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Tyndale University

Knowing God:

Restoring Spiritual Vitality Among New African Immigrants to Canada

A Research Portfolio

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Ministry

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By

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ABSTRACT

In this Research Portfolio, the author examines the practice of personal and communal prayer to enhance spiritual vitality and deepen believers' intimacy with God. The author presents this topic through three means. First, the author explores aspects of his personal spiritual journey through a spiritual autobiography. The autobiographical chapter highlights God's work in the author's life. Born and raised in a Muslim-dominated community with only a scant place of worship, God's mercies nurtured and sustained him through childhood and adulthood. Secondly, the Model chapter highlights the decline in spiritual fervour among African immigrant believers in my Church – Healing Stream Centre, Kitchener, Ontario. This Model examines some of the factors contributing to the decline of spiritual vitality among these believers, specifically within the African immigrants with Pentecostal-Charismatic framework and discusses various spiritual disciplines through which the Holy Spirit works to transform the lives of His people. Finally, the author reports on a project conducted with the Healing Stream Centre's leadership teams in Kitchener, Ontario. The project explored using the biblical strategy of prayer— Divine Hours prayer and *Lectio Divina* to restore spiritual vitality to a church where most of the members are recent immigrants. Overall, the outcome of this project was positive. The research suggests that prayer, as one of the spiritual disciplines, enhances participants' deepening experience, strengthens their devotion to God, and facilitates their spiritual vitality.

DEDICATION

This portfolio is dedicated to my loving wife, Victoria. Your faithful partnership and steadfast support have made this project possible. Thank you for being my best friend and most significant ministry partner. Your dedication to this project has been unwavering, and I am grateful to God for giving you to me.

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GLOSSARY

Spiritual Formation: I define Spiritual Formation as the transformative action of the Holy Spirit that results in a believer's spiritual vitality and fervency for the sake of others.

Lectio Divina is a Latin term for the formational reading of Scripture (also known as Divine Reading or Holy Reading). Mary Funk (2013, 16), an American writer, defines *Lectio Divina* as “an encounter with God: a way of praying using the revelatory texts of Scripture, nature, or experience.”

Divine Hours Prayer: Christians use various terms for this prayer, such as fixed-hour prayers, praying with the Church, and liturgical prayer. Divine Hours Prayer is praying at fixed times with the Church scattered across the globe. Scot McKnight (2006, 11), a Professor and Theologian, explains that, “We pray with the Church whenever we read or recite the scriptures – whenever we read the Psalms, whenever we utter the Lord’s Prayer, and whenever we learn and use other resources of prayer books of the Church.” Divine Hours Prayer is a spiritual practice that involves praying at set times throughout the day.

Spiritual Vitality: I define Spiritual Vitality as the energy of the Holy Spirit that facilitates believers’ effectiveness in their Christian walk. It is the source of our growing relationship to Christ. Spiritual vitality is the new and active life every believer receives through their union with the resurrected Christ.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

*Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor,
serving the Lord (Romans 12:11 NIV)*

With my two decades in active ministry, one of the many things I have seen as concerning within the ecclesial communities of which I have been a part is the decline of the spiritual vitality of believers. I have sometimes observed that the loyalty of believers gradually declines, leading to a lack of consecration, mistrust of God, church hopping, and spiritual backsliding. The danger of this is the negative impact on individual and community well-being.

Religion Watch (2022) reports that the Church in Canada has experienced a notable decline over the past two decades and is seeking hope in migrant religions. Adding to this report, Ashleigh Stewart (2022), an investigative reporter for Global News, highlights the sharp decline in church attendance as a contemporary phenomenon amid the very modern challenges facing religious institutions in Canada,

In 2011, 67.3 percent (about 22.1 million people) of Canadians said they were affiliated with a Christian religion. In 2019, that number had dropped to 63.2 percent. Catholicism, Canada's largest denomination, now accounts for 32 percent of Canadians over 15, down from 46.9 percent in 1996. Additionally, the United Church of Canada (UCC), the country's second-largest Christian denomination, represented 14.6 percent of Canadian Christians in 1985. In 1996, the number declined to 9.7 percent, and by 2019, it had dropped to just 3.8 percent.

Apart from the decline among those considered religious, participation in religious activities also declined. Stewart (2022) continues,

Not only is there a decline in the number of those who consider themselves religious in Canada, but participation in religious activities is also on the decline. Regarding partaking in religious activities, the number of people who answered "not at all" to the frequency of attending group religious activities in the StatsCan survey was an overwhelming 53 percent. Only 23 percent of Canadians reported attending group activities at least once a month. Between 2000 and 2009, that figure was around 30 percent.

Discussing the lack of immigrant Christians in boosting the spiritual vitality of the church in Canada, Sarah Wilkins-Laflamme, a sociology professor at the University of Waterloo, notes "that Western Christianity in Canada has not been receiving an influx of new immigrants, unlike Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Sikhism" (Stewart 2022). If the immigration disparity in policy continues, the immigrant Christian believers in Canada will decline.

I offer that Spiritual Vitality is the new and active life every believer receives through their union with the resurrected Christ through the Holy Spirit to live a life pleasing to God. Spiritual vitality is the source of our growing relationship with Christ. Roger Helland (2017, 4, 182), a Prayer Ambassador for the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada, calls it, "The crackling fire of renewal within us." Spiritual vitality is the energy of the Holy Spirit that facilitates

believers' effectiveness in their Christian walk.” Spiritual vitality is essential to believers' calls, characters, fruits, and giftings; it is deeply rooted in our commitment to Jesus and our intention to live within the confines of His teachings. Apostle Paul emphasizes the importance of maintaining zeal in our faith journey; in his letter to the Romans, Paul writes, “Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord” (Romans 12:11). The word “fervour” in Greek is ζέοντες (ZÉONTES), and interpreted in English to mean “to boil,” “boiling,” or “be hot.” Paul was saying to the church, see that you are not slothful but keep boiling and be lively. The early church in the Acts of the Apostles described how this is embodied: they affirmed their dedication to advancing the kingdom's service. Acts 2:42 says, “They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.” This is what Christian Churches and Christian individuals ought to be – being steadfast in living for God and fostering His will on earth. Taking all these definitions into account, we can deduce that spiritual vitality is a passionate pursuit of holiness and service to the kingdom.

Spiritual Vitality

According to the scripture, falling into error and slipping aside is a danger to our spiritual vitality. There are multiple warnings in the scriptures against the possibility of falling into error. Paul writes, “Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God” (Heb 3:12). Similarly, Hebrews 12:15 says, “See to it that no one fails to obtain

the grace of God; that no 'root of bitterness' springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled." 1 Cor 10:12 says, "Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall." Falling into error can include both individuals and the church. For instance, after Jesus acclaimed the hard work and dedication of the church in Ephesus, He rebuked them for failing in their first love and zeal. "Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken the love you had at first. Consider how far you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place" (Revelation 2:4-5). Also, Apostle Paul talks about Demas, who was once his faithful companion but forsaken his old master (2 Tim 4:10). The warnings and instructions in Scripture are not intended to scare us but instead to help us find our sufficiency in God's grace and continue to nurture our intimacy with the Holy Spirit, who is our Paraclete.

Of course, losing our spiritual vitality/fervour hardly ever happens suddenly; it can begin with minor resistance to the promptings of the Holy Spirit that take us farther away from God. Believers can fall into errors because of sin and disobedience (Hebrews 3:12-13), lack of discernment, covetousness (1 Timothy 6:10), worldly distractions (Matthew 13:22), and the neglect of spiritual disciplines (Acts 2:42). Some of the consequences of the loss of spiritual vitality include spiritual stagnation (2 Peter 1:8), ineffective witness (Matthew 5:14-16), loss of reward (1 Corinthians 3:14-15). A spiritual decline can lead to spiritual death if no effort is made to find our way back to God.

Going into this project, I sensed that God is inviting His people and His church to return towards spiritual vitality, which is a dynamic and essential aspect of the Christian life, characterized by a deep relationship with God, empowered by the Holy Spirit, and evidenced by a life of obedience, holiness, and community engagement (Bible Hub 2025b). I recognize that spiritual vitality must be developed and ongoing, as it is often seen as the spillover effect in the lives of a flourishing and healthy church. God wants His church to be strengthened and spiritually vital, but this cannot be achieved without intentionally embracing spiritual practices that include devotion to God's Word, worship, discernment, and prayer, among others.

Structure of the Portfolio

This project reflects my spiritual journey and experiences, which have become central to my message and ministry. Chapter 2, *Joy of Being Known by God*, highlights God's work in my life. In my spiritual autobiography, I reflect on God's love that brought me forth despite the circumstances and background of my birth. I liken my background story to that of young Samuel, as scripture reveals that "...the word of the Lord was rare in those days; there was no widespread revelation" (1 Samuel 3:1). I was born and raised in a Muslim-dominated community with only a few places of worship. Still, God's mercies found me, nurtured me, and sustained me throughout my childhood and adulthood. As I reflected on my story, I have many reasons to be grateful to God, whose love found me and guided my steps amidst my spiritually dark days. My pursuit to see

spiritual vitality restored to the church and in the lives of God's people in general and in new African immigrants to Canada in particular is due to how God marvelously helped me through my journey from childhood to adulthood. I have vowed to make known to my generation my experiences of God's transformative power and to let the upcoming ones know what Jesus can do in their lives.

Chapter 3 presents a Model of Spiritual Formation titled "*Rediscovering Spiritual Practices to Enhance the Spiritual Vitality of Immigrants' Framework, Specifically Healing Stream Leadership Team.*" The model chapter establishes that God is the only strength and sufficiency of the believers, and our spiritual vitality and energy flow from Him alone because He is our source. The chapter examines some factors contributing to the decline of spiritual vitality among believers, specifically within the African immigrants' framework. In developing the model, I took into account that the theological understanding of most, if not all of the new immigrants would be informed by their previous church context- the African Pentecostal-Charismatic tradition. It would be important that the introduction of a new prayer practice would incorporate as much familiarity as possible to encourage willingness to engage.

I recount my story of how the spiritual practices of discernment, prayer, and scripture helped me to discern God's will for my seminary education at Tyndale despite the difficulty on my path. This chapter further explores the model of spiritual formation. It examines the role of spiritual practices such as scriptural reading, worship, discernment, training and mentoring, and prayer in facilitating this transformation of believers.

Chapter 4, *Enhancing Spiritual Vitality of the Leadership Teams of Healing Stream Centre through Devotion to Personal and Communal Prayer*, presents research on my church leadership team's desire for spiritual vitality. My church members, who are primarily immigrants, are faced with many spiritual decline-related issues that are caused mainly by inadequate time for relational intimacy with God. These time constraints are also based on socio-economic factors. These leaders yearned for an experiential relationship with God that would continue to transform their lives in their new home of Canada. Before this project, many of these members reached out to talk about the struggles to settle in a new country. Some had to engage in several jobs in order to make ends meet. Others were navigating family separations and finding it difficult to adapt. However, the church leadership and the members yearned for an experiential relationship with God. The practice of prayer was chosen as the instrument to restore spiritual vitality, as prayer supported their existing spiritual foundational beliefs. They believed that prayer is crucial to deepening their experience and enhancing their spiritual fervor. To address this issue, this project examined a community-based formational strategy that incorporates personal and communal prayer practices, focusing on enhancing participants' spiritual vitality and deepening their devotion to God. This research explored two prayer approaches: Divine Hours (fixed-hour prayer) and the Holy Reading "*Lectio Divina*." The Divine Hours prayer involved spending specific hours of the day with a pattern of prayer to develop personal time with God. The Holy Reading "*Lectio Divina*" helped develop competencies in meditation and praying with scripture, especially

in a communal setting. An evaluative research methodology was employed to explore their experience. The research assessed the transformative impact of praying the daily Divine Hours prayer and the weekly communal prayer of the participants. The transforming effect of the project outcome was encouraging as results will show it reflected an increase in spiritual fervour by enhancing the participants' deepening experience and strengthening their devotion to God.

Chapter 5, *The Future I See*, concludes the report by examining the impact of spiritual formation studies on my life. I have gained a profound understanding of what the role of Spiritual Formation is — the transformative action of the Spirit of God resulting in spiritual vitality for the sake of God and others. This research project taught me that prayer facilitates growing our relational intimacy with God. I learned that prayer helps believers know God's heart, no matter how pressing and complex the situation. Through this project, the practice of prayer has proven to be an essential tool and a channel of spiritual formation and vitality. As the participants began to engage in the spiritual practice of prayer, they were drawn to God and started to receive the life and grace that flow from Christ —the “Vine.” Finally, spending several years studying spiritual formation and reflecting on my personal growth and ministry context has given me a sense of peace with God and joy in fulfilling God’s ordained purpose for my life. I am grateful to God for directing my path and for being faithful in every aspect of my life even in those moments of need, confusion, and stress. Through the DMin in Spiritual Formation program at Tyndale, I have grown deeper and spiritually healthier in my faith in

the Lord. By His grace, I continue to grow in the knowledge of Jesus as I learn to trust in Him.

CHAPTER 2
SPIRITUAL AUTOBIOGRAPHY
JOY OF BEING KNOWN BY GOD

For God knew his people in advance, and he chose them to become like his Son, so that his Son would be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters (Romans 8:29 NLT)

Introduction

Experiential knowledge of God is a great blessing in a world filled with enormous anxieties and uncertainties. Reflecting on my journey of faith and various experiences of God, I count it a privilege to be known and loved by God. Aside from the revelation of God through His Word (the Scripture), the story of God's work in my life has forever printed the love of God in my heart. Like the Psalmist, I will forever be grateful to God for His mercies. "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless His holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and do not forget all His benefits" (Psalm 103:1-22). One truth I have found in Scripture is that God prioritizes the welfare of His people, and His plan of redemption is absolute for all who come to Him. Jeremiah 29:11 says, "For I know the plans I have for

you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.” God has revealed Himself to me as God who is interested in every aspect of my life; He has shown on various occasions that He is faithful and can be trusted.

The theme of my spiritual autobiography is the *Joy of Being Known by God*. Writing this spiritual autobiography helped me recall God's various involvements and activities in my life from childhood to adulthood. It is a disclosure of the love and mercies of God that nurtured and sustained me throughout my life. The spiritual autobiography chapter began with the events of my childhood - God's miracle at my birth, my wonderful experience with my great grandma, and the visitation of Jesus that led to my understanding of salvation and healing just after my high school days. My teenage years were filled with various experiences of God's mercy, bearing me up from several errors, mistakes, and confusion related to my adolescent age. The Lord established me in Him and kept me from being snatched from His hands. He showed me many encounters that proved that He is alive. His various visits and encounters changed everything in my life. The Lord ordered me to step up to His plan, and today, I can only be forever grateful for His work in my life. At present, I sense God is inviting me to a deeper relationship with Him—to know Him more dearly and serve Him more purposefully. He is building my spiritual capacity to live as a light and burning fire for others to see and come to His knowledge.

God's Love Brought Me Forth

The events surrounding my birth are testimonies of comfort to the believers in my community, who had been praying that God should show Himself alive to the Muslim neighbours in the Muslim-dominated areas of the southwestern part of Nigeria. The circumstances of my birth served as evidence that the light of Christ shines through the darkness. God revealed Himself to be alive during my mother's childbearing experience. My mother, a devoted Christian, found herself in the pain of childbirth for many days. Due to poor healthcare, it seemed impossible that both mother and baby would survive this ordeal. The small Christian community in the area prayed for God's intervention on behalf of my mother, and God answered their prayers. God intervened, and my mother delivered a baby boy, and that baby was I.

I was born into a Christian family in a small town called Ifira Akoko in the southwestern part of Nigeria. My parents were devoted members of the Anglican church. Even though our immediate neighbours were predominantly Muslim, we still had a mutually peaceful community: the community was built to have a sense of togetherness, as it was presumably believed that it takes a community to raise a child. It was a place where everyone cared for and watched out for one another. I am the fifth child in a family of seven. My family was considered a special family within the community because my parents were staunch believers—they loved the Lord and helped the people. My parents believed that Christians are the light of the world and should always mirror God's goodness and love for people.

The Miracle Birth

It was a beautiful morning on May 16 after a gentle rain. The sun did not hide its illumination. It was admirable, shining beautifully, keeping everyone and everything warm. There were a few light clouds in the blue sky. However, there was a ghostly dark cloud upon the Boluwaduro family as my mother experienced the severe pain of childbirth for two days with no adequate medical assistance to help her. In those days, the people in the less populated communities could hardly access a modern health facility. Instead of a hospital, the people in the rural areas could only access a dispensary—a small outpatient health facility usually managed by a nurse. The facilities in the dispensary are not designed to manage complex medical issues. According to what my father told me, my mother was in labour for more than two days, and everyone thought she would not be able to survive because she had lost consciousness three times during the labour. She also lost a lot of blood. But to the glory of God, both my mother and I survived.

Indeed, it was a rare occurrence that a mother in those circumstances would survive after losing that much blood without a good healthcare system to support her. When the people of the community saw both of us alive, they were amazed, and they glorified God. This miracle prompted the elders in the family to give me a traditional name, *Iyanu*, meaning The Wonders of God.

My birth story has forever engraved the love of God in my heart. The psalmist declares,

You made all the delicate inner parts of my body and knit me together in my mother's womb. Thank you for making me so wonderfully complex! Your workmanship is marvelous—how well I know it. You watched me as I was being formed in utter seclusion, as I was woven together in the dark of the womb. You saw me before I was born. Every day of my life was recorded in your book. Every moment was laid out before a single day had passed. (Psalm 139:13-16 NLT)

I am grateful for God's sustenance, protection, and care over my life, and for the preservation of my mother and I during my delivery.

My Childhood Sources of Spiritual Nourishment

Apostle Peter writes, "Like newborn babies, you must crave pure spiritual milk so that you will grow into a full experience of salvation. Cry out for this nourishment" (1 Peter 2:2). Spiritual nourishment has a profound impact on the overall well-being and spiritual vitality of a believer. The word for "crave" in this passage is a strong word: *get an appetite for it or long for it eagerly* as babes long for milk, which is their proper food—the only food necessary for them (Ellicott 1905b). There are various circumstances that God used to build me up during my childhood. I will mention two instances, the Children's Bible Quiz and the Memory of My Great-Grandma.

Children Bible Quiz

I grew up healthy and strong and was filled with wisdom, and God's favour was on me. The Book of Proverbs encourages parents to teach their children the valuable virtues of godly character and the fear of the Lord: "Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old, he will not depart from it" (Proverbs 22:6 ESV). I am grateful to God for being exposed to the scriptures at

an early age of my life by my parents. I was in Grade 6 when the children's departments of the Anglican churches across southwestern Nigeria organized a special children's annual Bible quiz competition. This annual competition, Bible Quiz for Kids, was established to build a solid biblical foundation for children. It aimed to encourage children to read their Bibles. Also, the gifts given to the participants by the Bishop of the Diocese were meant to encourage the children's efforts. So, many churches did all they could to prepare their children to win the competition.

The first stage of the competition started at my local church, and all the children in the church participated. I became the winner, and the priest's daughter came second. Although Joy was older than me, she was in Grade 8, while I was in Grade 6, both of us were selected for the big competition. Moreover, before the second stage of the competition, I remembered my mother's words of encouragement that the Lord would help me. That word echoed in my heart as I prepared for the competition; I was confident and conscious that God's grace would be sufficient for me. There was an arrangement for a car to take Joy and myself to Oka Akoko, the city where the Bible quiz competition was held. When we arrived at the competition, the Diocesan Sunday school coordinator welcomed us and expressed how the Bishop was so proud that we both made it to the final competition alongside the 8 other representatives from other churches. He told us what gifts the first, second, and third winners would take home with them. I was very nervous to see the number of churches represented and, at the same time, confident knowing that God was with me. The quiz started, and many questions

were asked. Some I had heard before; others were new to me. Joy, an intelligent daughter of a priest, answered a couple of questions. The quiz competition continued, and Joy and I became very comfortable with the questions. Our score began to rise as we answered the questions promptly and accurately, while other participants struggled with their questions. Specifically, I was very calm and comfortable in the part of the competition that required Bible citations. I was calm because I knew I was not alone. I remembered my mother's words of encouragement. I knew God was with me. At this time, most of the other contestants found it difficult to cite the verses accurately.

One area in which I have seen God greatly helping me, even to this moment, has been the area of inner calmness in my spirit. "You will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are steadfast because they trust in you." (Isaiah 26:3 NIV). God's great and continual peace abides with those who cleave to Him. I have learned to hang on to God and draw my strength from Him, no matter what. I learned from my mother that it is the life that cleaves to God that experiences His glory.

Joy was excited when I could answer questions she could not and seemed quite impressed with my performance. I could see her nodding happily. At the end of the competition, my church was declared the winner. I could not believe we had won despite the caliber of participants from the represented churches. My church happened to be one of the smallest churches in terms of archdeaconry rankings, yet the Lord helped our team to win the competition. This strengthened

my faith to dare to believe in God in all life circumstances. I grew up aware that God was my sufficiency in every situation.

The memory of receiving an award from the Bishop of my Diocese as a young lad gave me a feeling that hard work pays off and is rewarding. I also remember that the Bishop prayed for us that day, and in his prayers, he said that God would use us for His glory. And now, many years later, I still remember his prayer. I do not believe that it is a coincidence that I find myself in the service of God and humanity— a minister of the gospel. Indeed, I have seen God’s hand in my life, even in the face of uncertainty, such as what Joy and I faced during our competition; I have confidence that God was with me. Moreover, I have grown up knowing that all achievements in life come from God. He is the strength of His people and the lifter of my head. “But you, Lord, are a shield around me, my glory, the One who lifts my head high” (Psalm 3:3 NIV).

Golden Wisdom from God - The Memory of My Great-Grandma

The Book of Job claims that wisdom accompanies the elderly. “Wisdom is found with the elderly, and understanding comes with long life” (Job 12:12). My great-grandmother left a legacy of true strength, and the positive influence her life has had on me has stayed with me and changed me into who I am. She was a source of inspiration and a loving caretaker. My great-grandmother passed away over forty years ago, yet her impact on my life remains fresh today.

