go out for a walk. Be aware that Jesus is walking with you, even when you don't sense it. Keep yourself in silence for a while. Take three deep breaths and pray with the Lord's prayer. The repeated prayer will be made like a chain and resonate in your ears and heart. Have you ever thought that, when you repeat, the Lord's prayer encapsulates some other prayers of your heart and brings them to God? At any rate, keep repeating the Lord's prayer. You may return to silence at any time.

WEEK 4

Day 4-1

(1) Self-examination in silence

Examine your past 24 hours as before. When was the moment that you felt His presence? Have you ever felt that God gave a thought in your prayer or silence? Think more about abiding with God and having an intimate relationship with God. It is important to sense God's presence and enjoy His accompaniment.

(2) Walk-in-silence

Enjoy your walk as before. Read Mt. 7:13-14 before you go out for a walk. Be aware that Jesus is walking with you. Keep yourself in silence for a while. Take three deep breaths and pray with the Lord's prayer. You may meditate on the passage you have read. Savour each word so that you feel you are absorbed in words. When you sense a word lighting up for you, pay attention to this word and linger on it. You can come back to silence any time. You may walk longer if you want.

Day 4-2

(1) Self-examination in silence

Examine the past twenty-four hours as before. Taking three deep breaths always helps. When was the moment that you felt His presence? Have you ever felt that God gave you a thought in your prayer or silence? Do you feel that you have become more intimate with the Father? It is important to sense God's presence in your mundane life.

(2) Walk-in-silence

Enjoy your walk as before. Read Ps. 37:1-4 before you go out for a walk. Be aware that Jesus is walking with you. Pray with the Lord's prayer. You may be distracted by conflicting thoughts when you are in silence or repeating the prayer. Even when you cannot focus on yourself, don't be discouraged. Remind yourself that Jesus is with you, and try to sense His presence.

Day 4-3

(1) Self-examination in silence

Examine the past day for fifteen minutes as before. Try to recollect the time when you felt God was with you. Do you have a stronger desire to become more intimate with God?

(2) Walk-in-silence

Enjoy your walk for twenty minutes as before. Read John 3:5-8 before you go out for a walk. Be aware that Jesus is walking with you. Enjoy silence for a while. Take three deep breaths and pray with the Lord's prayer. As you repeat, you may feel the warmth that touches your heart. Be attentive to the thoughts that

are poured into your heart during the prayer or silence. However, it does not mean that you need to do something to hear God; just wait with an expecting heart. You may want to walk a little longer.

(3) Closing session

Since this is the last practice of the training program, please have an additional session of silence when you return from the walk. Sit comfortably in your room. Keep yourself in silence and pay attention to the thoughts that come to your mind. Look back on the journey you made in the last four weeks. God is with you at all times. Do you sense God's presence? Do you feel your soul quiet and still? Give thanks to the Lord.

Filling up a Questionnaire

As we finish the program, I ask you to complete a questionnaire (Appendix C) provided and return it at your earliest convenience but no later than a week. It will take no more than an hour to complete the questionnaire; I ask you for an honest answer.

Appendix B

This questionnaire was provided to each participant in both English and Cambodian languages.

Pre-Program Questionnaire

1. How would you describe your relationship with God?
2. How do you think you can find God's will when you need to make a choice in your life?
3. There are many ways to develop your relationship with God: Bible reading, group Bible study, praying alone, praying in a group, chanting/singing, fellowship, self-reflection, and so forth. Perhaps you have been enjoying more than one way to nurture your faith.
 - 1) What are your ways of developing your relationship with God?
 - 2) Please describe how you practice the ways you have chosen.
 - 3) What do you think you need to do to further develop your relationship with God?

Appendix C

This questionnaire was provided to each participant in both English and Cambodian languages.

Post-Program Questionnaire

1. How would you describe your relationship with God?
2. What do you think you need to do to further develop your relationship with God?
3. Christians usually wish to hear God's voice when they seek God's guidance in their life situations. God's voice can come in many ways: an audible sound, thoughts, dreams, imagination, Bible passages, and so forth. How do you think you can hear God's voice? Have you ever heard it during this program?
4. Did daily Self-examination in silence help you develop your relationship with God? If so, how did it help?
5. Did Walk-in-silence help you develop your relationship with God? If so, how did it help?
6. Have you experienced any difficulties in practicing Self-examination or Walk-in-silence? If so, what are they?
7. Further comments and suggestions regarding this program would be appreciated.

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