I got to know my great-grandmother during my elementary school days as she lived very close to my school and always took good care of all her great-

grandchildren. My siblings and I often did not bother to go to school with our lunch because we always walked down to her house and ate during our break time. Due to old age, my great-grandmother was unable to see and mostly recognized her great-grandchildren from our voices. She often touched us to check our health, especially when we were feeling feverish. She always knew how to take good care of us. She was a wonderful and caring woman.

One fateful day, I came home desperately desiring to share with my great-grandmother what happened in my school, but I was surprised to see a lot of people gathered in front of her house. I could not even enter the house until my mother came out and took me to my great-grandmother's room, but this time, great-grandma could not welcome me with her greeting. I could see how she was covered with white cloth as she lay on her bed. Of course, it was very strange for me to see her in that state of helplessness—not looking at me and not turning to greet and touch me as she used to do. I was used to her songs, touch, and prayers, but she could not do any of those things now. I remember that she taught me many things from the Bible even though she could not see very well then. She taught me to pray before eating and recite the Lord's Prayer. Because of her age and sight, my great-grandmother depended on her eldest son's wife to cook for her. But instead of my great-grandmother eating her lunch, she would keep the meals for my siblings and I until we returned home from school. But on this particular day, she was not there to greet and welcome me. Even though I was young, I still remember that I was deeply hurt. Reacting to what happened, I tried

to run to where she was lying so I could hold her and ask her how she was doing, but my mother held me back and took me out of the room.

The death of my great-grandmother happened when I was in Grade 7. She was 120 years old at the time. This was my first encounter with mortality. My response when my great-grandmother died was instant. Every child dealing with death or loss in the family needs the support of an understanding adult. After the passing of my great-grandmother, I had many questions, such as, why should this good woman die? Indeed, real love leaves a memory that no one can steal. The love my great-grandmother showed me, the songs she taught me, the prayers she prayed with me, and the food she kept for me have imprinted her memory on my mind. Because I did not understand the situation, there was no way that I could process the reality of what I was feeling at that time, which was principally concerned about who would continue to do what my great-grandmother had been doing for my siblings and me. My parents did a good job reassuring me that my great-grandmother was not gone forever and that I would see her again when Jesus returned. My Sunday school teacher, Aunty Juliet, also helped me overcome the loss. She told me that my great-grandmother was a good woman who was loved by God, and that was the reason why God took her. Despite my limited knowledge of the scriptures at the time, I believed what she said, and I was comforted. Apostle Paul wrote to the Christians at Philippi and Corinth about death as a gain for the believers after we have fulfilled God's purpose on earth. "For me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain" (Philippians 1:21 NIV). Also, according to the Book of Psalms, the calling home of a believer is a precious thing

to God. “Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints” (Psalm 116:15 KJV). When a believer is called home, it is an entrance into eternal glory where Christ is sitting on the right hand of God (Col 3:1).

I grew up believing that my great-grandmother’s death was a call home to rest. It was God who took her away before the evil days. “The righteous person perishes, and no one takes it to heart; And devout people are taken away, while no one understands. For the righteous person is taken away from evil” (Isaiah 57:1 NASB). This event instilled a consciousness that living a Christian life of sacrifice, contentment, and prayer yields great rewards. “A godly life brings great gain to people who are content with what they have” (1 Timothy 6:6 NASB). My great-grandmother loved God and lived a life of sacrifice for many. She was satisfied with what she had and spent her life in prayer. No wonder she was called home to rest with the Lord. To me, this is timeless wisdom that remains applicable today.

When I returned to school the following academic year, I found it very difficult to adjust to the fact that I would not see my great-grandmother and eat with her during my lunch break. My great-grandmother was one of the people whose life had a profound impact on me during the early years of my childhood. Her Christian virtues of sacrifice, love, selflessness, and prayer are still part of my life today. In addition, I learned from my great-grandmother’s life of sacrifice and the need to invest my life in helping others. My great-grandmother showed me from the Scripture that I am God’s light wherever I find myself, and I should always take advantage of every opportunity to show Jesus to people and impact

them positively when I have the time and opportunity to do so. “Therefore, as we have the opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith” (Galatians 6:10 NKJV).

In conclusion, my great-grandmother brought the light of the gospel to many in her lifetime. I believe that all followers of Christ should live as the light of the world (Matthew 5:14). I choose to live as the light of God, and I strive to make my light shine before people so that they may see Christ living in me and glorify God. The memory of the righteous is a blessing (Proverbs 10:7 NIV).

First Encounters with Jesus: Salvation and Healing

I believe God’s presence ushers His people into a new experience of joy and true freedom. No wonder Moses said to God, “If Your Presence does not go with us, do not bring us up from here” (Exodus 33:15 KJV). As I continued to grow, the hand of the Lord was evident in my life. I increased in wisdom, and the favour of God was upon me, distinguishing me in my academics.

The Blessing of a Christian High School

I appreciate my parents for their love of education and for the privilege given to me to attend one of the best schools in my State. I attended Unity Secondary School, Epinmi, Ondo State, in southwest Nigeria. It is a boarding, government-owned, mixed-gender high school. During my high school years, I was one of the top students in my class. I also served as a chapel prefect, which entailed additional responsibilities, including being available to the students and

collaborating with the school chaplain, Mr. Peter, to plan the weekly chapel services.

The Lord was gracious to me throughout my high school days as He positioned wonderful people across my path to support me during my first time away from my parents. One person that God first brought across my path to help was Clinton. He was one of the student executives and a Christian brother. Clinton organized daily prayers for students and weekly tutorials on complex subjects such as Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry, and Biology. I was greatly influenced by his support for me, and I desired to grow to know God like him. Unfortunately, that was the year he graduated, and we never met again. Nevertheless, his teachings positively impacted me during my high school days.

Once I finished my high school education and returned home, things changed. I began to desire to bond with new friends more than I desired to grow in God. All my former friends, those I met during my high school days, all graduated and returned to their various homes. Indeed, I missed them and the great times we spent together. In my search for new friends, I met some boys, Frank, Gab, and a few others. These boys were my age, and we lived in the same community. Since I was in dire need of friends to play with, I bonded with them.

While I mingled with these new boys, I started to notice that my desire for God was decreasing, and all the Christian virtues I developed during my high school days as a chapel prefect had slowly died out. For instance, I started making excuses to avoid attending church prayer meetings and fellowship. And even when I attended fellowship meetings, my mind was not focused. All along, my

mother had not been comfortable with me going out with these new friends. She had warned me on several occasions, but I would not yield to her advice. Apostle Paul claims, “Do not be misled: Bad company corrupts good character” (1 Corinthians 15:33 NIV). Indeed, my friendship with these boys had negatively influenced me, and I found myself involved in all forms of ungodly acts that I once despised. Lying became so easy, and remorseful thoughts became far from my actions. I would take money from my parents and lavish it on these boys without feeling bad about my actions. I remembered a time Emmanuel needed money and told me about it. Because of the influence he had on me, I went to my mother and lied that I desperately needed money for certain things. I got the money and gave it to Frank. Of course, I was not happy about lying to my mother, but I succumbed to the pressures of my adolescent life. I was afraid that my friends would stop mingling with me if I refused to offer them what they demanded.

As I continued to spend time with these boys, my interest in attending the church’s weekly services with my family stopped altogether. I always had an excuse for not attending the prayer meeting. However, one thing was obvious throughout this time: my mother was not happy with my association with the boys, and she never stopped praying for me. I believe that her prayers for me were answered. They led to my salvation.

My First Encounter with Jesus

During this phase of my life, I was waiting for the result of the entrance

exam to university, but before the result was released, I became sick and was hospitalized. My parents could not stay with me at that time because of their business, but my sisters regularly came to visit. It was a very tough time for me as I constantly lived with severe pain around my waist, which the doctor diagnosed as a growth that had to be taken out through surgery. While in the hospital, I received a message that my university admission had been released, and I was admitted into the university. However, due to my health situation, my family had to call the school to defer my admission.

My daily struggle with pain, my loneliness in the hospital, and the fact that I was about to miss my admission brought me to my knees. I knew I needed God to intervene in my life. As I reflected on the months that I had lived without seeking God, not attending fellowship, and no involvement in communal prayer with my family, I could see how far I had departed from the lifestyle I used to cherish. I knew I had to cry out to God to save me. For the first time in my life, I sincerely cried for God's mercy, and in my lonely state, I poured out my heart—my frustration with life, my lack of direction, my lack of peace, and my burden of hopelessness. Surely God will be found when we seek Him with all our hearts. “You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart” (Jeremiah 29:13 NIV).

That night, I had an encounter with the Lord. Seeing His face was truly the most beautiful experience I had ever had. I did not only see Jesus externally, but I saw His being. In the vision, the Lord Jesus came to me, and as I looked at His

face, I began to sob. I cried because of the overwhelming glory of His presence. He approached me and embraced me. As He touched me, my sense of loneliness faded away, and I was filled with an overflowing joy that I cannot describe. There are many things that the Lord told me in the vision that I cannot remember, but I can remember vividly what He said about my doctor, his family, and the church. In the vision, Jesus revealed to me that the doctor was a pastor and that he was having some issues in his church. Specifically, the Lord said there were some internal problems that the church was battling with, and He was ready to intervene. He also wanted to heal the people.

In the morning, I shared my experience with the doctor, and he was astonished at how a young boy like me and a stranger could have knowledge of the things that his church was going through. He took me to the church the following Sunday, and at a time in the service, I was given a moment to share my revelation with the church. After my short message, I prayed with the brethren, and as I prayed, the Spirit of the Lord moved among the people. Many people in the church gave their lives to Jesus Christ by openly confessing the Lordship of Jesus over their lives, and others rededicated their lives to the service of God. In God's presence, there is liberty and deliverance from oppression and the bondages of darkness. "Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty" (2 Corinthians 3:17 (KJV)). Many of the leaders confessed their wrongdoings and agreed to ensure that peace reigns amidst the ongoing dispute in the church. God's visitation brings a turnaround of His people—from sinful living to godliness and from self-centeredness to God-centered lives. "Blessed be the

Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people” (Luke 1:68 ESV). There was great joy in the hearts of the people, as many others confessed that they were healed by the power of Jesus' Name in the service.

As a young boy with little knowledge of God, the events in the church that morning seemed very strange to me, but the experience pushed me toward God and encouraged me to seek Him and know Him better. I witnessed how Jesus proved His word that Sunday morning, and I believed that He was real. I knew that only He could have done what I saw—the transformation, the conversion, and the healing in the lives of the people. That same week, the Lord miraculously touched my body. I too was healed and discharged from the hospital. Praise God; I was able to start my studies at the University of Ilorin. I am a living testimony that the Lord is undoubtedly near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth (Psalm 145:18).

The Reality of Biblical Visions

Visions in the Bible are not merely fantasies or nightmares; visions are important aspects of biblical revelations and disclosures. They are one of the vehicles through which God reveals His desire to His people. God promised to pour out His Spirit on all humanity (Acts 2:17, Joel 2:28). Every child of God has received the gift, so they should minister the same one to another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God (1 Peter 4:10). I thank God for making Himself known to me.

All visions must be subject to the Scriptures. They must be interpreted, understood, and responded to according to Scriptural truth (1 Thes. 5:2). Some of the biblical examples of people's experience of visions include Paul's experience of visions that guide his missionary efforts (Acts 16:9); Peter received a vision, which challenges Jewish dietary laws and signifies the inclusion of Gentiles into the Christian faith in Acts 10:9-16. Daniel received visions that revealed future events and the unfolding of God's plan for the nations (Daniel 7:1). This paper contains some of the visions and disclosures I received in my journey with God.

Spiritual Struggles and Restoration of Vitality During My University Days

At certain times of one's life, the spiritual aspect of one's humanity can become stretched as a result of chronic work stress and emotional exhaustion. Spiritual struggles happen all the time, and these conflicts generate distressing emotions and questions about one's spiritual journey in life. In the same way, times of struggle can also be fundamental for human development. This was my experience during my early days at university. My spiritual struggles were turned around for my good. I overcame the loss of spiritual vitality, which is characterized by feelings of lukewarmness and a lack of interest in church events. I found strength that has continued to deepen my faith today.

I was 20 years old when I gained admission to the University of Ilorin, Nigeria. My undergraduate days were remarkable because I learned so much about God and my identity in Christ. Nevertheless, growing up and maturing in Christ is a highly complex process because it does not happen without a

purposeful process of nurturing and tutelage. Just as Samuel grew under the mentorship of Eli, the Lord ordered my steps using Christian leaders who helped and supported my growth through mentorship and discipleship.

Nevertheless, my journey of faith during my days at the university was not without difficulties. One of the issues I faced was the sudden loss of interest, excitement, and confidence in the student fellowship where I was once an active member. For instance, I remembered the struggles I faced when I was asked to lead a prayer session. It was like I was operating under a closed heaven. A closed heaven experience is like being under siege. It is an experience full of confusion, self-condemnation, and pain. I struggled through the prayer, and after that experience, I was so hurt that I began to criticize myself and question the authenticity of my salvation. With everything that was going on around me, I gradually withdrew into my shell. I stopped attending the weekday fellowship events and prayers. Of course, I knew that withdrawing into my shell was not the answer, but I could not help myself, and no one could tell me what was missing in my life. What I needed at that time was soul care since what was happening to me was a symptom of being burned out with fellowship activities. The unfortunate part of the story was that this experience lasted for about three months, and I could not interpret what was going on within me. I had no one in the fellowship who was mature enough to tell me that I was going through a dark night of the soul—a desolation experience.

St. Ignatius describes desolation as “the darkness of soul, the turmoil of spirit, movement to things low and earthly, the restlessness arising from many

disturbances which lead to a sense of guilt, lack of faith, lack of hope, and lack of love” (Fleming 1996, 317). Thomas Green (1984, 95), a Theologian and Philosopher, states that, “with desolation, there is no peace.” Green recommends that “in a time of desolation, we should never make decisions but remain firm in the resolution which guided us the day before the desolation” (Green 1984, 107). The reason is that according to St. Ignatius, in desolation, “the evil spirit guides and counsels, and we can only prevail against the desolation by doing the opposite of what the enemy suggests” (Green 1984, 108). For instance, Ignatius recommends that during desolation, “we double our prayer time, attend fellowship with the brethren more often, and serve more generously” (Green 1984, 108). Unfortunately, I lacked this truth at that time, but the Lord was with me throughout my struggles. He kept me in His love and His mercies — His goodness, affection, tenderness, compassion, and commitment never left me. “The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness” (Lamentations 3:22-23 ESV).

After three months of desolation, things began to improve when I met my friend, David, a medical student at my school. David was down to earth and loved the Lord. His love for the Bible instantly made me bond with him, and we formed a good partnership by studying the Bible and praying together. Our love and desire for growth and intimacy with the Lord made us addicted searchers for the knowledge of God. In addition to my Bible study, prayers, and soul friendship with David, I was privileged to attend various leadership development programs and was transformed by various books and the writings of the Church fathers. So,

through the mercies of God, I was established in Christian doctrine and teaching of Scripture, and thankfully, I had my peace, joy, and confidence restored.

My discovery during my earlier days of desolation at the university was that, though I was attending fellowship and engaging in many activities, the nurturing of my soul was missing. I understood that my loss of confidence, peace, and joy was due to a lack of inner life intimacy with God. Saint Augustine writes in his Confessions, “Thou hast made us for thyself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it finds its rest in thee” (Augustine and Henry 2008, 29). Praise God, the moment my soul found its rest in God, it overflowed with joy.

Finding My Path - Making Godly Decisions in Life

Perhaps my most challenging season was when I pressed in to know the heart of God concerning His purpose for my life. It was 2003, after I graduated from university and after my completion of the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC)—the one-year mandatory service program required for all Nigerian youths after the completion of post-secondary education. As a young graduate of computer science, I had numerous opportunities to practice my profession, both in private organizations and government establishments, but I had a strong impression of the Spirit, an inner witness of God's Spirit on my spirit, to become a priest. I have never been afraid to follow my ambition and conviction. I have grown to know the Lord and have learned to hear and discern His heart. However, the issue I faced at this time was how to convince my parents that I have a calling to ministry. My parents had always wanted me to become a notable system

engineer. They believed that, due to the high demand for information technology experts, I could earn enough money to support my family. Of course, I love my parents, and I appreciate their investment in me, but at that time, I envisioned myself as a preacher, and I knew that telling them would be very difficult. After some months of prayer and waiting on God, I was convinced that the prompt to enter ministry was from God. The Lord specifically told me that my computer expertise would not be a waste but a great asset for my ministry.

I summoned the courage to tell my parents and siblings about my intention. While my parents understood me, some of my siblings were dissatisfied. I recall a day when my older sister, Lynda, approached me and said she had heard about my intention to become a pastor. Then she said, “Do you think you will expect us to feed you and your family when you eventually get married as a pastor?” I was dumbfounded by her statement. I could not believe that someone could reason that way since I had always believed that my sister was very spiritual. Afterward, I told her that God would not allow such a situation to happen. And to God be the glory, I have had no reason to ask her for any support ever since I made up my mind to serve the Lord. I believe that my sister’s comment was one major push that ignited my passion to trust God for a fulfilling life of ministry. Instead of being distracted by her comments, I was determined to press on to God, which ultimately became a turning point in my life and ministry. One of my favourite scriptures is Isaiah 58:11, “LORD will guide you continually, and satisfy your soul in drought, and strengthen your bones; You

shall be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters do not fail.” The Lord was faithful to fulfill this word in my life.

One of my first amazements at the wonders of God was God's miraculous provision of a contract appointment with the government of Ondo State, one of the states in the Republic of Nigeria. Unexpectedly, I received a call from one of my friends, John, who was employed by the government. He asked me if I was interested in being part of an IT project. He shared that the government was looking for professionals to implement the automation of the state Payroll and Human Resource system. Knowing that I was not really interested in having a full-time job with any organization, John convinced me that the job was just a contract and would not affect my plan for the ministry. Based on his persuasion, I joined the team, and it was a perfect fit for my ministry plan.

My First Church Plant

The Lord helped me to start the first church I pastored in Nigeria; it was called Heirs Family. The church began in Akure, the Capital City of Ondo State, Nigeria, in 2005. This church was predominantly a youth and young adult church. Our priorities were to connect the youth to Jesus and to mentor them into vessels of positive change for God and the community. The Lord was with me and sustained His church. Like I told Lynda, my elder sister, I had no reason to ask any of my siblings for any financial help because the Lord was always meeting my needs. The church grew in number and in impact, and our daily testimonies confirmed that it was God who was building His Church.

That same year (2005), I married Victoria, who was also a partner in my ministry. The wedding was glorious, the Lord raised helpers to plan and finance the ceremony. Some of these helpers were people whose lives had been impacted by my ministry, and others were friends and family members. The state government, where I worked as an IT consultant, sponsored the wedding. It was a miracle of God. The Lord also used the government of Ondo State to support the wedding. It was amazing! The Lord continued to prove Himself faithful and dependable in my home and my ministry, and none of His words have failed in my life. It is good to trust in the Lord. “The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it” (1 Thessalonians 5:24 NIV).

God’s Spirit Preserved Me From A Ghastly Car Accident

The first major gift I received from God during my marriage was the gift of a vehicle, an Audi. The car came after the Lord opened a training consultancy door for me that required me to partner with Ondo State government in Nigeria to organize a capacity training program in Information Technology for its workforce. Indeed, the Lord used this training to open many other opportunities for me to sustain my young family. I was able to buy my first car with the provision from the training project.

When I purchased my Audi, I did not know how to drive a car. I was looking for someone to teach me. I met a young man, Daniel, who was one of the staff members of my computer business. He told me that while I was looking for a professional driving instructor, he could take me through a few training sessions.

Excitedly I agreed. I asked him to take me to a safe place to practice and learn that weekend. He took me to a school playground with a big open field where I could practice my driving. Once we arrived, Victoria got out of the car and watched Daniel teach me how to drive.

Daniel started by showing me a few components that I needed to get familiar with the car, and showed me how to start and stop the car. After the initial training, he encouraged me to start the car and drive it forward, which I did perfectly. The second step was to drive around the field. I started the car, and I was driving it when suddenly I heard Daniel shouting, “You are heading towards the main road, stop!” “Stop!!” I guess when he did not know what else to do while the car was speeding towards the main road, he pulled the hand brake to stop the car. That is all I remember, as I lost consciousness at that point. It was Victoria who witnessed the accident and the miracle of God. According to my wife, after Daniel suddenly pulled the hand brake, the car somersaulted four times and, in the process, hit a big stone, tumbled, and came to a stop on its roof with its four tires upside down. The sound of the car crash alerted the people in the community, and they quickly gathered at the scene, but no one knew how to help. Everyone was afraid of lifting the car back to its normal position because Daniel and I were still in the car. They were not sure if we were still alive.

More so, something very strange happened while I was unconscious. In my unconscious state, I was aware of a few things that were going on. For instance, I could hear myself talking out loud, saying, “Not me, not now!” “I am to fulfill His purpose!” “Not me, not now.” This voice became loud, and it woke

me up. While still saying those words, I saw that the car window was broken on the driver's side. I climbed out through that window, and I discovered that Daniel was also conscious. He followed me out of the car through the same window while the car was still upside down. This happened about six minutes after the accident, and the crowds were trying to figure out what to do. When the people, including Victoria, saw us coming out, they were excited and could not hold back their joy. They shouted and gave glory to God.

What baffled me was the role played by the subconscious part of my soul in the incident. From my understanding of Christian theology, the reality of the existence of the inner life and its significant role in influencing human lives is undeniable. According to Dallas Willard (2014b, 37), a Professor at the University of Southern California's School of Philosophy, "The soul is the deepest part and an intelligent faculty of our being that can influence our whole being, and like a computer, it quietly runs as well as stores everything that happens in one's life." This means the subconscious can be programmed and reprogrammed with good information. I wondered why the words that were coming out of my mouth during my unconscious state were words I commonly used during my daily meditations and declarations. The Book of Proverbs says, "Watch over your heart with all diligence, for from it flow the springs of life" (Proverbs 4:23 NASB). After the incident, I learned to start filling my soul with positive affirmations. I am committed to reading the Scriptures and allowing the inspiration of God's Word to guide my thoughts.

My view on life changed after the car accident. I genuinely grasped the

meaning of Psalm 31:15a, “My times are in your hand.” Reflecting on the incident, I have learned to be very careful and engage the services of professionals in everything I do. I constantly view my life as no longer my own, but a gift from God that is kept alive for His own purpose and glory. I have more confidence that God has a plan and purpose to keep me alive.

My Visit to the State of Israel

As I remember the journey of my life, especially how the Lord has orchestrated my destiny, I will always be grateful for His love. My journey to Israel was such a journey that was divinely directed by God. On December 28, 2009, I was privileged to visit the nation of Israel with my wife, Victoria. It was my first visit to Tel Aviv. I was excited. Indeed, celebrating Christmas in Israel was a unique experience for me. The experience made the reality of Jesus as God’s gift to the world more tangible to me.

As it happened, a journey that was supposed to be a short visit took another route when the Lord began to whisper to me that He would need me to stay and support a missionary project in Israel. Specifically, the Lord told me to be ready to partner with the existing mission work in Tel Aviv. The instruction of the Lord initially came to me in the form of a deep knowing, and thereafter, several open visions followed. In the visions, I could see myself in various cities in Israel, preaching and praying for people. This idea felt strange because I never planned to stay or live in Israel. I was very comfortable at home in Nigeria. My IT business and the church, Heirs Family, where I pastored, were expecting me back

after my vacation. So, relocating to another country was not part of my plans. However, I could not get this idea of ministry in Israel off my mind from the time the Lord spoke to me about it.

After the first two days in the hotel, a pastor from House of Friendship, Tel Aviv, came to my hotel. Apparently, someone informed him that my wife and I were in the country. I did not probe to find out how he knew we were in the country, but I later found out that the pastor was a staff member at the Nigerian Embassy in Tel Aviv. So, there was a possibility that he was aware of who arrived and left the country. Yet it was still very strange to us when Pastor Greg told me that the Lord wanted my wife and I to stay back and join his missionary work in Israel. This was accurate to the instructions we received from the Lord. After much prayer, my wife and I had peace with God and with what He wanted us to do in partnership with Him in Israel. House of Friendship, the headquarters of a Nigeria-based missionary church. This church spans many countries in Tel Aviv; I was made a co-pastor with Pastor Greg, who was the head of the mission organization in Israel, while Victoria served as the Secretary of the mission. There were other pastors who worked with the organization, but most of them were pastors in other cities outside Tel Aviv. What made my time in Israel unique was God's constant and precise instructions about what He wanted to do with my life. The Lord worked with me throughout my time in Israel, and I was privileged to minister to various churches across the cities in Israel, such as Tel Aviv, Ashdod, Herzliya, and Jerusalem, among others.

My supernatural experience of God's leading during this time would not be complete unless I mention an occurrence that surrounded my leaving the state of Israel. In August 2010, about a year into the work in Israel, as my wife and I were already getting settled into the country and hoping to make Israel our permanent home, the Lord told me that I had to leave the country with my family and return to Nigeria. Again, this voice came in the form of a deep knowing. I was wholly convinced in my spirit that it was the Lord. When God speaks to me, it usually comes in the form of knowing by the Spirit or an impression of the Spirit, which is generally too real to be misinterpreted for fantasy. It was a challenging message for Victoria and me because we believed we were still needed there. We received immense acceptance from the people, and we enjoyed many open doors for our ministry in various cities of Israel, so receiving an instruction to leave Israel was quite shocking. But I was used to God's instructions, and even when they appeared very tough to bear, I have always known that it was for His glory. I responded to God by starting to prepare to leave Israel. However, it was difficult for Victoria. It was a shock for her because we told all our family and friends that we were to stay in Israel, so how would we adjust to life in Nigeria again? We left our jobs for the mission work in Israel, and Victoria feared how we would manage financially after leaving all for Him. My wife approached the host pastor, Pastor Greg, and asked if he could speak to me in order to change my mind. While Pastor Greg talked to me, I could perceive his admiration for me, my family, and my ministry. He opened up to me about his sincere love for me and his plan of preparing us for a more major leadership role

in Israel. However, while this discussion was still ongoing, the Lord spoke to me again and said that I had to leave within the next two weeks. I told Pastor Greg what the Lord told me, and I sincerely appreciated his love for my family. He agreed and prayed for us.

So, Victoria and I left Israel as the Lord instructed us. However, I had a strange experience the day I left Israel. While my wife and I were in the Tel Aviv Ben Gurion International Airport, I had a strange visitation of God's presence. The presence of the Lord rested upon me, and the glory of God was so tangible that I wept uncontrollably and sobbed like a baby. No one knew why I was crying, but Victoria sensed it was the Lord. We left Israel without knowing what was next in our future. But the Lord had already gone ahead of us. We witnessed His favour and presence upon our arrival in Nigeria.

Meanwhile, a few things happened that really unsettled the mission organization's operations in Israel after we left, but I will not go into details about the issues due to confidentiality. Thank God for the grace to discern and obediently follow the voice of God's Spirit. The event in Israel confirmed that returning to Nigeria was our right choice. "The LORD directs the steps of the godly. He delights in every detail of their lives" (Psalm 37:23 NLT). I have learned to trust God and submit to His judgment in all life situations.

Second Encounters with Jesus: The Visitation that Changed Everything

A second encounter came in 2010 after I left Israel for Nigeria and while I was waiting on God to know His direction for me, my family, and my ministry. I

was in a meditative, trance-like state, yet I was connected to my physical form. I was inside my house, and suddenly, I heard a shout from outside my house that the Lord Jesus was in the neighborhood. Excitedly, in the vision, I ran out of the house to the front of my house, trying to see what the shouting was all about. Suddenly, I saw Jesus walking in the street and moving towards my house. There were many people following Him, but I did not recognize any of them. I stood in awe, watching what was happening, and as I watched, I noticed that Jesus had stopped as He got to the front of my house. I lived in a very big compound, and my house was fenced with an iron gate. Jesus entered through the gate without anyone opening it for Him, and I still could not talk, but I was filled with joy and was deeply amazed at how Jesus could stand in front of my house and enter my compound. Excitedly, I ran to meet Him as He entered my living room, and immediately, I knelt before Him in awe and welcomed Him to my house.

Seeing Jesus face to face is truly the most beautiful experience. I did not only see Jesus outwardly, but I saw His essence and his being. Everything in me encountered Him, saw Him, experienced Him, and I was completely overtaken by who He is. I was entirely overwhelmed by His love, and I collapsed and began to weep uncontrollably.

As I beheld His face, tears of joy welled up in my eyes. His face looked ever admiring and full of peace. He came closer and stretched his hands gently towards my head to draw me closer to Himself. Very tenderly, He put His hands around my body, hugged me, and drew me to His chest. Nobody ever touched me so lovingly as Jesus. And He said: 'I am with you.' His words broke through into

my deepest inner self, and I cried deeply, contemplating what He had said. I knew it was true because He once told me those words when I was much younger in the hospital.

God's glory filled my living room where we were together. His presence was refreshing. I noticed that, as I beheld His face, I was sobbing profusely. I held tight to him because I did not want Him to leave me. "As the eyes of servants look to the hand of their master, as the eyes of a maid to the hand of her mistress, so our eyes look to the LORD our God until he has mercy upon us" (Psalm 123:2 NKJV). I saw love and affection as He looked at me, and as He left, He said to me, "All is well." "Tell the righteous it will be well with them, for they will enjoy the fruit of their deeds" (Isaiah 3:10 ESV). God's blessing is upon those who will follow His instruction. He rewards those who obey Him with good and happiness. It was refreshing as I watched the Lord Jesus continue His journey with the crowd.

Victoria was in the room, praying and watching me as I sobbed. I was awake yet unconscious to the flesh and deeply in touch with my spirit. Victoria recognized the experience since that was not her first time seeing me in such a trance. After the incident, she asked me what had happened to me, and I told her that the Lord Jesus was in our house, and He told me that He was with me, and all was well. That Lord said He was opening the gate of Canada to me and that He would send me as a missionary, a teacher of His Word, and a pastor to His people. My wife was excited, and she wanted to hear more of what the Lord Jesus said

because we were still praying for a child at that time. I told her that I could only decode peace, love, and joy from His face.

Our obedience to return to Nigeria worked out in a way that was beyond our understanding. After Jesus' visit, Victoria became pregnant. In June 2011, my wife delivered a baby boy, Zion. We chose the name Zion because we received the name while we were in Israel. He was a great joy and a wonderful gift from God. Despite the good news about our baby, I still did not stop praying because I knew God still had more for my family. In July 2012, exactly a year after my son Zion was born, I was given a Visa to study in Canada. A new door had opened for me to go to North America, just as the Lord had declared.

Indeed, Jesus' visitation changed everything in my life, our home, and our ministry. It is true that when God shows up, everything turns around for good. My heart was strengthened, and I was more encouraged in the Lord because our God answered prayer. God is able to do whatever He says He will do. It is beautiful to trust in God. When we trust God, we demonstrate our love for Him.

Arriving Canada: Experience of Spiritual Vitality in Sarnia, Ontario

The news of a young lady who committed suicide in the City of Sarnia, Ontario, where I was living as a student in the year 2012, was one major signpost that the Lord used to draw my attention upon my arrival in Canada. I had arrived in the country three months previously when I heard about the mysterious incident, and it was difficult for me to process. Suicide is the act of purposefully taking one's own life. It is a catastrophic response to stressful life situations.

Suicide is often the end of the path of mental disorders, including depression, anxiety disorders, personality disorders, and bipolar disorders, among others. Part of the reason for my devastation about the suicide news was that, in Nigeria, where I grew up, a good number of citizens lived below the poverty line. The people developed a certain resilience through tough economic times caused by bad governance and leadership. Yet suicide was never seen as an option. They have learned to turn things over to God in prayer in difficult times. Therefore, it was a surprise to me that a young girl committed suicide as a result of depression.

While I was meditating and praying for what the Lord wanted me to do in the new country and city, the Lord spoke to me and said He wanted me to reach out to the youth in the community. God's instructions came to me distinctly, as a still small voice in my heart. As someone familiar with the voice of the Lord, I was sure it was the Lord who was speaking (John 10:27 KJV). But I did not act on this instruction until after a year, as I was still a student at Lambton College at that time. In November 2013, I had the impression that I should approach the Office of the Registrar at Lambton College. The Lord was with me as the staff gave me attention. The staff I met directed me to speak with the director and management staff of the Department of Mental Health of Lambton College. Following a series of meetings with the Department of Mental Health staff and the international office, I was granted permission to hold fellowship and prayer meetings among the students in one of the school's lecture halls. This was an excellent opportunity to share the gospel with the students. The Lord raised some believers among the students I could mentor to serve and support me. Powerful prayer meetings began,

and many students and youths, including some of the college professors, joined the meeting. The students began to grow in their passion for prayer, and their desire for the things of God increased. “Your people will offer themselves freely on the day of your power, in holy garments; from the womb of the morning, the dew of your youth will be yours” (Psalm 110:3 ESV). Many youths and their families joined the prayer fellowship, and the group grew tremendously. The fellowship later evolved into a church known as RCCG Rhema House in the city of Sarnia.

One lesson I learned from my early experience in Sarnia was that God wanted to save and strengthen His people. So, He orchestrated my path from Israel to Nigeria and brought me to Canada in order to fulfill His purpose. I learned never to despise the voice of God, no matter how foolish it might sound and difficult it might appear to my senses. The city of Sarnia experienced God’s visitation as a result of my obedience to God and my response to start a prayer fellowship among the suicide-prone youth. In addition, I have learned that it is always a privilege to be used by God. God is sovereign, and He can accomplish His work without any human effort, yet to have been chosen to carry out His work through me has humbled me. I have seen the transformation that my little act of obedience brought to the city of Sarnia, and I am encouraged always to continue to live a life of submission to God’s instruction. I have purposed to continue to love God and serve His will until the end of time.

The Challenge of Sustaining Spiritual Vitality as a New Immigrant

Like many immigrants, I experienced several hurdles and faced many difficulties during my early years in Canada. Those struggles were severe enough to shatter my faith in God, but God sustained me. I would like to share two of them: the traumatic experience of delayed family reunification and the traumatic experience of spousal open work permits.

Traumatic Experience of Delayed Family Reunification

For the first two years, I was living in Canada without my family. I came alone, hoping to bring them to Canada once I had settled, but things did not work out as planned. It was quite challenging to see my family's immigration application denied three times. Even though it was frustrating, I was determined not to give up, but continued to press in. A pastor's friend told me that since my family had already been denied three times, I should not attempt to try any further because if I tried, immigration Canada might ask me to leave the country. This word pierced my heart like a sword. I knew it was an arrow from the enemy intended to destabilize me. After I heard what the pastor's friend said, I went to my room and cried to God to bring my family. This was one of the loneliest times of my life. I was still in Sarnia and was still overseeing the student and youth fellowship, which was growing and doing well, but I was confronted with my family's immigration delays, which appeared insurmountable. "Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the LORD delivers him out of them all" (Psalm 34:19 NKJV).

One day, after praying, I approached Emily, who was the student advisor at Lambton College. I shared my concern with her and how I needed God's intervention to bring my family. I told her all I had heard about the possibility of having to be sent out of the country if I further applied for my family visit again. When Emily heard this, she spoke softly, "It is not so, not possible!" Then she asked, "Who told you that?" Emily began to encourage me with the Word of God. She told me that God could not have led me this far to deny me now. I was encouraged by the words. "Kind words are like honey - sweet to the soul and healthy for the body" (Proverbs 16:24 NLT). As soon as I got home that day, I asked my wife, who was in Nigeria at that time, to send me all the documents for her immigration application. I worked on the application throughout the night and submitted it online.

After submitting the application, I went into prayer. The prayer took me into a trance, and the Lord took me to the Canadian immigration office in Lagos, Nigeria, where my family application was being processed. I saw a man who supposedly was the one working on the application seated at the table. Suddenly, there was an instruction, like an announcement, telling the man to prepare to go on vacation. Immediately, I saw that man leave his desk and walk out of the office. Not too long after, a woman walked into the office and sat at the table. As I was watching what was going on, suddenly, the woman opened an envelope, and she started working on my family's immigration application. When she was done, she endorsed the paper and gave the file to another officer. At that point, I came out of the trance. I was still lying on the floor, praying in my room, but I knew the

Lord had visited me. That same morning, I received a message from my wife that she had received an email alert from immigration Canada, and since she could not access her immigration account, she asked me to check her status. I immediately logged into the account, and the message was to send her passport to the Canadian immigration office in Lagos because her application was approved. Everything happened that same morning.

While I praised God for this miracle, the Lord told me that His angel was sent to take care of the application. The Lord is God, and there is none like Him. He is the God of all flesh—the God who can do all things. “I am the LORD, the God of all mankind. Is anything too hard for me?” (Jeremiah 32:27 NIV). The Lord opened the door for my family to join me in Canada. He confirmed His Word that He answers the prayers of His people with mighty signs and wonders to the glory of His name. There was a great celebration as my family joined me in Canada, especially among the members of my fellowship who had been praying with me and for my family to come to Canada.

There is no doubt that settling in a new country poses many challenges for new immigrants. However, finding a healthy Christian community has helped me and my family immensely. I thank God for sending godly people to support my family and me during our early days in Canada.

Traumatic Experience of Spousal Open Work Permit.

My family joining me in Canada was a miracle of God after being denied a visitor visa to enter Canada 3 times. While I rejoiced at their arrival, I was once

again, faced with another struggle: obtaining a work permit for Victoria that would enable her to stay in Canada. I was working as a system analyst (a temporary staff member) at Nova Chemical, an oil and gas manufacturing company, and pastoring a new church, Rhema House, which I started in the City of Sarnia, Ontario. However, since I was not yet a Canadian citizen at that time, the company could not issue a supporting document for my wife's work permit application. I was pressured because time was running out on her 3 months visitor visa, and I cried out to God for intervention when it was a week before her permit ran out. I cried because I did not want her to be forced out of the country. Miraculously, God answered my prayer. I got a permanent job as an IT programmer in downtown Toronto, and I was able to apply for a work permit for Victoria a few minutes before her status expired.

Leaving Sarnia with the young church I had started and the loving Christian family I had lived with was tough for me. But the Lord was constantly assuring me that He was aware of my journey. Today, I have seen through God's work in my life that God remains faithful to His word, and God makes all things work together for the good of those who love Him (Romans 8:28).

Personal Process of Achieving Spiritual Formation and Vitality

Reflecting on my experiences and struggles as a new immigrant, I became curious to experience God afresh and determined to find God more intimately. The longing and desire for God have orchestrated my steps to Tyndale University. It was a life-changing moment when I overcame my fear, anxiety, confusion, and

uncertainty and went all the way in search of God. Indeed, a profound experience of God cannot be found at the shallow end. At Tyndale, I was connected with other students who were similarly hungry and desiring relational intimacy with God. I was trained to engage in disciplines such as prayer, Bible reading, worship, discernment, etc. These are the practices that Jesus taught His disciples, and the early church once embraced.

As I continued the MDiv program at Tyndale, I discovered many things. First, I learned that the reason behind the struggles I confronted and the endless questions in my heart was simply God's invitation to be deeply rooted in Him. God was calling me into deeper intimacy with Him, but I was not realizing it. Also, I discovered that many believers talk about going deeper in their spiritual walk, yet they often fail to realize what the statement entails. There is indeed a cry in everyone to go deeper with God and to experience everything He has for them, but whoever desires to go deeper into God must be intentional. I discovered that a genuine walk with God involves a great deal of obedience and trust in God, who is inviting us.

Connection with Spiritual Directors

During my master's program in the spiritual formation track, I was assigned a spiritual director whose role was to walk alongside me in navigating my spiritual journey, especially accompanying me in my discernment of God's purpose at each stage of my life. A trained spiritual director facilitates your exploration of God and fosters self-awareness, discernment, deeper faith

connections, and growth. According to Liz Hoare (2016, 1), a director of pastoral care and tutor for spiritual formation at the University of Oxford, “Spiritual directors make themselves available to directees, offering prayerful support and encouragement to help them listen to and respond to God.” My spiritual director offered me hospitality and a safe space to have a conversation about where God is at work in my life. At first, seeing a spiritual director felt strange to me. I wondered what questions my spiritual director was going to ask me. But Debbie, my spiritual director, did a very good job of explaining what we were there to do. She explained that spiritual direction is not meant to be a question-and-answer session. Of course, occasionally, there could be a need to ask questions, but the spiritual director is meant to help the seekers discern where the Holy Spirit is leading them as He guides them to grow in holiness. Thomas Merton (1987, 17), a Priest and Author, explains that, “A spiritual director helps another to recognize and to follow the inspirations of grace in their lives, in order to arrive at the end to which God is leading them.” Meeting with a spiritual director offered me the ministry of holy listening, which helped me feel known and loved by God.

Toward the end of my master's program in spiritual formation, I felt the Lord was calling me into the ministry of spiritual direction. To become a spiritual director would require me to undertake two intensive internship experiences. The program was organized by Tyndale Spiritual Formation Centre, and after a series of meetings and interviews with the program director, Sharon Bradimore, I was admitted into the program. The internship program was designed to help the students undertake the transformative journey that would develop them into the

person with the heart of Christ, equipped with the skills, habits, and knowledge that facilitate the spiritual direction of ministry. I went through the program, and it was a life-changing experience.

All the courses taught in both my spiritual formation classes and the internships contributed significantly to my formation. However, there are a few topics that have specially impacted my life. When we listen deeply, we do so without judgment or prejudice. Deep listeners listen with the intent to learn and connect — they consider every conversation as a path of discovery. A good spiritual director must be a deep listener. Another lesson learned was “Developing a discerning heart.” I learned that if I am going to be mature as a believer in the world that calls evil good and good evil, I must develop a discerning heart. According to Hebrews 5:14, discernment is the practice of knowing and doing what is genuinely good. Also, the practice of the Awareness Examen is having a sweet fellowship with God’s Spirit through prayer and meditation. The ability to be present with God was the pinnacle of my experience in the Prayer of Examen exercise. The Prayer of Examen is a prayer for greater self-awareness as the Psalmist says, “Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: And see if there be any wicked way in me and lead me in the way everlasting” Psalm 139:23-24. As an ancient practice in the church, the Prayer of Examen invited me to reflect on my past twenty-four hours, walking back through my day hour by hour so that I might see how closely God has been involved in my life. As I continue to practice the Prayer of Examen, I see the transforming power of God to grow me in my skill of discernment. I can also see

why I need to be humbled in the presence of God and remain the loving individual that God has created me to be, because God is love. These insights have greatly strengthened my faith.

Journey of Growth and Maturity

Richard Foster (2018, 2), an American theologian, explains that “superficiality is the curse of our age, and the primary requirement for spiritual growth is not to be advanced in matters of theology but in a simple longing for God.” I agree with Foster, and I believe that real growth can only happen when we continuously press in with God and allow him to stretch us beyond our normal comfort zone. For me, it was my passion to know God more intimately that made me venture into the journey of getting certified as a spiritual director. Getting certified with CCPC Global Inc. was another milestone in my spiritual journey, and I am thankful to God for the grace that He has given me.

As I continued in my practice of spiritual direction along with pastoring my church, the Lord instructed me to return to Tyndale for my DMin program. He told me that many in my church do not understand the ministry of spiritual formation. Also, the Lord told me that the ministry of spiritual formation/discipleship has been one of the essential practices among the Pentecostal-Charismatic Tradition. Nevertheless, this is fast fading among the churches. The Lord told me that adequate knowledge of what spiritual formation means will help restore this lost virtue to the body of Christ. So, to be ready to partner with God in restoring His will to His church, I must be trained and

groomed by God. It was the longing and desire for growth in intimacy that orchestrated my return to Tyndale to participate in the DMin Program in spiritual formation. A profound experience of God cannot be experienced at the shallow end. “Deep calls unto deep at the roar of your waterfalls; all your breakers and your waves have gone over me” (Psalm 42:7 ESV).

The results of my encountering God have been finding peace, purpose, increased faith, and a sense of awareness of God. Through my training at Tyndale, God has built in me the capacity to walk alongside others. I desire all believers, especially my fellow immigrants, to know God intimately. My daily practices of prayer, meditation, and other forms of spiritual practices have built into me an active spiritual life as well as a Christ-centered life. I am filled with the burden of walking alongside people to help them experience God’s love for them. Through my training in spiritual direction, God has built in me the capacity to walk alongside others and help them know what spiritual formation ministry is all about. Through this training, I hope to show the leaders of various Christian denominations and traditions how to embrace it in their organizations, as well as how to incorporate it back into their organizations. I look forward to the future as I see God actively working to build His church and restore His glory upon it once again. It is my earnest prayer to continue to grow in my knowledge of Him, and as I know and continuously yield to Him, His Presence and Power become more real in my life.

Summary of My Spiritual Autobiography

This chapter describes my spiritual journey and experiences with God, which became the central message of my life and ministry. *The Joy of Being Known by God* is a revelation of God's love and mercy that nurtured and sustained my life from childhood to adulthood. The spiritual autobiography highlights various moments in my existence, including my encounters and testimonies, and the multiple roles they have played and are still playing in my life. The Lord's continued supply of strength kept me out of moments of spiritual decline.

I am grateful to God for the gift of people He surrounded my life with from childhood to adulthood. My formation could not have been without the vessels God used from childhood to the present. Coming to Tyndale Seminary has been transformative. Now, it is clearer why the Lord led me to Tyndale. Studying spiritual formation has impacted my life and enhanced my spiritual vitality.

CHAPTER 3

**A MODEL OF SPIRITUAL FORMATION: REDISCOVERING
SPIRITUAL PRACTICES TO ENHANCE THE SPIRITUAL VITALITY
OF AFRICAN IMMIGRANT BELIEVERS IN CANADA**

*Thus says the LORD: “Stand by the roads, and look, and
ask for the ancient paths, where the good way is; and
walk in it and find rest for your souls” (Jeremiah 6:16)*

Introduction

Spiritual vitality is a crucial aspect of the Christian life, and its role in living a life pleasing to God cannot be overemphasized. Apostle Paul, in his letter to the Corinthians church, says, “Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim that anything comes from us, but our competence comes from God.” (2 Corinthians 3:5). The word “competence” in Greek is *ικανότης* (*hikanotés*), and interpreted in English to mean "vitality," "adequacy," "sufficiency," "ability," "power," and "fitness." According to Paul, only in Christ does a believer have spiritual vitality, ability, power, fitness, and adequacy to live a pleasing life to God. Only by yielding to the Holy Spirit can we remain spiritually vibrant.

From my experience as a pastor and an immigrant in Canada, whose migration-related challenges have tested my spiritual resilience, I see many people, particularly immigrants, declining in their spiritual vitality daily as they try to live by their own strength. Losing strength under life challenges and pressure indicates that our vitality and power are small. Proverbs 24:10 says, "If you falter in a time of trouble, how small is your strength?" God wants His children to constantly lean on Him and draw their strength to live as shining lights for Him in the world. Our sufficiency flows from Him as He is our source.

This Model Chapter examines some factors contributing to the decline of spiritual vitality among believers, specifically among African immigrants with a Pentecostal-Charismatic framework. The chapter recounts how the spiritual practices of discernment, prayer, and scripture helped me discern God's will for my seminary education at Tyndale despite the difficulty on my path. The chapter further explores the model of spiritual formation and examines the role of spiritual practices in facilitating this transformation of believers. Through the help of the Holy Spirit, as we yield to His leading, believers can remain spiritually vibrant in their devotion to God even in the face of the world's pressures.

Factors Causing the Decline of Spiritual Vitality among African Immigrants

The Bible offers numerous warnings about the dangers of spiritual decline, emphasizing the importance of staying holy, watchful, and devoted to God. Apostle Paul warned Timothy about a difficult time to come, saying, "People will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their

parents, ungrateful, unholy...” (2 Timothy 3:1-2). These warnings remain very applicable today as spiritual fervency is gradually fading among the people of God. For instance, there are some of the immigrants in my church who do not attend church services again; although some are legitimately constrained by socio-economic factors working extra shifts in order to meet their needs, some deliberately choose to boycott church activities because they need to take more shifts to earn more money, not minding if such a discussion affects their spiritual wellbeing or not. I analyze below some of the factors that contribute to the decline in spiritual vitality among believers, particularly among some of the new immigrants in my church. These include a lack of consecration, the rise of consumerism, shallowness among Christ's followers, and secularization.

Lack of Genuine Consecration

I define consecration as separating oneself from unclean things, especially anything that would contaminate one's relationship with a perfect God. In Romans 12:1, Paul writes, “Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship.” In a biblical context, to consecrate is to set apart someone or something for God's service, marking it as sacred. Having pastored youth and young adult churches for over two decades, one area of weakness I often see among some of the youth and young adults I pastor is the struggle to live a consecrated life. For instance, some of the international students I support confessed that they struggle with living free from constant immoral

thoughts and actions. Peter, a young brother who migrated from Ghana, told me about his struggle with pornography and illicit sexual behavior despite being married. Some of them had concluded that it is the grace of God that saves, and that God has forgiven their past sins and will continue to forgive future sins. In contrast, I agree that it is only God's grace that saves humanity and can bring us into our adoption as God's children. Apostle Paul writes, "For it is by grace you have been saved through faith, and this not from yourselves; it is the gift of God, not by works, so that no one can boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9). However, God's Grace is not a license to sin. Here are Paul's writings on this subject in Romans 6:15, "What then? Shall we sin because we are not under the law but under grace? By no means!" In Romans 6:1-2, Paul writes, "What then shall we say? Shall we continue in sin so that grace may increase? Certainly not! How can we who died to sin live in it any longer?" Paul declares that we must be free from sin and never live as slaves to sin (Romans 6:7, 18).

Keith Matthews (2010, 92), a Professor of Spiritual Formation and Contemporary Culture at Azusa Pacific University's Graduate School of Theology, writes, "The grace that saves us becomes the grace that teaches us, said Paul in his letter to Titus. Grace empowers effort! Thus, grace in very real terms becomes the daily fuel for living a holy, transformed life, yet not without our effort." Using the word "effort," Matthews (2010, 92) writes, "Jesus Himself used a word that embodies the call to effort or intentionality: *repentance (metanoia)*." Repentance is not emotion – feeling remorse during the conversion experience, which still does not affect the old life. Matthews (2010) claims, "Repentance is a

realization that what God wants from you and what you want from God are not going to be achieved by doing the same old thing.” So, we trust in the grace that saves us, teaches us God’s way, and empowers us to live for Him.

To be spiritually vital and mature after a conversion experience, believers must undergo inner transformation. Apostle Peter writes,

For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith virtue; and to virtue, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. For if you possess these qualities and continue to grow in them, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Peter 1:5-8).

Intentional and purposeful nurturing of believers' spiritual lives often results in a vital faith. Helland (2017, 18) states that, “Biblical piety is first and foremost characterized by inward devotion to the Savior, Jesus Christ. It entails daily repentance under the cross of Christ and renewed dedication to the will of Christ.” For me, supporting young immigrants and students in my church and the Waterloo region, prayerfully, patiently, and without condemnation, as they navigate issues related to purity and devotion to God, is a joy. I walk with them in love and tenderness and see many of them becoming spiritually strong in their daily walk with God.

A life of spiritual vitality requires a life of holiness. Having walked with a good number of immigrant youths in Canada, it is disturbing that many of them do not believe that a life of integrity and piety is possible. Some youths believe that the time they are away from parental supervision gives them the freedom to

live as they please. I am grateful to God for being used in some ways to support these young immigrants in understanding what purity is and how engaging in spiritual practices can help them live their lives with God's awareness. According to Helland (2017, 5), what fuels the devout life is an ardent practice of dedication and commitment to loving God and people through Christ from the heart.

According to Francis de Sales (1972, 4), Bishop of Geneva in the first quarter of the seventeenth century, and John, "True devotion is the love of God in its highest form. It is when charity reaches that point of perfection wherein it not only causes us to do good but to do it earnestly, frequently, and readily." For me, supporting young immigrants and students in my church and the Waterloo region as they navigate issues related to purity and devotion to God is a joy. I walk with them in love and tenderness, and I see many of them becoming spiritually strong in their daily walk with God.

Consumerism

Consumerism is the relentless pursuit of material possessions, and the constant desire for more is one of the factors contributing to the decline of believers' spiritual vitality. This has become a defining characteristic of modern society. The Bible does not use the term "consumerism," but it addresses a similar attitude. Jesus warned in Luke 12:15, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions." Based on my experience with people, especially immigrants, the relentless pursuit of money remains one of the reasons why many lost their lives of devotion to God. For

instance, some immigrants who used to be committed to God in their country lost their devotion and dedication once they get to Canada. Some of these young immigrants tell me that they came to Canada to earn money, not to do church. While I agree that they should work hard and live comfortably, I often encourage them that God gives us the power to create wealth (Deuteronomy 8:18). God is a good and loving Father who loves to provide and prosper His children. However, He does not want His children to be consumed by what He provides.

Paul writes in 1 Timothy 6:10, “For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have strayed from the faith and pierced themselves with many sorrows. God truly wants His children to prosper and has perfectly provisioned the world for humans to thrive. The book of 1 Chronicles 29:11–12 states, “Everything in heaven and earth is Yours, O LORD. Wealth and honor come from You; You are the ruler of all things. In Your hands are strength and power to exalt and give strength to all.” Without a doubt, wealth, strength, and power belong to God. It is God who gives us the power to make wealth. So we must create time to nurture our relationship with God and live to serve His will.

Today, the worship of the god of wealth is increasingly infiltrating churches. Such beliefs continue to influence lifestyles that were once foreign to the kingdom. Unfortunately, this does not come without a price as these churches are filled with self-centered congregations, lovers of riches and pleasure rather than lovers of God, and their leaders are full of falsehood, dishonesty, arrogance,

and lasciviousness. The cost of hosting the God of Mammon is a loss of personal happiness and satisfaction, as Tim Kasser (2002, 14), an Associate Professor of Psychology at Knox College, Illinois, notes that “there is an inverse link between materialistic values and personal happiness and fulfillment.” Jesus said in Luke 12:15, ‘And he said unto them, take heed, and keep yourselves from all covetousness: for a man's life consisted not in the abundance of the things which he possesses.’ Cimino Richard, a Professor in Sociology of Religion, and Don Lattin, a Journalist and Author, claim that “The consumerism gospel leads people to shop around for a church, much like they would for a car (Cimino and Don 2002, 10), This explains many of our present experiences in church. For instance, the people who used to attend one church are no longer congregants; they are customers. People attend church today not simply to know God but to satisfy their desires. I believe the church must be sensitive to human needs and show people the love of Christ; nonetheless, the church’s primary responsibility is to help God’s people develop a relationship with Christ and follow to advance His cause on earth (Matthew 10:38).

Spiritual Shallowness

Another factor causing the decline of spiritual vitality among believers is spiritual shallowness. To be a shallow Christian means such a Christian is not deep in scriptural knowledge or fervent in Christian doctrines. A shallow Christian is superficial and can only produce spiritual lethargy. Some of the signs of shallowness include poverty of knowledge of the scriptures, ceremonial

attendance at church, materialism, a lack of depth, struggles in prayer, and a constant state of living in worry, anxiety, mumbling, grumbling, unforgiveness, or hatred towards anyone. Becoming more spiritual and less shallow requires a personal journey of self-reflection, self-awareness, and a willingness to change. One common discovery among many African immigrants is the phenomenon known as the “prayer contractor” – a practice of assigning one's prayer responsibilities to someone else, such as a spiritual mentor, prophet, or pastor. There is nothing wrong with having one's mentor or pastor offer support in prayer; however, surrendering the responsibility of one's time with God to someone else is destructive. No one should take the place of God in one's life. Some new immigrants from Africa who join my church cannot do without calling their prophets or prophetesses to pray or see a vision for them. Some reasons for these are that they are weak and lack confidence in their relationship with God.

According to Hosea 4:6, one reason for the widespread abuse and manipulation of some members of the congregation in some churches is their lack of grounding in the knowledge of God. Not having a personal encounter with God is detrimental to one's life. According to Matthew Henry's Concise Commentary (2024) on Colossians 2:1-7, “The soul prospers when a believer has a clear knowledge of the truth as it is in Jesus and does not only believe with the heart but is ready, when called, to confess with the mouth. Knowledge and faith make a soul rich.” Every believer must continue to grow in their knowledge of God and remain deeply rooted in faith. Knowledge of Scripture is an antidote to spiritual shallowness and feebleness.

Paul writes in Ephesians 3:17-19,

So that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. Then you, being rooted and grounded in love, will have power, together with all the saints, to comprehend the length and width and height and depth of the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

According to Ellicott's Commentary for English Readers (1905a), the expression “rooted and grounded” (i.e., founded) contains the same mixture of metaphor as in 1 Corinthians 3:9, of the tree and the building— a mixture so natural as to pass into common usage. (Comp. Colossians 2:7, “rooted and being built up in Him”). The idea implied in “rooted” is of the striking down deeper and spreading wider into the soil; in “founded” of the firm basis on which believers rest. As a tree grows down its roots deep in the earth, believers’ faith should be strengthened in the doctrine of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ in all things. Being rooted in Christ should be most important to every believer because many are deviating from the right path—the path of God's Kingdom every day. The authentic Christian's roots are Christ, not another source, so believers are to be “built up” in Christ and completely rely upon the Savior. According to Paul, believers must know that spiritual grounding and nourishment are only found in Christ (Colossians 2:6-8).

Secularization

Secularization refers to the steady shift in which people's faith or religion no longer dominant in steering the social order, especially the human values system. The church's beliefs and practices are systematically challenged in every

aspect: the word, music, culture, and lifestyles. One of the major drivers of secularization has been the rise of science and technology, which are also good tools for propagating the gospel, but the church must find a way to take advantage of them and not be ruined by them. John Grayston (2002, 101), an Author and Director of Bible Ministries for Scripture Union, identified some areas of decline in the church due to secularization, says,

There are some questions about how far reading patterns have changed in society. A recent piece of research undertaken by the Publishers Association suggests that people read as much as ever, but it also notes that reading declines during secondary school and only resumes in middle or later life, especially in males. For many people, reading is limited to technical material associated with their job, a quick glance at their newspaper, and a blockbuster when they go on holiday. If reading is in decline, it is hardly surprising that personal Bible reading is also in decline. Of the latter, there seems little doubt. All the Bible reading agencies report a decline in the sales of notes. Independent surveys indicate that relatively few churchgoers read the Bible from one week to the next.

For Grayston, the decline is growing among evangelicals, but I believe it is a concern among the global church.

The rate at which secularization has invaded the church is terrifying. For instance, I intentionally educate the members of my music department on the importance of songs and how songs enhance our intimacy with God. I encourage them to include scripture-based songs, such as hymns, in their weekly worship services. I constantly encourage my members to cultivate a relationship with the Holy Spirit because deepening our relationship with God is a journey that requires intentionality, devotion, and a sincere desire to draw closer to Him. As we engage in spiritual practices such as prayer, scripture, discernment, and worship

personally and communally, we are transformed into our authentic image and identity in Christ (2 Corinthians 3:18).

How Spiritual Practice of Prayer, Scripture and Discernment Helped Me to Discover God's Will for My Seminary Education Despite All Obstacles

Learning to navigate our life journey through the Holy Spirit is essential for sustaining spiritual vitality as believers. Recalling my past experiences, one of the challenges I faced as an immigrant in Canada was the difficulty I encountered on the path to my seminary education. My first nine years in Canada were spent studying, working as a systems engineer, and serving as a church planter. I love the Lord, and it was a remarkable experience to see all He has helped me to do with Him until I began to sense the promptings from the Holy Spirit to create time to invest in my spiritual life. According to Bible Hub (2025a), “spiritual investment” typically refers to the commitment of one's time, resources, and energy toward activities and practices that nurture and enhance one's spiritual life and relationship with God. Even though I was a pastor at the time and had been in ministry for over a decade, I sensed a strong need to pursue theological education that would refresh my understanding of God, but I found it challenging. The decision was challenging because, being an IT manager, my employer found it difficult to have me work remotely for a two-day-per-week request I made in order to run my master's program at Tyndale University. Additionally, although I knew it was the Lord calling me to invest in my spiritual life, I was reluctant to take the step, fearing the financial implications that such a decision would have on

my young family. However, the prompt to nurture my spiritual life through spiritual training persisted for two years despite my indecision.

One thing I cannot deny that happened to me at the time was an intense hunger for knowledge of God. There was an apparent lack of in-depth knowledge of God that my soul yearned for. I sensed that there was much more that God was calling me to experience in Him than just being a pastor. In 2019, the Lord spoke to me vividly, urging me to register for training and mentoring at Tyndale. This instruction came with a deep sense that I could no longer hide, especially from my wife, Victoria. As someone who loves the Lord and is aware of His instruction, Victoria was not surprised to hear me sharing it with her, but her concern was how God would want us to go about it. My wife asked me if I wanted to run the program as a part-time or a full-time student, and if it were to be full-time, how would I cope with the financial and other responsibilities? My straightforward answer to her was that it would be part-time, although I had not yet fully understood God's plan concerning the program. I explained to her that I would first discuss the requested two days with my director.

The following day, I approached Kate, the organization's Chief Executive Officer, and discussed my plan with her. Kate was happy with my plan and was willing to support me, especially after I promised I could work remotely and that there would be no issues. However, things changed after I discussed this with my direct boss, Philip, the Finance Director. He objected to my request, and during the management meeting, Mr. Philip insisted that the organization could not afford to

have its IT manager physically present in the office three days a week. The Chief Executive Officer then asked me what I would like to do. It was like saying, 'Choose between your job and your seminary plans.' I told her I would get back to her after discussing it with my family. Returning home, Victoria saw my face and sensed something had happened. I told her what had happened – how my plan for seminary education had been refuted. Both of us decided to spend some time in prayer to discern God's mind concerning the issues.

After the prayer, Victoria said, "I am convinced that you should go to Tyndale, and the Lord will take care of us." I have no struggle to agree with her because I received a word from God in Isaiah 58:11, "The LORD will guide you always; he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land and strengthen your frame. You will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail." After the prayer, the Lord came to me in a dream and showed me an inspiring scene of being in a school environment. After the scene, I saw myself teaching a large crowd about restoring the church's lost virtues. In the same vision, the Lord said He is visiting His church, and His people will know Him intimately. To my surprise, the phrase eventually became my focus of study at Tyndale: "spiritual formation," a transformative action of the Holy Spirit that results in the spiritual vitality of a believer. After the prayer session and waiting on God, it was clear to me that the Lord wanted me to pursue my seminary education. The following day, I approached the chief executive director of my organization and thanked her for her support; I told her that I had decided to resume at Tyndale with my family's support.

I resumed my studies at Tyndale Seminary in September 2019. The first semester was challenging, as I had to live without income, yet I was filled with joy because I had given my yes to the Lord. I trusted the Lord to support me supernaturally, and He did not let me down. One of the things that God did was that, after eight months of my return to the seminary, things began to change positively around me. The Lord was blessing the members of my church, and the people started to share diverse testimonies, including new jobs, increased business opportunities, higher incomes, and several answered prayers. Above all, my members began to grow in their knowledge of God's Word and became fervent in their prayer. There was a positive change in the members' lives as they grew in their understanding of God, just as I increased my spiritual capacity and vitality through the Holy Spirit. Gradually, the members began to support me financially as I continued my education. My testimony of God is that He has always shown Himself to be alive. When we draw near God, He draws near to us (James 4:8, Jeremiah 29:12-14). I sought the Lord in prayer and waited for His strength, and God directed me. Obedient faith leads to spiritual vitality, and a life surrendered to God's will yields its rewards. God proved Himself faithful in my life, and to this day, I have never regretted taking a step toward personal spiritual development by attending Tyndale University.

Spiritual Formation and Discipleship in Spiritual Vitality

The term "disciple" represents the Koine Greek word *mathētēs* (μαθητής), which means one who engages in learning through instruction from another or in

religious contexts such as the Bible. While the word discipleship does not appear in the New Testament, the concept is indicated through Jesus' instruction regarding the Great Commission—to make disciples (Matthew 28:16-20).

According to Wilkins (2010, 41), in the first century, the cultural understanding of a disciple was more than just a learner; the disciple was also a “follower.”

Discipleship is a return to the fundamentals of what it means to be a follower of Christ. All the followers of Jesus are referred to as disciples. According to Wilkins (2010, 18), the qualifications for true disciples include belief in Jesus as Messiah (John 2:11, 6:68–69), commitment to identifying with Him through baptism, obedience, and submission to His teachings and Lordship (Matt 19:23–30, Luke 14:25–33). Learning to be a disciple is the foundation of our understanding of discipleship. According to Bill Hull (2006, 18), an Author and Speaker, “the disciples of Jesus Christ fulfilled their calling through discipleship.”

I define Spiritual Formation as “the transformative action of the Holy Spirit resulting in the spiritual vitality of a believer, which often leads to the transformation of others” (Boluwaduro 2025). This transformative action of the Holy Spirit is a process through which believers grow in their spiritual lives. It entails an intentional pursuit of spiritual maturity through practices and disciplines that foster a deeper relationship with God. 2 Peter 1:4-7 spells this out, “Now since you have become partakers of the divine nature,” The writer says, “Applying all diligence, in your faith, supplies moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge; and in your knowledge, self-control, and in your self-control, perseverance; and in your perseverance, godliness; and in your

godliness, brotherly kindness, and in your brotherly kindness, love.” Verses 8-9 tell us the outcome of this: “For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But whoever does not have them is nearsighted and blind, forgetting that they have been cleansed from their past sins.” According to this passage, diligence and persistence in spiritual disciplines are key components of the Christian life, encompassing scripture study, worship, discernment, and prayer, among other practices. Spiritual formation is a pathway to spiritual vitality. It helps believers grow in character and faith, aligning their inner life and outward actions with God.

Spiritual formation is rooted in the biblical call to discipleship and sanctification, where believers are nurtured to grow holiness and reflect Christ's image. Hull (2006, 35) explains that Spiritual formation is the sanctification or transformation that happens during the process of intentional discipleship. The focus of spiritual formation is the Holy Spirit, who guides the ongoing journey towards union with God. Similarly, the essence of spiritual formation is hearing God in His Word, growing in the grace and knowledge of Jesus, and bearing lasting fruit. According to Paul, through spiritual formation, the old nature is being taken off, and the inner being is transformed into the image of Christ (Col 3:9-10). This holistic process enlightens the mind, shapes behaviour, and transforms the inner being into the image of Christ. This holistic process enlightens the mind, shapes behaviour, and transforms the inner being into the image of Christ. According to Paul, the old nature is being taken off, and the inner

being is transformed into the image of Christ (Col 3:9-10). Hence, holistic discipleship is what produces the real fruit of the Spirit. According to Stephen Clark (2004, 39), a Philosopher and Scripture scholar, the fruit of the Spirit should be produced by one who is truly filled with the Spirit and in a deep relationship with Christ.

Willard (2014a, 15) says, “One of the reasons many people struggle to live a Christ-like life today is the lack of genuine formational experiences.” Paul writes, “My dear children for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is *formed* in you, how I wish I could be with you now” (Galatians 4:19). According to this passage, Paul voices his longing to see spiritual formation occur in the lives of the Galatian disciples. His desire was that the discipleship of the early Christian communities in Galatia would yield changed lives and convey evidence that transformation was happening. According to Paul, through spiritual formation, the old nature is being taken off, and the inner being is transformed into the image of Christ (Col 3:9-10).

According to Willard (2020, 88), “Spiritual formation is a process, not an outcome. There is an outcome, but formation itself is a process, that of taking on a certain character for your whole life.” In the Christian sense, spiritual formation is the process of transformation that occurs in the disciple. Such transformation involves emotional and spiritual maturity. According to Willard (2020, 91), “You cannot experience spiritual formation— transformation into the likeness of Christ— without being a disciple of Christ.” This is how transformation takes place in a believer’s life.

The Model: The Tree (Vine and Branches)

The model of spiritual formation focuses on engaging in a relationship with Jesus, which in turn produces fruit. Figures 1a and 1b emphasize that an individual and a congregation with strong spiritual vitality, such as those who continually engage in formative spiritual disciplines, are like a tree firmly rooted by streams of water (Psalm 1:3). They draw strength and sustenance from God. Likewise, the withered part of Figure 1a shows no connection with the Vine, and it withered. The metaphor in John 15:5, 7 says that the abiding of the branches with the Vine is the only way the branches can flourish. Believers abide in the Vine through practices such as Scripture, worship, discernment, and prayer — the practices known as spiritual disciplines. Through the spiritual disciplines, the vine continues to receive from the Vine the spiritual resources needed for its spiritual vitality. In more poetic terms, according to Donald Whitney (2014, 19), a Professor of Biblical spirituality and Associate Dean at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, “We place ourselves in the paths of God’s grace.” As a branch without connection with the vine is withered — dried up, so a soul unconnected with Christ. Those who are separate from Christ can bear no fruit.

Our connectedness with Christ is the key to the outpouring of the Spirit. And as believers remain and abide in the Vine (Son), they grow in their intimacy with the Son. When believers yield themselves as vessels unto God and become part of His mission on earth, God is glorified. Our doing comes from our being (dwelling). This is what brings transformation. This is what spiritual formation is all about. As believers abide in Christ through prayer and scripture, they are

transformed and grow in their intimacy with Him. This is what spiritual formation is about. Additionally, our participation in the kingdom stems from our belonging to Christ. Acts 17:28 reads, “For in him we live and move and have our being...” Our life is in God, and so is our vitality and strength to live a life pleasing to Him.

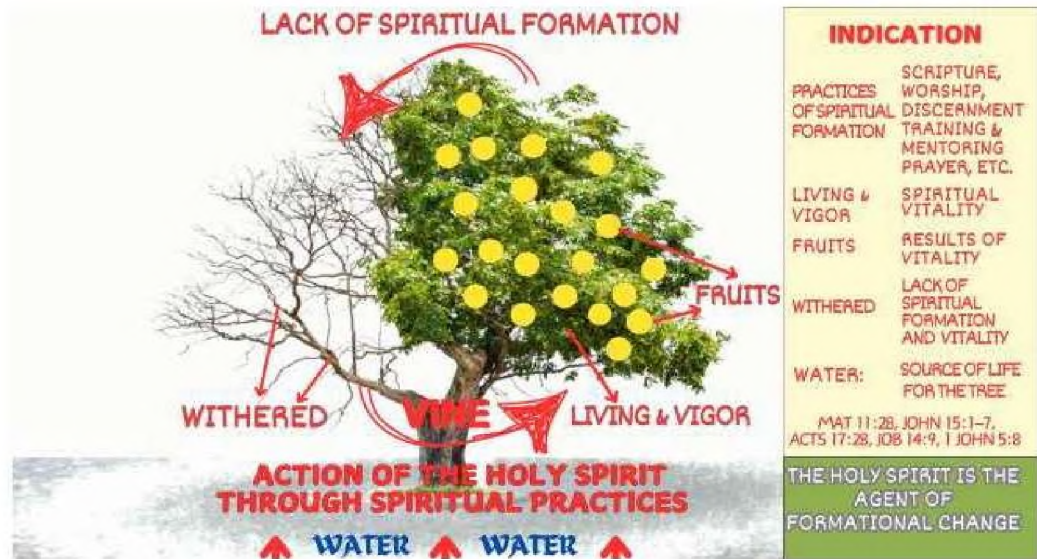


Figure 1a. The Pathways of Transformation



Figure 1b. The Spirituality of Spiritual Formation and Vitality

Spiritual Practices for Spiritual Vitality

Spiritual practices are the actions believers undertake in response to the workings of the Holy Spirit within them, which ultimately foster growth and deepen their intimacy with God. Discussing the importance of regular spiritual practices, Whitney (2014, 11) states that “The Spiritual Disciplines are those practices found in Scripture that promote spiritual growth and vitality among believers in the gospel of Jesus Christ.” Spiritual formation occurs through the agency of the Holy Spirit, who is the agent of formational change. It is also worth noting that the Holy Spirit works through spiritual practices to facilitate spiritual transformation. There are various spiritual practices revealed in scripture, and each one helps facilitate spiritual transformation and vitality in believers. As shown in Figures 1a and 1b, four spiritual practices have been selected for discussion in this model: scriptural reading, worship, discernment, training and mentoring, and prayer.

It is essential to note that spiritual practices are most effective in a community, and as believers come together, we create an environment that fosters spiritual growth, vitality, and accountability. The community offers a vital platform where individuals can share their insights and exchange experiences. Gordon Fee, an American Canadian Christian theologian (1996, 66), states that, “God is not just saving individuals and preparing them for heaven; rather, He is creating a people among whom He can live, and who, in their life together, will reproduce God’s life and character.” We cherish community in my ministry, and

knowing that communal life fosters an environment of mutual learning and development, we create a safe space for expression for everyone.

Scriptural Reading

Spiritual Formation entails making time for Bible reading, study, and meditation. The Word of God is the believer's spiritual food and spiritual sword. Jesus was deeply familiar with the Scriptures, which equipped Him to do the Father's will. While being tempted by the devil, Jesus quoted a passage from the Old Testament. Jesus did not try to reason with Satan but immediately took out His spiritual sword. He used God's word to defeat His enemy. In Matthew 4:4, Jesus answered the devil, "It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" Feeding on the Word of God helps believers to be rooted in Christ and to draw upon the resources of the Spirit so that it is possible to discern God's responsibility and to understand one's own. Additionally, by feeding on the Word, we receive the grace to know and obey when we are convicted of our failures. For spiritual formation to occur, believers must live by the Word – this entails reading, studying, and meditating on God's Word. "I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you" (Psalm 119:11).

In my church, the bible reading is done through personal devotions, small group studies, or corporate worship services that include Scripture reading. Reflective study is also essential. It can be done using resources such as Bible study guides, commentaries, and organizing discussion questions that can help

both individuals and groups learn the deeper meaning of the Bible text. A Bible reading and study plan requires discipline, intentionality, and the conscious development of one's spiritual appetite for the "daily bread" of God's Word. When this is done individually or in groups, it enhances believers' spiritual vitality.

Worship

Participating consciously and actively in acts of admiration towards God is worship. It is experienced through the liturgy during a church service, and it is also practiced in solitude during times of devotion, which acknowledges the holiness, grace, and sovereignty of God. It is an enduring practice for believers. God's children are to worship and serve Him only (Deut. 6:16; Luke 4:8). Practicing and participating in worship for a Christian disciple is an act of sacrifice. Moreover, worship is not simply the making of the sacrifice but the becoming of the sacrifice (Romans 12:1). "For I will pour out water on the thirsty land and streams on the dry ground; I will pour out My Spirit on your offspring and My blessing on your descendants" (Isaiah 44:3). The early disciples lay bare their souls on the altar of Heaven with the expectation that the fire of the Holy Spirit will fall upon them, refining them as a living sacrifice (Acts 2:1-4; Acts 2:16). Worship is an organized process that draws a worshipper in and uses their senses and imagination to draw them into a greater awareness of God's presence and power. By focusing attention on the object of adoration, worship reshapes and transforms the soul's affections.

Communal worship in my church, like in other Pentecostal-Charismatic churches, often includes accompanying practices such as raised hands, kneeling, or even dancing, which are embodied expressions of worship that reflect the posture of the heart toward God. Where there is unified corporate participation in such expressions, the expectation of divine encounter increases as the company of disciples goes together to the place of God's manifest presence. Individual attachments are shaped by this corporate experience, enabling the person to continue making sacrifices outside of corporate gatherings. Worship is one way that Christians demonstrate their affection for God and a means to establish a closer, more personal relationship with Him. As believers draw near to God in worship, they experience His strength and spiritual vitality in their lives.

The Practice of Discernment

Amidst the struggles and challenges many believers face today, the need for biblical discernment, alongside other spiritual practices, is crucial for maintaining the spiritual vitality of believers. But how do we secure God's mind concerning a thing, and why is the practice of spiritual discernment so vital today? "Discernment" refers to the ability to perceive accurately or judge well. According to American authors and pastors Morris and Charles (2012, 10), "Discernment creates the capacity to see. It distinguishes the real from the phony, the true from the false, the good from the evil, and the path toward God from the path away from God. Spiritual discernment sees reality from God's perspective." In 1 Thessalonians 5:21, Paul writes, "But test everything; hold fast what is

good.” The Greek word here is “dokimazó,” which implies “to test, by implication, to approve.” Discernment is a spiritual exercise rather than an intellectual exercise that protects believers from deception and enables them to live in faithfulness to God’s truth.

Spiritual Vitality Results in Making the Right Choice

Our world is filled with schemes and deceptions, and almost every time, people fall into these schemes and succumb to the enemy's trickery and lies. Jesus was tested in the Wilderness by the devil (Matthew 4:1-11). He was confronted with a choice to make a wrong decision, like any other human being. During His temptation in the wilderness, the devil asked Jesus to turn the stone into bread and sin against God, but Jesus did not respond to the bid of the enemy. Instead, He responded to the devil by saying that God had said, “Man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord” (Deuteronomy 8:3). He had the option to sin, but He did not. As a pastor working with many young people and young adults, I am concerned about the rate at which young people are making costly mistakes that could significantly impact their lives. Over a few months, there was a case of an international student in the Waterloo Region who became mentally unstable due to an unhealthy relationship and was expelled from school because he could not continue his studies. Making choices is an indispensable part of living. Proverbs 4:20-22 says, “My son, pay attention to my words; incline your ear to my sayings. Do not lose sight of them; keep them within your heart. For they are life to those who find them and health to the whole

body." Right choices guarantee life and spiritual vitality. It is time to encourage every believer, especially young people, to embrace discernment for their spiritual vitality.

The Source and Practice of Discernment

The Bible guides how to practice discernment effectively. The paragraph below provides details on the source and offers guidance on engaging in the practice of discernment for spiritual vitality. Learning the details will enhance our understanding of discernment and strengthen our spiritual vitality, enabling us to navigate life's complexities with wisdom and understanding.

First, the Bible establishes that the source of discernment is God's word. Psalm 119:105 writes, "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path." So, true discernment is a result of being filled with God's Word. Hebrews 4:12 states, "For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any double-edged sword. It pierces even to the dividing of soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and intentions of the heart." Regular study and meditation on Scripture equip believers to recognize truth and reject falsehood. Jesus cautioned us about false teachers (Matthew 7:15, NASB). False teachers are not always openly dishonest, as they often disguise their deception in biblical language and half-truths. That is why we need discernment—so that we will not be "tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes" (Ephesians 4:14, NASB). As we grow up in Christ and mature in His word, we will also increase in discernment.

Additionally, since the source of discernment is God's word, the foundation of discernment is the wisdom that comes from Him. Believers should constantly ask God for discernment. "If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him" (James 1:5). Prayer is essential in seeking divine wisdom, as it aligns the believer's heart with God's will and opens the mind to understanding. That was what Solomon did when he became Israel's king. God appeared to him in a dream and said, "Ask what I shall give you" (1 Kings 3:5). Being a new king, Solomon did not ask for political power, conquest in battle, fame, or unending success. Instead, he asked for the most valuable thing he knew of—discernment (1 Kings 3:7–9).

The Holy Spirit plays a crucial role in guiding believers into all truth. While Scripture is the foundation of discernment, Christians are guided by the Holy Spirit to respond to Scripture effectively. Jesus says in John 16:13 (NASB), "But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own, but whatever He hears, He will speak, and He will disclose to you what is to come." The Holy Spirit teaches us from Scripture, convicts us of sin, and guides us to righteousness. The leading of the Holy Spirit will never be contrary to God's revealed Word.

Growing in the Practice of Discernment

According to Thurman Howard (2006, 45), an American author and theologian, "Spiritual disciplines are meant to 'ready' the mind, the emotions, the spirit." To heighten one's experience of the practice of discernment, deliberate

action to grow one capacity is essential. Thurman claims that, “All spiritual disciplines tutor our spiritual discernment so that both the familiar and the strange are understood in light of the desires of God’s heart” (Thurman and Luther 2006, 32). The term Growth means development in the life of an organism – the process of developing or increasing in size. According to Thurman, “It means change manifests in structure” (Thurman and Luther 2006, 51). Many adults continue to develop physically and intellectually, but they have remained babies in what they expect of life. Nevertheless, for believers, God’s instruction is to grow not only in grace but also in the knowledge and experience of God, “But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and forever” (2 Peter 3:18). The call to call to grow in God’s knowledge is a must for all Christians for accurate discernment.

One area of growth and tutoring is the importance of understanding the place of prayer and the Word in discernment. Thurman (1999) states that, “Prayer at its best is revealed when a man enjoys God and prays out of sheer love of Him.” True prayer is about a relationship. It is a 2-way communication. This is not prayer as a ritual. This prayer is borne out of love for God and His will. Prayer is not only the participation in communication with God in the encounter of religious experience, but it is also the “readying” of the spirit for such communication. It is the total process of quieting down and, to that extent, must not be separated from meditation. As important as prayer itself is the “readying of the spirit for the experience” (Thurman and Luther 2006, 57). Prayer at its best is when the soul enjoys God and prays out of sheer love for him.

Discipline of commitment to God is another area in which capacity can be built as we grow in discernment. According to Thurman, "Commitment means that someone can yield the nerve center of his consent to a purpose or cause, a movement or an ideal, which may be more important to him than whether he lives or dies" (Thurman and Luther 2006, 46). So, in commitment, there is a "yielding" and a "giving oneself to." More so, commitment is related to "surrender. According to Thurman and Luther (2006, 48), "Whatever stands in the way of our full surrender, we must search it out and remove it." Thurman believes that living a spiritually disciplined life and constantly yielding to the Holy Spirit yields increased capacity and enhanced spiritual vitality to walk with God.

Discernment takes place in both personal and communal settings.

According to Morris and Charles (2012, 57),

For the individual, discernment is personal but never private; it is not done in isolation. Even though the leadings of the Spirit may be known only to the individual, the presence of the community and the witness of long-standing Christian traditions will inevitably come into play. We do not engage in the discernment process by accident, or on a whim, or by a quirk of circumstance. We are involved in spiritual discernment because we choose to be and because we are part of a religious community that knows and experiences God.

The practice of discernment, which includes prayer, bible study, and meditation, is best engaged within the community of believers. Acts 17:11 (Contemporary English Version) commends the Bereans for their discernment, "The people in Berea were much nicer than those in Thessalonica, and they gladly accepted the message. Day after day, they studied the Scriptures to see if these things were true." Community involvement aids communal learning and mutual edification.

Another important factor in practicing discernment includes humbleness of heart and trust in God's timing. Humility is crucial for discernment, as it acknowledges our dependence on God and fosters openness to correction. James 4:6 reminds us, "But He gives us more grace. This is why it says: 'God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.'" A humble heart is teachable and receptive to God's guidance. Discernment requires patience and waiting on God's timing (Psalm 27:14). Trusting in God's timing ensures that decisions are made with clarity and peace.

Training and Mentoring Toward Spiritual Vitality

Spiritual formation entails helping people become more aware of God's deep love for them. It includes an educational component, a formality of teaching, training, and mentoring. A spiritual formation coach assists another in developing and implementing a spiritual growth plan. Christ incorporated a teaching component that follows baptism in the Great Commission, and He commanded his disciples to teach others to obey Jesus' commandments. According to Matthew 28:20, "Teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you." One area that all Christian leaders should intentionally teach their members is the ordinances ordained by Christ. Jesus commanded the disciples to teach the followers not their own or anyone's illusions or fantasies but the truths and institutions of Christ.

In 2 Timothy 3 v16-17, Apostle Paul writes, "All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction and for training in

righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work.” The ordinance instituted by Jesus Christ must be taught since it is intended to be a sign of fellowship with him. According to Kenneth Archer (2011, 87), a Professor of Theology at Trinity Bible College and Graduate School, “The concept of ‘ordinances’ must be re-visioned because, in Pentecostal worshipping communities, these rites provide sacramental experiences and impart grace to the faithful participants.” Likewise, several people have experienced the sanctifying and redemptive presence of God in powerful ways via the practices of communion, foot washing, and baptism. “The practices provide worshippers with opportunities for the ongoing spiritual formation of being conformed to the image of Christ through encountering the Spirit of Christ through the participatory re-enactment of the story of Jesus” (Archer 2011, 87). The spiritual practice of Training and Mentoring strengthens the believers’ faith, builds unity in the church community, and reassures God’s people of His wonderful promises.

Practice of Prayer

Prayer is a fundamental practice of spiritual formation. Purposeful prayer is a lifelong journey that deepens believers' relationship with God and transforms their hearts. Creating an atmosphere to encounter God through prayer is about cultivating a profound, intimate relationship with Him. It involves the provision of a space where believers can sincerely connect with God and allow Him to transform their lives as they stay in His presence. “The neglect of prayer is a grand hindrance to holiness” (Helland 2017, 85). As believers commit to the

practice of prayer, they experience a closer communion with God. Discussing the importance of prayer in fostering a life of intimacy with God, Thurman (1999, 26) claims that “Prayer at its best is revealed when a person enjoys God and prays out of sheer love for Him.” True prayer is about a relationship and two-way communication.” The love of God compels us to pray, for prayer is not ritual, but it is communing with God about what we are doing together (Thurman 1999, 26). Indeed, the early Church fathers lived out an intentional commitment to the life and practice of prayer. Although there are diverse types of prayer, they have the same purpose: to meet with God, to commune with Him, to know Him, and to be known by Him through relationship. Jesus prayed often to God the Father, so this affirms that prayer is transcendent. Prayer recognizes God's omnipotence and our dependence on Him. Jesus provided His disciples lessons on prayer as well as an example of a disciplined prayer life. Two of them are in a unique position to clarify the factors to be considered for a Pentecostal prayer: Private and Persistent Prayer and Corporate Encounter Prayer.

Private and Persistent Prayer

We should pray with intentionality to the Father who sees in the secret. In Matthew 6:6, Jesus said, “But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.” Jesus' comments, “Go into your inner room,” do not condemn public prayer, but affirm private prayer as every Christian's duty. It means there should be a place where we can be in secret—a

place where we can be alone with God (Barnes 1834). Another important instruction on prayer is to “Persist in Prayer.” Luke wrote that Jesus told a parable on the persistence of prayer so that the disciples would know “the need for them to pray always and not become discouraged” (Luke 18:1). This theme of persistent prayer continues all through Jesus’ time with His disciples. So, when Jesus instructed them to “ask, seek, knock,” He spoke in a present, continuous verb tense: “Keep asking, and it will be given to you. Keep searching, and you will find it. Keep knocking, and the door will be opened to you” (Matt. 7:7).

Effective prayer is sanctified prayer led by the Holy Spirit. Paul wrote to the church in Rome, “In the same way the Spirit also joins to help in our weakness because we do not know what to pray for as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with unspoken groanings” (Rom. 8:26). My church, Healing Stream Centre as Pentecostal-Charismatic tradition believes the Holy Spirit does help believers to pray. When a believer feels inadequate in prayer, the Holy Spirit intercedes with groaning too deep for words to understand. So, we must take comfort in knowing that the Spirit is interceding for us. According to Jude 1:20, when a believer prays in tongues, their spirit is strengthened. The ability to pray in tongues is exclusive to those who have received the Holy Spirit's baptism. Additionally, the Pentecostal-Charismatic tradition holds that speaking or praying in tongues is a transcendent experience of a divine encounter that unlocks a deeper relationship with the Lord. An American Psychological Anthropologist, Tanya Lührman (2012, 185) states that praying in tongues is an apophatic and contemplative technique understood within the Pentecostal-

Charismatic tradition. When we pray in tongues, the believer's understanding (which, in Greek, means nous, meaning intellect and mind) is unfruitful because the prayer comes from the man's spirit. Paul writes, "For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful (1 Corinthians 14:14). As believers yield to the call to pray to the Father who sees in secret, they are ushered into a partnership with the Holy Spirit to fulfill Jesus' appointment to His disciples, as described in casting out demons, healing the sick, and raising the dead (Matt. 10:8).

Corporate Encounter in Prayer

As in all Pentecostal-Charismatic churches, corporate prayer in my church is rarely quiet; it is often marked by Spirit-led spontaneity. Pentecostal-Charismatic spirituality is rooted in a communal experience of God, typified by its encouragement of democratic and participatory forms in worship. The service is participatory because, since the Holy Spirit is freely given access, the Holy Spirit moves people to participate and experience the presence of Jesus in the service. The service typically centers on worship, prayer, testimonies, and Christ-centered preaching from the Bible. Sometimes, even though the service is well-planned, you never quite know what will happen because the Holy Spirit may lead people to worship, pray, and prophesy. Sometimes, people may experience physical healing and miracles in the service and want to share their testimonies.

As in all Pentecostal-Charismatic churches, my church values community, and our services are characterized by inclusivity and gathering people from all

walks of life, regardless of race, gender, or social class. The church offers a friendly and supportive fellowship that provides mentoring and uplifts one another in prayer and the Bible. Gathering and sharing life is a discipline that community groups provide. To foster the development of personal discipline in prayer, it would be beneficial to the spiritual formation of a congregation to make corporate times of prayer available outside of the regular worship service. These meetings would serve as a place and opportunity for God's people to gather together, much like the meeting place of the upper room in Acts 2.

Corporate prayer is essential to Pentecostal discipleship as it unites believers and invites others to be instruments of ministry by the power of the Holy Spirit. Believers are called to bear one another's burdens, and those who carried their friends and family to Jesus for a touch from Heaven were honoured in their petitions. Jesus said to His disciples, "Again, I assure you: If two of you on earth agree about any matter that you pray for, it will be done for you by My Father in Heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there among them" (Matt. 18:19-20). This is a profound statement by Jesus affirming the power of communal prayer and unity among God's people. Jesus' word assures us that when we come together in faith, God's power is present to accomplish the expectations of His people. His presence fosters relational intimacy and spiritual vitality among His people.

Soul Nurturing for Spiritual Vitality

Vitality is a basis for spiritual formation that emphasizes on Spiritual growth

yielded from an active and fervent relationship with God. Every human is made of the body, soul, and Spirit. The soul is the integral center of a person, connecting the body, mind, emotions, and spirit. Hence, the soul needs to be nurtured for vitality to be maintained.

Soul care is nurturing and tending to one's inner spiritual life. It is help and support given to an individual or group to overcome all forms of physical, mental, and spiritual struggles and temptations. Soul care involves nurturing our relationship with God through spiritual disciplines and practices such as prayer, fasting, scriptural reading, listening and meditation, spiritual direction, etc. In the hurly-burly of life, we must prioritize the care of our souls to find peace with God. The wellness of our souls is key to our total well-being and wholeness. One of the ways to take care of the soul is to renew our minds. Paul admonishes believers to renew their minds daily to discern God's will and desire. "And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God" (Romans 12:2 NKJV).

In 1 Thessalonians 5:23, the Bible describes that humans comprise body, soul, and spirit. The spirit connects to God, and the body connects to the world around us, but what is the soul used for? The soul is how we connect to ourselves. The human soul refers to the inner self or inner being. It is the seat of affection and will. The Greek word for "soul" is "psyche," which concerns a person's mind, will, and emotions. In the simplest terms, the mind is the thinker, the will is the chooser, and the emotional part is the feeler.

The Bible teaches that humans are tripartite beings—body, soul, and spirit (Ro. 8:16). God desires our entire being to be cared for. To build vital faith, we need to have a healthy soul. McKenna (2011) claims, “Soul nurturing has to do with the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit in a believer’s soul to produce holiness.” The Spirit works in us to live a holistic and healthy lifestyle that glorifies God. Similarly, 3 John 1:2 shows a correlation between how we are doing in our souls and how we are doing overall, even in our physical health. “Beloved, I pray that all may go well with you and that you may be in good health, as it goes well with your soul.” The health of the soul came first in the Apostle’s mind: when there is that, he can wish for bodily health to support it.

Soul care is a way to care for the wellness of our soul. It is an essential tool for enhancing spiritual vitality as we intentionally engage in spiritual practices, we nurture our spiritual life and get drawn closer to God. When our souls are healthy, we will be healthy in every area of life. When our souls are vigorous and subject to our spirits, we experience vitality through total wellness and wholeness.

Summary: Spiritual Vitality in the Life of a Congregation

The model chapter emphasized that an individual and a congregation with strong spiritual vitality, such as those who continually engage in formative spiritual disciplines, are like a tree (Figures 1a and 1b) firmly rooted by streams of water (Psalm 1:3). They draw strength and sustenance from God. The withered part of Figure 1a represents lives that have no connection to the Vine, and it withered. The metaphor in John 15:5, 7 states that abiding in the Vine is the only

way the branches can flourish. As believers abide in the Vine through practices such as scripture, worship, discernment, and prayer — the practices known as spiritual disciplines — they continue to receive from the Vine the spiritual resources needed for their spiritual vitality. Bearing fruit for God’s kingdom results from actively engaging in the spiritual practices outlined in Scripture. These practices can be engaged in both personal and communal settings. Congregations grow in vitality by actively participating in spiritual practices and by integrating them into the context of their daily lives and community. In the struggles and pressures that people face in the world today, God's people need to live under His rulership and draw closer to Him through intentional engagement in spiritual practices. Prophet Jeremiah affirms that no one can sustain life on their own. Jeremiah exclaimed, “O LORD, I know the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man who walks to direct his own steps” (Jeremiah 10:23). Unfortunately, some people still struggle to surrender their will to God by obeying Him in all things. This is what I do among the youth and young adults to support them in growing in their faith and finding God’s purpose for their lives.

In addition, congregational spiritual vitality centers on the depth and vibrancy of the congregation’s faith life. It encompasses how well members grow in their relationship with Christ through engaging in the spiritual discipline that transforms life – living with God’s Word, engaging spiritually in worship, practicing spiritual discernment, and developing a meaningful prayer life. By engaging in spiritual practices, believers of Christ become more in tune with God’s word and the movement of the Holy Spirit in their lives. Willard (1988,

107) comments about the purpose and the transforming impact of spiritual disciplines:

The aim of disciplines in the spiritual life—and, specifically, in the following of Christ—is the transformation of the total state of the soul. It is the renewal of the whole person from the inside, involving differences in thought, feeling, and character that may never be manifest in outward behavior at all.

The various spiritual practices offer practical insights that illustrate how they can contribute to the overall vitality of an individual and a congregation. My ministry views the community as a platform for communal transformation and spiritual vitality as it offers a platform where individuals can experience God tangibly, receive mutual support, and share experiences.

CHAPTER 4
ENHANCING SPIRITUAL VITALITY OF THE LEADERSHIP TEAMS
OF HEALING STREAM CENTRE THROUGH DEVOTION TO
PERSONAL AND COMMUNAL PRAYER

*Wake up, wake up, O Zion! Clothe yourself with strength.
Put on your beautiful clothes, O holy city of Jerusalem,
for unclean and godless people will enter your
gates no longer. (Isaiah 52:1 NLT)*

Introduction

This research chapter connects to my model of spiritual formation through the focus on the renewal of spiritual vitality among the leadership of my church, Healing Stream Centre, a multicultural church rooted in a Pentecostal-Charismatic ethos. Almost 80 percent of Healing Stream Centre memberships are African immigrants who desire to experience spiritual vitality. Spiritual decline can occur in any individual, but one of the underlying reasons for these immigrants' decline in spiritual vitality is the lack of sufficient time to attend to their spiritual lives due to the demands of daily life. Bruce Demarest (1999, 95), a Senior Professor of Christian Theology at Denver Seminary, states that, "A fulfilling and empowering connection with God cannot develop in busyness. It comes in quietness and prayer, and as we act under His peaceful guidance in concern for others," Paul

writes, "I can do all life comes from Christ. God is our life, and an intimate relationship with Christ is vital to drawing strength from Him. Why did I choose prayer as a spiritual practice to enhance the spiritual vitality of my leadership team? Many of my church members struggle to cope with their demanding work, as some must take on multiple jobs to make ends meet. Bradley Sliedrecht (2024), a Writer and Theologian, identifies a lack of consistent prayer as one of the causes of the decline in the spiritual vitality of God's people. Also, Edward McKendree Bounds (1920, 105), an American author, attorney, and member of the Methodist Episcopal Church South clergy, claims that "He who is too busy to pray will be too busy to live a holy life." This rigorous life makes it difficult for them to find time to nurture their spiritual lives. Praying with purpose deepens believers' prayer lives, enhances their intimacy with God, and facilitates an experience of genuine devoutness and vitality. Yearning for an experiential relationship with God, my church leadership and members believed prayer was crucial to strengthening their devotion to God.

To respond to the yearning or relational intimacy with God, the question addressed in this research was: How can prayer practices facilitate spiritual vitality and deepen transformative experiences of God for the leadership of my church? Prayer is one of the ways to experience transformation, primarily due to its life-changing impact on the lives of those who engage in the practice. The practices of Divine Hour Prayer and Holy Reading *Lectio Divina* were used for personal and communal prayer exercises.

The two prayer techniques were employed because they both focus on enhancing participants' deepening experience and strengthening their devotion to God.

During the Divine Hours prayer, specific hours of the day were saturated with a pattern of prayer to develop personal time with God. Also, the Holy Reading “*Lectio Divina*” helped establish competencies in meditation and praying with scripture, especially in a communal setting.

For this research, the practice of Divine Hours prayer was limited to two days a week—Mondays and Fridays. This allowed the participants who were initially new to the practice to develop incrementally competencies in the Divine Hours prayer practice without being overwhelmed. During this prayer exercise, all participants engaged in a personal transformative prayer practice three times a day, which included morning, afternoon, and evening. I was an active participant in this research, and my training as a spiritual director helped me to facilitate an atmosphere that enhanced the participants' spiritually transformative experiences. All eight participants indicated that they experienced transformation through the prayer exercises, as revealed in the post-participants' interview log.

Supervision, Permission, and Access

This project followed the specific guidelines and restrictions of the Research and Ethics Board of Tyndale University. The participants, who are committed Christians, were briefed together about the objective of the research, the contents of the research, and the proceedings of the research by the church's Business Intelligence and Security officer (BISO). An officer was responsible for

coordinating the selection process and distributing the consent forms to all the participants.

Eight individuals were interested in the research. After a week of briefing by the BISO, all the interested individuals signed and returned the consent forms to the BISO to join the project.

Context

This project serves as a way of giving back to my community what I received in my early days of struggle in Canada. Apostle Paul writes in 2 Cor 1:4, “God comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort others. When they are troubled, we will be able to give them the same comfort God has given us.” This Research was conducted among the Leadership Teams of Healing Stream Centre. I prioritized my leadership because true transformation often begins with leadership and flows to the people (Pant 2023). Practicing greatness requires that the spiritual leader develop some key disciplines

This research occurred at Healing Stream Centre, a church in Kitchener, Ontario, where I have been pastoring for over ten years. Healing Stream Centre is a multicultural church with roots in the Pentecostal-Charismatic tradition. The church is 80% African immigrants. Many of these members struggle to cope with the stress of settling in a new country. Some must engage in working several jobs in order to survive and make ends meet. Facing this rigorous life makes it difficult for many immigrants to have time to attend to their spiritual lives, and this has led some to abandon the Christian faith they once treasured. Many of the immigrants'

daily experiences are challenging. These challenges include immigration stress, such as resident permits and delays in family reunification. Others include physical, mental, and emotional health. These experiences have negatively impacted their faith and prevented some from being steadfast in their walk with God.

My engagement with some of these immigrant members shows that many of them lack a basic understanding of God, and others have knowledge but are not in a relationship with Him, despite attending church services. Some professed they came to Canada to make money and not for church affairs. But a few months after exhausting their strength, they became frustrated with life, and some entered into depression. This project is informed by the many factors that can burden new immigrants, resulting in diminished spiritual vitality. Matthew 11:28, Jesus invites us, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest." The leadership members participating in this prayer are responding to God's invitation. God seeks companionship with us, whether we are immigrants, permanent residents, or citizens. He desires that we know Him intimately and experientially. The research introduced the practice of contemplative prayer to the leadership of Healing Stream Centre to enhance their spiritual formation and vitality.

I cannot end this context section without mentioning my journey as an immigrant and my experiences with the Holy Spirit—His leading, training, and nurturing through the spiritual formation programs at Tyndale. My past experiences and testimonies of God as an immigrant were my motivation to help

many immigrants encounter God and settle into His purposes for their lives in Canada. Carter (2017) states that, “If prayer is asking God for things agreeable to his will, and the purpose of the disciplines is to train us to be godly (1 Tim. 4:7), then the primary purpose of prayer as a spiritual discipline is to help us conform our will to God’s.” God is indeed interested in helping His people and calling them to receive rest. Jesus says, “I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28). God is ready and waiting. As we yield to Him, He will come and reveal Himself to us. I wanted my leadership team to have the same experience of a God-equipped life, enabling them to face the challenges and struggles on their faith journey through their devotion to Divine Hour prayer and *Lectio Divina*.

Background Resources

This project is a direct result of my spiritual autobiography and my model of spiritual formation. It details my testimonies of God’s love from childhood to adulthood and highlights the strategies and formational-based approaches to help Healing Stream Centre discover biblical pathways that facilitate the spiritual formation and vitality of its members. I cannot forget the formative impact of spiritual formation during my struggling years as a new immigrant. Indeed, a profound knowledge of God was missing in my life during this time, and entering the spiritual formation program at Tyndale answered my long search for growth in my intimacy with God. My spiritual direction internship at Tyndale was transformative in allowing for introspective evaluation.

God built in me the capacity to recognize and stay in tune with the actions

of the Holy Spirit in my life. My continued one-on-one spiritual direction with a spiritual director ensures steady growth in my intimacy with God. As Foster claims, “Spiritual direction is for anyone yearning for God. Sometimes this desire appears as a sense of longing for something greater or a sense of discontent with the status quo” (Foster 2023). In my DMin program, I developed my skills in spiritual leadership and empowered my practices of prayer, listening, discernment, and spiritual direction. Going through the Doctor of Ministry has positively changed my life forever.

Theological Foundations

As explained in Chapter 3, *Model of Spiritual Formation*, the path of transformation in Christ is the abiding of the branches in the Vine. This is because the branches' only source of spiritual life is the vine. Jesus says, "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me, you can do nothing." (John 15:5). To abide in Jesus means spending time with Him. As we abide in Christ through prayer, scripture, and community, we grow in our intimacy with Him.

Figures 2a and 2b illustrate how prayer, as one of the spiritual practices, enhances spiritual vitality in believers' lives and how the lack of it can produce a withered branch. Although there are other vehicles that the Holy Spirit uses to bring spiritual transformation to believers, prayer was chosen in this research because it enhances reliance on God and not just self, thereby allowing individuals to rely wholly on the ministry of the Holy Spirit. One thing revealed

through this research was found that if we allow our heart to be fixated in stillness and allow for God's infilling power despite struggles, we become transformed in our minds. Romans 8:26-27 declares, "...the Spirit helps us in our weaknesses. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans..." The Spirit of God, which dwells in us and by whom we are led, is actively involved in us, helping us with our limitations in prayer. As we press into our relationship with God through prayer, we open ourselves to God and align our will with His will.

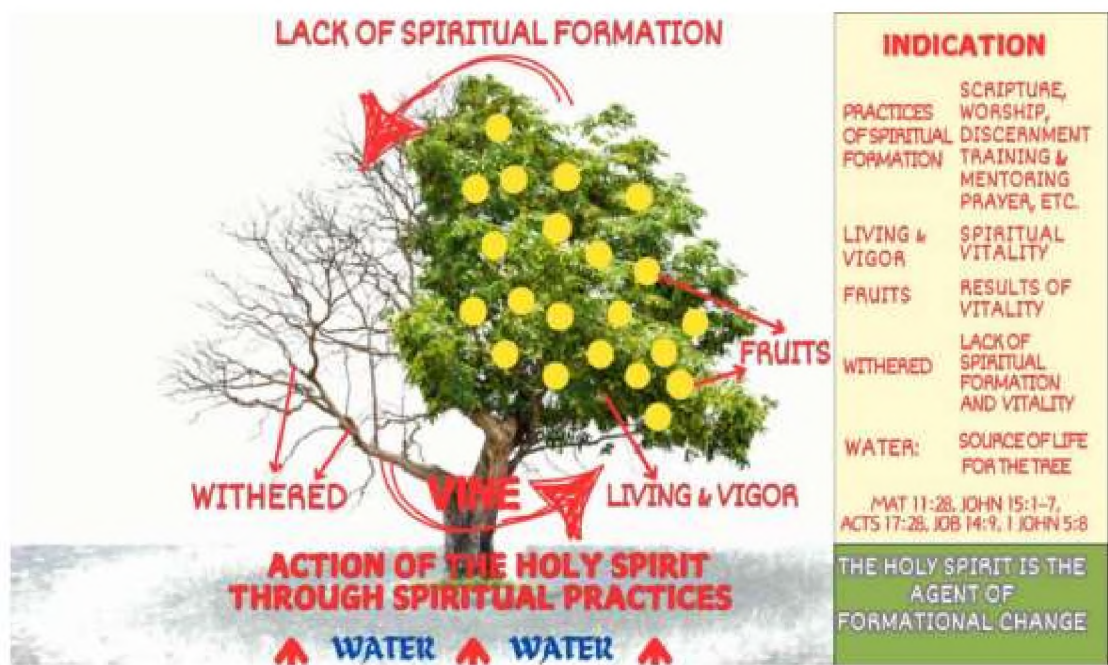


Figure 2a. The Pathways of Transformation



Figure 2b. The Spiritual Practices of Spiritual Formation and Vitality

The Role of Prayer in Spiritual Formation

Prayer is the Christian’s way of communicating with God, an essential means of connecting and developing a deeper, intimate relationship with Him. Over the years of engaging in prayer ministry, according to Thurman and Luther (2006, 59-60), “Prayer at its best is when the soul enjoys God and prays out of sheer love for him.” I have realized that believers' prayer is not a meaningless utterance; it is a fellowship with God and enjoying His companionship. Prayer is a vocalization and affirmation of our dependence on Christ and our continuous need to remain attached to the vine and be fruitful through Him.

This research explores prayer as one vital way to create an atmosphere for encountering God. Although there are diverse forms of prayer, such as the Prayer of Examen, Praying in Tongues (among the Pentecostal-Charismatic tradition), Daily Hour Prayer, etc., they can all facilitate fellowship and intimacy with God.

Praying with Scripture

According to Ruth Barton (2014, 10), a Spiritual Director and Founder of Transforming Center, “Spiritual transformation takes place incrementally over time with others in the context of disciplines and practices that open us to God.” Praying with Scripture is one of the spiritual practices that fosters personal growth. It leads to a deeper understanding of God’s character, a greater awareness of His guidance, and a heightened sensitivity to God's presence. Ideally, participants establish a rhythm of praying with Scripture that aligns with their daily lives. Participants can use words, emotions, and Bible characters to gain more confidence in their prayers.

Divine Hours prayer is deeply rooted in the scripture. It was borne out of a desire for communion with God, as revealed in Psalm 119:164, “Seven times a day I praise you for your righteous rules.” Adele Calhoun (2015, 517), an Author and Pastor of Spiritual Formation at Highrock Covenant Church in Arlington, Massachusetts, explains that, “Jesus learned to pray in the traditional Hebrew way. In the morning, he prayed the Shema: ‘Hear O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one’ (Deu. 6:4) as well as a series of blessings known as the Tephilla.” Arthur Boers (2003, 29), a Professor and ordained Mennonite minister and Benedictine oblate, recommends that believers should try the Fixed Hour, the Jews of his days prayed at specific times (Mark 1:35, Luke 6:12). This practice was continued by the disciples of Jesus even after His death. They pray because it is based on the “fixed language of Scriptures, through which God has spoken in

the past and continues to speak today.” He believes that setting aside time each morning and evening to pray reminds us that all we have, including our time, belongs to God. Enzo Bianchi (2015, 35), an Italian lay monk, claims that praying with Scripture requires a context of faith and prayer and is not limited to verbal communication. It can be a form of meditation and contemplation. This research engaged two prayer approaches: Divine Hours prayer, which adds rhythm to prayer practice, and Holy Reading *Lectio Divina*. These are both means of developing competency in meditating and praying with scripture. I chose the Divine Hour prayer and *Lectio Divina* practices in this project because Divine Hour prayer promotes sound spirituality and devotion to God, while communal prayer via *Lectio Divina* enhances communal growth, consecration, and discernment.

Why Did I Choose These Prayer Practices?

Grayston explains the decline in biblical literacy among evangelicals and the future of quiet time. His points include the pressures of modern lifestyle, which also means that the patterns that evolved in the nineteenth century and served the tradition well until the middle of the last century no longer work. Another was the relevance of the text they hear and the reality of their world. Grayston (2002, 101) explains,

Many churchgoers find little connection between the preaching that they hear and the world in which they live. Sermons have been dry and academic and lacking in application or human interest, or they have become a collection of anecdotes that fail to engage with the text of the Bible. No bridges are built between the world of the Bible and the world of the reader; the horizons are as far apart as ever, and no windows of the imagination are opened to enable the hearer to see new possibilities or explore the transforming power of the Word. If the Bible is not seen to touch on the questions that are raised in everyday life, it is not surprising that many have turned away from it.

To affirm the importance of *Lectio Divina's* practice in solving Grayston's issues, Funk (2006, 9) explains that, "The practices of *Lectio Divina* are helpful and suitable for Bible reading and prayer for all ages." Funk (2006, 9) states, "Through the tool of *Lectio Divina*, we can literally 'know' God and enter into a relationship just as we do with our friends." *Lectio* is an important prayer practice because, through scripture reading, we access Christ through His life, His teaching, and His transforming works on the people.

McKnight called Divine Hour Prayer, praying with the Church. What is praying with the church? According to McKnight (2006, 11), "We pray with the Church whenever we read or recite the scriptures—whenever we read the Psalms, whenever we utter the Lord's Prayer, and whenever we learn and use other resources of prayer books of the Church." That is, we pray with the Church when we pray at fixed times with the Church. McKnight (2006, 14) claims that Divine Hours Prayer fosters uniting as Jesus prayed for the unity of the Church. Secondly, Prayer is difficult for many Christians. There are many reasons for the lack of prayer; one is that prayer takes time and effort. According to McKnight (2006, 14), "Prayer requires concentration. Sometimes, we do not have the energy

for prayer, and at other times, we do not know what to say.” A sacred rhythm or Divine Hour prayer is praying at selected Hours of prayer, which Jesus and the Church prayed. Divine Hours prayer does not overlook the importance of personal, spontaneous prayers. It affirms the uniting of the Church of Jesus. If learning to pray a set of prayers at fixed times according to a sacred rhythm can reinvigorate our prayer lives, then *Lectio Divina* and Divine Hour prayers are worth choosing for my leaders. The contemplative prayer practices that I chose for this project are not Pentecostal, but they are the practices that many in the Pentecostal tradition are used to. They enhance intimacy and draw us closer to God.

Other Literature and Cases

In the *Rhythm of God's Grace: Uncovering Morning and Evening Hours of Prayer*, Boers (2003, 29) recommends that believers try out Fixed-Hour Prayer because it is based on the fixed language of Scriptures, through which God has spoken in the past and continues to speak today. Fixed-Hour Prayer has a rich spiritual history, foundationally rooted in Judaism and adopted by early Christians as a way to shape their days around prayer and scripture. By the rhythm of prayer, we mean regular, fixed times of the day—morning, afternoon, and night. For instance, the Psalmists proclaim, “At midnight I will rise and thank you” (Psalm 119:162), and “In the morning I will offer you my prayer” (Psalm 5:3). Psalm 119:164 reads, “Seven times a day I praise you.” The practice is also supported in the New Testament (Luke 6:12, Acts 3:1;10:3, 30).

The scriptures show that Jesus followed a rhythm of prayer while on earth. According to Mark 1:35, Jesus often rose early to pray, and Luke 5:16 reveals that Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed. The truth is that humanity was created for a loving relationship with our Creator that is renewed and strengthened by a regular rhythm of prayer.

Field, Ethics, Scope, Methodology and Methods

The following section will outline the field, scope, methodology, and method used for this project to detail the process. It also includes the phases and timetable, providing a timeline framework for all project-component phases and individual project tasks. This section includes comments on Ethics in Ministry-Based Research, details of actions conducted during the project, and concludes with an overview of coding in qualitative data analysis.

Field

This research occurred at Healing Stream Centre in Kitchener, Ontario. I introduced this prayer exercise in my local church because of the yearning for a more significant and more profound experience of God by the leaders and members of my congregation. Many of my members get so occupied with day-to-day life that they barely have sufficient time to attend to their spiritual lives.

The project ran for four weeks during the fall semester of 2024—from October 14 to November 8, 2024. There were 9 participants in this project (including myself). Although participation was open to the entire church leadership team, not all leaders were available. 53.3% of the church's leadership,

ranging in age from 25 to 50, agreed to participate and signed both the information letter and the consent form. The participants consisted of 4 women and 5 men.

Participant Selection Process

Effective participant recruitment and selection are fundamental to the success of qualitative research. The participants in this research consisted of my church leadership teams. In this project, I prioritized my church leadership teams because true transformation often begins with leadership and flows to the people. Pant (2023) states, “Leading change may need to begin with changing yourself.” My leadership team has fifteen individuals—Seven male and eight female. In recruiting the participants, the church’s Business Intelligence and Security officer (BISO) extended an invitation to all leadership teams after briefing them about the project. The leaders have been calling for prayer retreats that would bring about transformation in their lives. Moreover, the BISO was engaged to increase transparency and reduce any ethical issues related to power imbalance. The officer also helped reduce the risk of participants feeling pressured by the researcher to participate in this project, especially when the lead researcher is also the lead pastor of the participants and, therefore, is in a dual relationship with them.

As part of the selection procedure, the BISO, who is not part of the key leadership and ministerial members, briefed all the participants and distributed the Verbal Consent Briefing (Appendix 5), Information Letter (Appendix 6), and

Consent Form (Appendix 7) to all the leaders on behalf of the lead researcher to reduce the power differential in the relationship. No participants among the leaders were prohibited from participating in the research. The BISO collated and returned the signed consent forms to the lead researcher. Any participant returning the consent form was assumed to be ready to participate. All initial participants chose to participate and knew they could withdraw from the team anytime. After this selection process, 9 leaders—4 women and 5 men, including the facilitator, were available for this project.

Ethics

Although participating in prayer-based research has many advantages and does not pose any severe risks to the participants, the risks associated with the lead researcher's dual relationships, as both the lead pastor and lead researcher, must be dealt with. In achieving this, strategies were employed to manage the ethical issue of power imbalance and the risk of participants feeling pressured by the researcher to participate in this project. In general, the guidelines below were introduced to ensure the project was safe and ethical.

As a pastor-researcher, I hold a measure of spiritual influence on the key leadership of Healing Stream Centre and the potential research participants. Although my influence on the participant is more of mutual love and respect than legalism, I have taken action to prevent personal bias, favoritism, and power differential in the relationship with the participants. The church's Business Intelligence and Security officer (BISO), who is not a ministerial team member,

was engaged to coordinate the briefing and distribution of the consent forms to the participants on behalf of the researcher. The BISO returned the signed consent form to the lead researcher, and no interested participants among the leaders were prevented from participating in the research.

To safeguard the participants' welfare and rights, the information letter, verbal consent briefing, and consent forms clearly affirmed that participants could withdraw from the project without consequence. Moreover, the BISO was only involved in the recruitment process of the participants. He was not involved in data collection or any other parts of the research. The BISO also agreed to the confidentiality of the disclosed information and signed a Non-Disclosure Agreement (Appendix 8).

The Tyndale Research Ethics Board approved the research before it started. I submitted the application on July 26th and received approval on October 2nd. I did not contact any participants until the REB application was approved. I have ensured confidentiality for all participants by replacing their names with numbers. I have also upheld data safety by keeping their details on my secure server. Participation in this project was open to all my church leadership teams without bias or favoritism.

Scope

This project explored Divine Hours prayer and communal prayer via *Lectio Divina* in building impactful prayer rhythms and spiritual vitality into believers' lives of faith. The project helped me explore how a prayer rhythm can

facilitate devoutness and a profound experience of God. Based on my training as a spiritual director and my experiences of group spiritual direction with my directees, I knew that embarking on these sessions of prayer practices within my congregation would promote spiritual vitality and explicitly enrich the spiritual journey of my members.

Additionally, it also generated data on the impact of the Divine Hours prayer on believers' devotion and the transformative effect of communal prayer on believers' growth and maturity through *Lectio Divina*.

Limitations of the Study

Despite this project's relevance within the global church community, it focuses on strengthening believers' devotion and spiritual vitality within the leadership teams of the Healing Stream Church, Kitchener, ON. The researcher did not extend this study's scope and effectiveness beyond the selected group. The outcome of this project will be valuable for further study in the future.

Methodology

The methodology chosen for this project was Evaluative Research, a crucial tool for evaluating outcomes and helping participants understand whether a program or intervention is as effective as intended and where to improve. This project evaluates the impact of Divine Hours prayer and *Lectio Divina* on the participants' spiritual fervour and vitality.

Method

The research intervention aimed to explore the role and impact of personal and communal prayer practice in enhancing the spiritual vitality of the participants. The research focuses on 9 participants in this project (including the lead researcher who facilitated the prayer sessions). For a period of 4 weeks, the participants engaged in Divine Hours prayer and *Lectio Divina*.

As the lead researcher, I instructed the participants by conducting a group teaching session about the project's objectives during pre-implementation. At the same time, I conducted a pre-interview session with each participant to establish a baseline for their prayer practices. The section below outlines in detail the various actions of the research.

My Action Overview

The first data collection occurred during the initial four weeks of prayer exercises. In the participants' training session, I explained the research's purpose and aims, focusing on measuring the impact of personal and communal prayer on the participants' growth in intimacy. I also informed the participants of my qualifications as a trained spiritual director, emphasizing my ability to facilitate the various prayer sessions required by the project. Before starting the prayer exercises, I conducted a pre-interview session with each participant to establish a baseline for the prayer practices. I watched as the participants responded to the pre-interview guiding questions (Appendix 1) and kept a log of the session using

my laptop as the participants shared their difficulties concerning the exercise of prayer.

I provided the participants with resources for Divine Hour prayer, such as a common prayer app (Lectio 365 App, My Daily Office App) that provided prayers, songs, and scripture readings for each day on mobile devices. I selected the app since I was introducing them to these practices for the first time. I needed to guide and show them some of the resources that would be beneficial to them during the prayer sessions with the hope that they would continue to explore other better Apps on their own. Every participant maintained a log of their experiences during the Divine Hours prayer.

The weekly Divine Hours prayer was conducted concurrently with the weekly Wednesday communal prayer of *Lectio Divina*. This approach was employed in order to facilitate the participants' group discernment and deepen their experiences of God. *Lectio Divina* was practiced in the small prayer group as a meditative prayer method rooted in scripture. The participants met for an hour throughout the four weeks in the church auditorium for sessions of prayers and discernment. As a spiritual director, I led the *Lectio Divina* prayer practice, which entailed choosing a short biblical passage (5–14 verses) for each session. The four basic movements of *Lectio Divina* used in the session included **Lectio**—Listening to the Word of God or Reading the Word; **Meditatio** is reflecting on the Word of God (pondering and meditating on what was read). **Oratio** is responding to the Word of God (Affective Prayer), and **Contemplatio**—resting in the Word of God

(Contemplation). The details of each session of the *Lectio Divina* prayer are shown in (Appendix 2A-2D). Each participant kept a log of what they experienced. The final data collection method was the post-interview session I held with each participant via Zoom to discuss the overall impact of the four-week prayer exercise. During this post-interview session, I met separately with each participant and carefully watched and took notes as they responded to the post-interview guiding questions (Appendix 3). All the participants shared the positive effects of the prayer exercise and the transformation it had brought to their lives; these included a better understanding of prayer rhythm, enhanced God's Awareness, and Self-discovery. I carefully logged my observations using my laptop as participants shared their concrete experiences and personal reflections.

Coding Process Overview

No coding occurred until the raw qualitative data from all sessions, such as interviews, discussions, and prayer sessions, were completed and all documents were collected. The data sources for this project are from the data collection phases described in the action phases above—the pre-interview logs, the participants' Divine Hours Prayer logs, the weekly Communal Prayer journals through *Lectio*, and the post-interview logs. The process of coding started with gathering information from the data sources, cleaning the data by removing all identifiable information, assigning unique IDs to replace the names, and arranging them in a readable, meaningful, and concise format (using Microsoft Word). Then, the data was imported to NVivo, a qualitative data management and coding

tool that was used for this analysis. My initial reading through the data was to get a general sense of reoccurring ideas, highlighting the phrases and sentences that stood out. Using NVivo, I created containers or codes to organize the identified significant information from the participants' quotes and comments. This was done by dragging and dropping the related codes into containers. Selecting *aggregate coding for children* automatically collated all the aggregate information connected to each code. The codes were sorted into clusters based on shared relationships, and I used concise labels for the themes to ensure clarity. Prominent themes emerged in the process, including struggles, apprehension, opportunity, and continuity. The details of the coding table are shown in the findings section. I reviewed each coding table about 4 to 5 times to ensure repetitive phrases or comments were removed.

I want to emphasize that various other variables and themes emerged in this research project; some were aligned with the research question, while others were not. For this research, I have only utilized data from participants who reported similar preferences. I also admitted that there is a possibility that the participants' responses were influenced, given that the researcher was also the Pastor of the church and the nature of the interview questions.

Findings, Interpretations, and Outcomes

This research intervention investigated the effect of prayer in enhancing the spiritual vitality of the participants. It aimed to explore the spiritual impacts and outcomes of adding rhythms to believers' prayers in a communal setting. This

section reviews and presents the findings that emerged from the research analysis process. The findings were interpreted, and the outcome revealed the impacts of these prayer practices on the leaders of Healing Stream Centre.

Findings

The following coding tables enhance this research analysis and help organize my findings in a transparent and sensible format: 1) Coding Pre-Interview Logs, 2) Coding Participants' Divine Hours Prayer Logs, 3) Coding Weekly Communal Prayer via Lectio Journals, and 4) Coding Post-Interview Logs. The details below outline the findings. The details of coding below outline the findings (Table 1).

Pre-Interview Logs

Prior to the four weeks of prayer exercises, I conducted a pre-interview session with each of the 8 participants. This interview was to establish a baseline for participating in the prayer practices of Divine Hours prayer and *Lectio Divina*. The pre-interview guiding questions are found in Appendix 1. Table 1 outlines the coding categories for pre-interview logs. The categories and sub-categories in the coding are not necessarily taken from participants' precise statements and quotes. They are words that best capture the information in the participants' data. The reference count indicates the number of participants mentioning these issues. Most of the issues raised by the participants were associated with many problems that immigrants face in a new country, which affect their spiritual growth and cause many to struggle with their faith or wander away from their spiritual

devotions. The details of these are shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Coding for Pre-Interview Logs- Experience with Prayer

Category	Subcategory	Reference Count
Struggles	Lack of Time for Prayer	8
	Burnout due to the Hustle and Bustle	8
	Pressure from family and friends	8
	Lacked Consistency in Spiritual Practices	7
	No Stable Job	5
	Lacked Daily Prayer Rhythm	5
	No Understanding of Spiritual Discernment	3
Apprehension	Fear of Adjusting to New Prayer Practices	8
	Fear of Failing in the New Practices	6
Opportunity	Hopeful to Encountering God	8
	Eager to try New Prayer approaches	8
	Eagerness to experience the Practices that Nourish	8
	Yearning to experience Communal Prayer	8

Explanation of Identified Components of the Log:

According to Table 1, some of the underlying issues with the participants include a lack of time for prayer due to demanding work, burnout due to the hustle and bustle of everyday life, pressure from family and friends from Nigeria, lack of consistency in spiritual practice, daily rhythm, and struggle in finding stable jobs. From the pre-interview log, most of the immigrants showed that the struggle associated with settling in a new country comes with many challenges, which

include weakening of believers' faith and devotion to God. For instance, Participant 8 said, "I have experienced burnout many times because of the difficulty I faced in settling in Canada." Participant 4 said, "I have not been committed to prayer meetings since coming to Canada because I have not been able to get a permanent job in my field of study, and this is affecting my devotion to God." Some of the participants expressed fear of being involved in practices they were not used to. For instance, Participant 8 said, "I love praying, but I am concerned with contemplative practice since I am only familiar with prayer practices of speaking in tongues and declaration." The participants feared they might struggle through the practices or fail.

All eight participants expressed their willingness to receive a gift of prayer and to pray (both individually using the Divine Hours prayer and in a communal setting during *Lectio*). They are willing to overcome the struggles and apprehension mentioned in Table 1. According to the pre-interview logs, they all requested basic training on engaging in contemplative prayer and learning a new way to connect with God. Thus, my engagement with the participants during the training session was to guide them in practicing Divine Hours and *Lectio Divina* prayer exercises.

Participants' Divine Hours Prayer Logs

After the information sessions, the participants began the transformative prayer practice of Divine Hours Prayer on Mondays and Fridays for four weeks. Every participant kept a journal during the prayer exercise. Table 2 outlines the

coding categories for participants' Divine Hours prayer logs. All 8 participants commented on at least one sense of struggle, opportunity, and continuity in their journals. The categories in the coding are not necessarily taken from participants' precise statements and quotes. They are words that best capture the information in the participants' data. Details are shown below.

Table 2: Coding for Participants' Divine Hours Prayer Logs

Category	Sub-Category	Reference Count
Struggles	The Practice is new	8
	Struggling with Time for Prayer	5
	Challenges of Settling	3
	Practice is tedious	1
Opportunity	The Prayer Apps enhanced daily Prayer	8
	Unified Spirituality into Daily Habit	8
	Helped in Scriptural Meditation	8
	Enhance Growth in Intimacy with God	8
	Increased Awareness of God	8
	Increased experience of Joy and Hope	7
Continuity	I would like to continue	8
	Not Willing to continue	0

Explanation of Identified Struggles:

According to the participants' journal on Divine Hours Prayer, more than half of the participants admitted they struggled with time for prayer due to their work demands. They feared that another prayer involvement would stress their

already busy lives. At the same time, all the participants believed that their busy lives and lack of adequate time for prayer contributed to their decline in devotional lives. Participant 1 communicated his struggle well: “Since I came to Canada, I have been a workaholic, living from job to job, yet unsatisfied and empty. I recognized that my settlement stress is affecting my devotional life.” Participant 4 stated, “I often feel like I do not have enough time. So, I do not dig into the practice of prayer as much as I wanted to.” All 8 participants confirmed that their busy lives and schedules have been making it difficult to pay attention to their spiritual lives.

Explanation of the Opportunity:

A few prayer and meditative apps were used during this practice, such as Lectio 365 App, My Daily Office App, and Prayetic App. These apps contain diverse songs, multiple prayer points, and scriptural declarations that are helpful for people seeking relational intimacy with God through prayer. Most participants noted that the practices enhanced their daily prayer devotion, helped them meditate on the Scriptures, and developed their intimacy with God. For instance, Participant 2 said, “Using Prayetic app for Divine Hour Prayer simplified praying without ceasing to me. My faith is strengthened as I continue in the practice.” This project confirmed that Divine Hours Prayer helps people to mark the hours of the day with prayer by infusing the ordinary day with God's continual presence, as the participants were able to pray for several hours of the day, which they expressed, according to Table 2, they had never done before this time. Divine

Hour Prayer brings me into the consciousness of God's abiding presence. "For the Lord is the Spirit, and wherever the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom" (2 Corinthians 3:17). The members of my leadership teams desired a more satisfactory prayer life, so they joined this project of Divine Hours of Prayer and Holy Reading. As shown in Table 2, the practice was initially challenging because it was new; the participants saw it as transformative and expressed their interest in continuing the practice.

Effect of Time on Participants During Divine Hour Prayer Logs

As shown in Table 2, maintaining a regular prayer routine remains one of the key struggles among the participants, and this was due to the hustle and bustle of the hectic lives of many immigrants in Canada. Table 2i summarizes the coding for participants' Divine Hours prayer logs. I captured the effect of time on each of the participants' devotional lives. In particular, the study tracked the progress in the daily practice of Divine Hour prayer from the initial stage to the concluding stage of this project. Table 2i shows that participants made some progress during these prayer sessions. For instance, the data shows that during morning prayer, only Participant 1 prayed for 30 minutes; others struggled to stay longer in the prayer. By the end of the prayer exercise, most of the participants could stay for about 20 minutes praying, which showed an improvement in the participants' prayer life.

Table 2i: Effect of Time on Participants during Divine Hour Prayer

Sub-Category: Prayer Routine	Time Spent in Prayer By Participants	Reference Count (At Initial Stage)	Reference Count (At the Concluding Stage)
Morning	30 minutes	1	2
	20 minutes	1	6
	15 minutes	4	0
	10 minutes	2	0
Afternoon	20 minutes	1	3
	15 minutes	3	5
	10 minutes	3	0
	5 minutes	1	0
Evening	1 hour	0	1
	30 minutes	2	7
	15 minutes	5	0
	10 minutes	1	0
	5 minutes	0	0

Practicing God's presence requires that believers have sufficient time with God. Matthew 6:6 reveals that Jesus encourages a private life of prayer. Hence, if we desire a healthy relationship with God outwardly, we must purposefully cultivate a healthy relationship with Him privately. The Divine Hour prayer resources, such as the common prayer app (Lectio 365 App, My Daily Office App, and Prayetic App), provided the participants with daily prayers, songs, and short Bible readings. The participants used these technologies to pray privately in

the morning, midday, and in the evening after dinner when they returned home from work. Participant 6 explained,

Practicing Divine Hour prayer was helpful to me. This App has helped me to overcome somniphobia. I usually fear going to bed because of my frequent scary dreams, but as I continue meditating on this prayer app, I have found the stillness I require to experience the peace and comfort of the Spirit of God. My faith is strengthened as I meditate on the scriptures, and the music helps me to sleep like a baby with no fear. One of the songs was *The Lord is My Good Shepherd who Restores My Soul* – taken from the book of Psalm 23:2-3.

The participants' logs showed that all the participants continued to improve as they progressed with the prayer practice.

Weekly Communal Prayer via Lectio Journals

During the four weeks of *Lectio Divina* practice, all the participants kept journals (digital and manual), which helped them process their experiences (details shown in Appendix 2A-2D). As in other tables, the categories in the coding are not necessarily taken from participants' precise statements and quotes. They are words that best capture the information in the participants' data. Table 3 summarizes the coding for Weekly Communal Prayer via Lectio Journals.

Table 3: Coding for Weekly Communal Prayer via Lectio Journals

Category	Sub-Category	Reference Count
Struggles	Adapting to the Practice	7
	Practice is tedious	1
	Too tired	0
Opportunity	Helped Seeing God’s Word with New Eyes	8
	Joy to learn the new Prayer Practice	8
	Practice improved my Scripture meditation	8
	Practice Improved my Listening skill	8
	Practice enhanced my Spiritual Imagination	8
	Practice facilitated my growth spiritually	8
	Practice enhanced awareness of God’s presence	8
	I encountered God’s Love in His Word	8
	Lectio enhanced the skill of Discernment	8

Explanation of Participants' Struggles:

Journal comments revealed that adjusting to the group *Lectio Divina* or Holy Reading was the most prominent identified challenge, as the practice is new to many participants. However, this did not hinder the participants from exploring the new practice. During this project, the participants were willing to learn new practices. According to the weekly *Lectio Divina* journals, all participants were willing to learn the new practice of *Lectio Divina*. They showed their confidence in me as a trained spiritual director to facilitate their learning of the practices.

Even though the practice is new to Healing Stream Centre church, the participants believed in reading the scripture and were committed to the exercise. For instance, Participant 7 claimed, “Holy reading is helpful in many ways to me. I felt I had been ushered into a new union with God through His Word, where His love is real and tangible.” At the end of the practice, according to Table 3, only 1 participant claimed he was still struggling with *Lectio*; the remaining 7 participants affirmed that the practice was adaptable.

Explanation of the Opportunity for Growth:

Journal comments indicate that weekly communal prayer with Holy Reading, “*Lectio Divina*,” is helping the participants to encounter the Scripture in a new way. According to the participants’ comments, engaging in *Lectio* enhances community, and the reading and sharing among the members foster new insights and fresh understanding of the Scripture. The word was made alive as the participants allowed the text to interpret their lives. Participant 4 wrote,

During the communal prayer, I suddenly saw myself crying uncontrollably and gnashing my teeth, and a sensitive rush of emotion overcame me. I could sense assurance of God’s love and hope; above all, I received a new word in my heart—Christ in me, the hope of glory.

Furthermore, all the participants indicated that *Lectio Divina* had improved their meditation and discernment. Table 3 shows that all participants expressed satisfaction with *Lectio Divina*, enhancing their awareness of God’s presence in their everyday experiences. Participant 2 claimed, “Through the practice of *Lectio*, my listening and discerning gifting have been restored. Now I can sense God is near.” Indeed, Holy Reading facilitates people’s awareness of God’s

presence. Also, Participant 5 wrote, “The practice of *Lectio Divina* is a beautiful and transformative discipline that alters my view of the scripture as indeed the living word of God sent to me.” Table 3 shows that all participants acknowledged that the prayer practice of *Lectio* had facilitated their spiritual growth. They affirmed that *Lectio Divina* inspired them to engage with the Scriptures.

Post-Interviews

My post-interview session with the participants after the four-week prayer exercise was helpful. During these sessions, I met each participant via Zoom to discuss the overall impact of the exercise. I also logged my experiences during these sessions, including the participants' concrete encounters, personal reflections, areas of struggle during the prayers, and the effect of the prayer experience on their lives (Appendix 3). Table 4 summarizes the coding for participants' Divine Hours prayer logs. As shown in Table 4, the bulk of data collected in the post-interview session was positive, and the number and frequency of struggles with the practices saw a reduction. This reduction was due to the participants' assertion during the post-interview sessions that they had encountered God during the prayer practices. A fundamental aspect of spiritual growth is developing an intimate relationship with God.

Table 4: Coding for Post-Interview Logs

Category	Sub-Category	Reference Count
Struggles	Busy Life/Job	2
	Struggling with Time	1
	Always too tired	0
Opportunity	Prayer Rhythm has increased my Devotion	8
	Lectio has enhanced my Awareness and Faith in God	8
	Practice is Transforming	8
	Enhanced relationship with God and love for others	8
	Enhanced self-discovery and clarity of purpose	8
	Increased passion for praying for others	8
	Enhanced my Discerning Skills	8
	Enhanced Fervency in Prayer	8
	Contemplative prayer facilitates peace of mind	8
	The Consistency and Structured Prayer life	8
	Improved Decision-Making competence	8
Continuity	I am pleased and wish to continue the prayer practices	8
	I am not willing to continue the prayer practices	0

According to Table 4, part of the findings includes participants' belief that prayer rhythm has increased their devotion and that *Lectio Divina* has enhanced their

awareness and faith in God. They believed the practices have enhanced their relationship with God and love for others. They saw that the practices had enhanced self-discovery and clarity of purpose, increased passion for praying for others, enhanced their discerning skills, improved their decision-making skills, and enhanced their consistency in prayer. These results show participants' perceived growth in their Christian walk. This research also affirmed that spiritual discipline is one of the avenues through which we connect with God. For instance, the initial challenges the participants faced were their struggles with time for prayer and their inability to navigate their busy schedules. However, exercising the Divine Hour prayer practice helped the participants navigate through the challenges. In particular, the use of common prayer apps (Lectio 365 App, My Daily Office App, and Prayetic App) has helped them navigate their daily prayers. Moreover, the participants showed commitment throughout the project period. Participant 5 wrote,

Maintaining a regular prayer routine is difficult for me because of my job. However, my intentionality, dedication, and use of the Lectio 365 App have made me an expert in this practice. I overcame every struggle during this project. It is amazing.

The data in the post-interview shows that the number of those still struggling with prayer time has reduced.

Explanation of the Opportunity for Growth:

Holy reading, "*Lectio Divina*," is life changing. The four fundamental actions of *Lectio Divina*, *lectio*, *meditatio*, *oratio*, and *contemplatio*, provided space for God's Word in the participants' hearts. Laura (2016) states, "The 4 steps

of *Lectio Divina* offer a space for God's Word to move from the participants' lips into their minds and finally into their hearts." Overall, the journal comments indicated that growth was more prevalent than the identified challenges in this project. The participants commented that Divine Hours prayer and Holy reading had enhanced their Biblical meditation and deepened their focus on God.

Furthermore, the post-interview logs in Table 4 showed that reading and reflecting on the scriptures deepened connections with God and led to a greater sense of peace, comfort, and purpose in our lives. For instance, Participant 7 wrote,

This project has enhanced my consciousness of God and self-discovery. It has given me a structure and roadmap to build on, especially regarding my prayer life. The process has helped me understand the importance of meditation in spiritual growth.

Moreover, Participant 1 claimed,

One of the things that happened to me during this project was the fine-tuning of my mindset. I now focus on God, not what I have and do not have. The prayer rhythm has increased my need for prayer, creating an unabated intensity and considerable urge for personal devotion to God daily.

The project has established in the hearts of all the participants that relative intimacy with God is possible through the spiritual practices of prayer.

Interpretations

Having reflected on the findings, I focus now on interpretations of the data with the following subheadings: 1) Adaptation to New Prayer Practices, 2) Personal Evolution and New Discovery of God, and 3) Communal Prayer is

invaluable to Developing Spiritual Vitality.

Adaptation to New Prayer Practices

Although the Divine Hours prayer and the Holy Reading “*Lectio Divina*” are new practices for my congregation, my church's leadership teams were able to engage in the prayer exercises. Also, by engaging in Divine Hours prayer during this project, the leaders of Healing Stream Center could live out the call to “pray without ceasing” (1 Thessalonians 5:17 NIV). Praying specific prayers at specific times is not new for Pentecostal discipleship; however, incorporating the practice of Divine Hours prayer and the Holy Reading, *Lectio Divina*, was a blessing as they maintained the rhythms of prayer throughout the day. Nippard (2022) states that, “Many Pentecostals are renewing the ancient practice of *Lectio Divina* or Dwelling in the Word.” I believe that the process of *Lectio Divina* is more than reading for reasoning or insight into the text. According to Funk (2006, 9), “It is an encounter between God and the human person.” Anyone desiring God will experience Him if the practice is engaged with understanding. The daily practice of Bible reading and meditation by the Healing Stream Centre makes the practice of “*Lectio Divina*” readily adaptable for the participants.

Additionally, despite being new to the prayer practices, the participants’ acceptance, growth, and commitment to *Lectio Divina* and Divine Hours prayer practices were encouraging. For instance, in the post-interview, Participant 4 shared her experience,

This prayer exercise has helped me be more sensitive to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. Right now, I have discovered that immersing myself in the

story of the Bible and into the action of the scene of what is going on in a passage of scripture that I am reading is a great way to engage with scripture on a deeper level. It also helps me connect with God more in prayer (Participant 4).

During the post-interview session, all participants showed that prayer enhanced their faith, devotion, discernment skills, and awareness of God.

Furthermore, during the *Lectio Divina* session, the participants showed a genuine interest as they listened deeply to each other to see what God might be saying collectively. They adapted to hearing the Word being read aloud; they silently listened to the Holy Spirit while the Word was read and jotted down words, phrases, or verses from the text that were illuminating to them. They shared pleasant insights from God's word with one another in the group. While the participants initially struggled with the practice, the struggle seemed short-lived. All the participants were happy to continue the practice of *Lectio Divina* after the completion of the project. According to the post-interview, all the participants were delighted with the practices, as the prayer practices have helped them grow spiritually through their love and services for the people in the church community. For instance, Participant 6 stated, "This prayer practice has helped me understand the importance of meditation for healthy living and the significance of routine and structured prayer in developing a relational intimacy with God." The participants further requested that the prayer practices continue.

Personal Evolution and New Discovery of God

Pursuing a deeper union with God entails investing time in the discipline that nourishes our spiritual life. Creating an environment for active listening and

praying the Scriptures is crucial to believers' transformation. However, prayer is more than a one-sided conversation; it is a communion with God. According to MacLaren (1910), "The perfection of communion will be the perfection of visible transformation." This project shows prayer as a transformative channel that opens the door to a greater understanding of God. In the post-interview logs, all the participants expressed that the consistency and structured approach of the prayer practices had transformed their lives. All the participants expressed that through the Divine Hours prayer and the Holy Reading of the Scripture, they have gained insight into their identity and purpose in life. For instance, Participant 8 stated, "I never thought I could pray so many times a day because of my busy work. However, I can see myself able to spend a reasonable amount of time praying during this project" (Participant 8, Table 2). In the post-interview, participants 1 and 5 affirmed that their struggles with a lack of consistency in their spiritual practices, such as prayer and scriptural study, were gone during the prayer practices. Likewise, all the participants asserted that their faith had been strengthened, and their awareness of God's love had been enhanced.

Another important discovery through this project is the impact of prayer practices on enhancing meditation. This project has shown that the spiritual practice of *Lectio Divina* is an excellent approach to developing meditation practices. Participant 6 stated, "The impact of *Lectio Divina* prompted me to want to continue the practice. During this time, I have become more aware that God is truly alive and speaking through the Holy Scripture" (Participant 6, Appendix 2

Log). God does speak through the written word, and the practice of *Lectio Divina* creates a space to experience this.

I say that the participants' hunger for God as they showed interest in participating in this prayer research. This affirmed the word of Jesus in Matthew 5 verse 6, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.” My interactions with the participants during the post-interview session revealed that all the participants were pleased with the prayer practices and desired to continue. For instance, Participant 8 said, “My prayer life is far better than when I started this prayer exercise. Currently, all my usual struggles and fears in prayer are no more. I am truly growing spiritually” (Participant 8). Likewise, Participant 3 said, “My joy at present is that I understand with greater reason that my prayers are not meaningless. Now I know that I pray to God, who loves me and always wants me around Him” (Participant 3). This research has shown that a sincere hunger for God stirs the hallowed desire within believers to abide in God’s presence. The hunger for God always results in intimacy—a more meaningful relationship with God.

Communal Prayer is invaluable to developing a Vital Community

Merton (2016) affirms that “spiritual formation cannot take place in isolation but must be grounded in the experience of relationships and community.” Engaging with others with similar values can enhance our understanding and inspire a more profound exploration of our beliefs. However, only a vital church can provide a vibrant community and provide a space for

others to meet God more tangibly. Wynand Johannes (W.J.) De Kock (2024), a Professor of Practical Theology and Director of Open Seminary at Eastern University, writes,

Regular prayer and Bible study create a foundation of wisdom and resilience, enabling believers to stay grounded in their faith. When the church collectively prioritizes these practices, it fosters an environment where spiritual growth is not only possible but inevitable. This, in turn, leads to a more engaged and enthusiastic congregation.

As the participants came together, their understanding was enlarged. Through interaction with one another, during the Divine Hour prayer and the Holy Reading, many participants professed that their awareness of God and self-discovery had been enhanced. According to the post-interview, all participants indicated that these prayer practices have enhanced their relationship with God and love for others. Participant 3 stated,

I have difficulty studying the scriptures because of many distractions and worries, especially the issues with my family's settlement in Canada as immigrants waiting for the approval of their permanent residency application. But coming together for corporate prayer with Lectio has been helpful in my spiritual growth (Participant 3, Appendix 3 Log).

Through this exercise, I saw the positive impact of Divine Hour prayer and the Holy Reading. The members' communal gathering helped nurture their faith, which in turn positively impacted the whole congregation.

Indeed, communal prayer life strengthens bonds and promotes unity. It is an invaluable path to developing spiritual vitality. By surrounding ourselves with praying believers, we create opportunities for individual transformation and collective spiritual growth. Through the sessions, the leadership teams of Healing

Stream Church have been strengthened and more united to serve the will of God in the community collectively.

Outcomes of the Project

While this research data supports the overall objective of this project, which is to enhance the spiritual vitality of the leadership of Healing Stream Centre by deepening their intimacy with God through devotion to personal and communal prayer, I accept that the project outcome may have benefited from my influence on the participants to think positively and trust the efficacy and the impact of the prayer practices of Divine Hour prayer and *Lectio Divina* as I have experienced the same through my spiritual formation program at Tyndale. Below are some of the outcomes of this project.

The outcome of this research was the experience of spiritual vitality: a blazing fire and burning flame experience, which resulted in organizing a city-wide revival prayer and establishing an online prayer ministry.

City-Wide Revival Prayer

After the research, I discovered that my love for God became more intense. I became more passionate about walking with Him. While seeking to know what the Lord wanted me to do for Him, the Lord put in my heart to share with some ministers the vision to organize a two-day revival prayer meeting among the church leaders in the region of Waterloo. In the foregoing, I met a few pastors I know and explained my mission to them, to which they all agreed. We held the first revival prayer in downtown Kitchener. This prayer event allowed

ministers, pastors, and church leaders to come together for prayer and worship sessions. Our focus during the revival event was to pray for the restoration of fresh fire so that revival could break forth in our lives, churches, and cities. We prayed for restoring strength for those who lost their enthusiasm and passion for kingdom service since the COVID-19 pandemic. We also prayed for encouragement and spiritual vitality for all the believers in the Waterloo region. We prayed for boldness for church leaders to preach the word of God with faith.

Jesus says, "I have come to bring fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled!" (Luke 12:49). The real presence of God kindles the fire of God among His people. The participants in the event asked for the continuation of the program. They all desire that we come together and pray that God's light should shine and brighten our cities, regions, and churches. According to Bounds (2022, 18), "Prayer freshens the heart of the preacher, keeps it in tune with God..." As we continue to invest in ourselves through devotion to prayer, God's grace flows and touches those around us. This event occurred in the fall of 2024, and about eight churches were represented in the meeting. Some of the practices engaged during this event included the use of scripture, prayer (various prayer sessions), and moments of song. The attendees' testimonies and the program were refreshing, and many participating churches wanted the meeting to be a yearly event. Each pastor and minister continued the prayer and lessons in our ministries.

Online Prayer Ministry

Another outcome of this research was the startup of an online prayer

ministry, a program run by my church ministers. We started this as we were inspired after prayer research to build an online prayer forum to encourage people to pray. Many people from all over the world have joined this online prayer session. Spiritual vitality calls believers to live as the light of the world. Jesus spoke concerning John: “He was a burning and a shining light: and ye were willing for a season to rejoice in his light” (John 5:35). In other words, Jesus said John was a lamp that burns and shines. All my leaders have resolved to live as Christ calls us, and we trust God to continue to strengthen and sustain us. Jesus spoke concerning John: “He was a burning and a shining light: and ye were willing for a season to rejoice in his light” (John 5:35). The outcome showed that the prayer practices had strengthened the participants' devotion to God and offered them a new insight into spiritual vitality with unspeakable affection. The ministers expressed their desire to continue to be a burning flame for the Lord, both physically and online. I hope many more members will attend our meetings.

Conclusion

It is true that my church's leadership asked for a prayer session that would enhance their spiritual vitality, but I can see that it was God who drew us to Himself and brought about this prayer event. Carter (2017) claims that, “Prayer is an encounter with God that is initiated by him through his Word and that changes our hearts as we humbly communicate and worship the Lord...” We truly encountered God during this exercise. As the participants stated in Table 4, the Holy Spirit has not stopped working; He continues to work within us to enhance

our relationship with God and our love for others.

This research has confirmed that prayer is one of the spiritual practices that helps deepen the participants' experiences of God and enhances our spiritual vitality. This project has deepened my leadership team's understanding of God's love, compassion, and grace. Since they have indicated their interest in continuing these prayer practices, I will pay attention to them over the next six months to see how this exercise of prayer continues to shape and transform them. It will be a joy to see this project extend to the entire congregation of Healing Stream Centre and help. Christian immigrants and other churches are in the Waterloo region.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

THE FUTURE I SEE

Therefore, He says: 'Awake, you who sleep, arise from the dead, and Christ will give you light' (Ephesians 5:14)

The last seven years of my studying of spiritual formation at Tyndale have been life-changing, first during my Master's and second during my Doctor of Ministry program. The transformation experienced within these years, especially in leadership and spirituality, was immense. Through spiritual formation studies, I have gained a profound understanding of what Spiritual Formation is — the transformative action of the Holy Spirit that results in a believer's spiritual vitality and fervency for the sake of others. Also, spiritual vitality is the new and active life believers receive through their union with Christ and the action of the Holy Spirit. Every day, I learn something new about what His plans are. For me, this is life changing. I see my growth in God as a lifetime project. It is a privilege to continue to rediscover God and grow devotionally via formative spiritual practices directed by the Spirit of God.

As I bring this research project to a close, I present this portfolio not just as a collection of findings but as a vision for the future of the church, particularly to the immigrants in Healing Stream Centre who desire intimacy despite the hurdles of settling in a new country. The prayer practices revealed in this research reinforce that God can be reached and experienced. “You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart” (Jeremiah 29:13). Everyone who desires a relational intimacy with God needs to stay intimately united with the Spirit of God, who gives life to its members.

The paragraphs below take a broad view of each chapter of this portfolio to summarize key aspects of spiritual vitality and the place of personal and communal prayer as one of the channels of spiritual formation and a means to achieve a vibrant faith community. Each chapter established the importance of spiritual vitality and the fact that it will be difficult to achieve without an intimate alignment with God.

Reflections on the Chapters

This portfolio includes the Spiritual Autobiography (Chapter 2), the Spiritual Formation Model (Chapter 3), and the Research Project (Chapter 4). Chapter 1 introduces the reader to the portfolio and delves deeply into the meaning and importance of spiritual vitality and its decline. In my introduction, I established that being not idle in business but fervent in the Spirit serving God, as Apostle Paul declared in Romans 12:11, is an honorable call for diligence in fulfilling God’s mandate.

Spiritual decline hardly ever happens suddenly; it begins with minor resistance to the promptings of the Holy Spirit, particularly the careless actions and choices that lead to neglecting attention to our spiritual lives. The ministry of spiritual formation is a proven approach to enhance believers' spiritual vitality, growth, and maturity.

In Chapter 2, I shared some of my life stories highlighting God's work and love that brought me forth despite the circumstances and background of my birth. God's Spirit nurtured me, His power kept me, and His presence continues to guide my steps. One significant thing to highlight from childhood through adolescence was God's abiding presence throughout the journey. The Lord revealed Himself to me early and, by His Spirit, taught me when I was in confusion and desolation. I can now look back and see clearly that some of the events of my life, including my struggles, all played a role in God's shaping the deepest parts of my heart. James encourages his readers to "draw near to God, and He will draw near to you" (James 4:8). I saw the need to draw and yield to God, and as I drew near to God, His power continued to shape me and strengthen me.

Chapter 3 establishes that God is the only strength and sufficiency of His people. Our spiritual vitality and energy flow from Him alone because He is our source. The model chapter highlights some factors contributing to believers' decline in spiritual vitality, specifically among African immigrants in Canada. Some causes of this decline include a lack of genuine consecration, consumerism, spiritual shallowness, and secularization. I narrated how the spiritual practices of discernment, prayer, and scripture helped me to discern God's will for my

seminary education and act by trusting God. The chapter also explores the model of spiritual formation and examines the role of spiritual practices in facilitating this transformation of believers. Some practices discussed scriptural reading, worship, discernment, training and mentoring, and prayer.

In Chapter 4, I tackled the problem of spiritual decline among the Healing Stream Centre leadership teams by exploring a community-based formational strategy of personal and communal prayer practices that focuses on enhancing the participants' deepening experience and strengthening their devotion to God. This research used two prayer approaches: Divine Hours (fixed-hour prayer) and the Holy Reading “*Lectio Divina*.” The Holy Reading “*Lectio Divina*” helped develop competencies in meditation and praying with scripture, especially in a communal setting. The research assessed the transformative impact of praying the daily Divine Hours prayer in conformity with the weekly devotion to the communal prayer of the participants, and the transforming effect of the project’s outcome was encouraging. The outcome of this research was the spiritual vitality of the participants: a blazing fire and burning flame experience, which resulted in organizing a city-wide revival prayer and establishing an online prayer ministry. The two-day revival prayer meeting drew various church leaders in the region of Waterloo. Eight churches were represented in the meeting in the fall of 2024. Another outcome of this research was the startup of an online prayer ministry; this was a program run by my church ministers and leaders. The church leadership was inspired by this prayer research to build an online prayer forum

to encourage people to pray. Many people from all over the world have joined this online prayer session. Many of these participants are now willing and ready to continue this prayer assignment with others in their respective groups. According to the participants' feedback, the research was life changing as it enhanced their deepening experience and strengthened their devotion to God.

Other Specific Insights from this Project

Spiritual Vitality is a basis for spiritual formation that emphasizes on Spiritual growth yielded from an active and fervent relationship with God. This research has demonstrated that prayer facilitates believers' relational intimacy with God. I learned that prayer enhances believers' discernment and helps us discern God's will in every situation. Through this project, prayer has proven to be a vital spiritual practice that enhances growth. As the participants began to engage in spiritual prayer practices, they were drawn to God and started to receive the life and grace that flow from Christ, the "Vine." John 1:4 declares, "In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind."

From this project's result, I hope for a future filled with spiritual vitality, especially for the members of Healing Stream Centre. I envision many immigrants who are struggling with their devotion due to the busyness of their day-to-day lives in Canada receiving strength and vitality. I envision many immigrants will begin to see prayer as not a transaction but a means of engaging God and submitting to His will, where God's people will realize what it means to say, "Let your will be done" (Matthew 6:10). I am persuaded that God is inviting

His people to consider the good ancient path — the path of intentional devotion to spiritual disciplines and practices that will intimately draw them to Him. Just as the early Church lived out an intentional commitment to the life and practice of Christianity, I believe God is inviting His people to rise up in His strength and give attention to the instruction of His Spirit. The early church was determined to be committed to the practice of prayer and the word. “And will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word” (Acts 6:4).

This research has shown how two prayer practices facilitate spiritual transformation and deepen the participants' experiences. Praying with purpose deepens believers' prayer lives, enhances their intimacy with God, and promotes an understanding of genuine devoutness and vitality. Based on the participants' statements, this project has greatly empowered the participants through the various prayer sessions. The research showed that Divine Hours prayer and *Lectio Divina* are effective in personal and communal prayer and group discernment among the participants. However, embracing spiritual disciplines is a journey, not a destination. It is hoped that the participants will continue in the strength of God and will not look back or be distracted.

Finally, as I mentioned in Chapter 4, while this research data supports the overall objective of this project, which is to enhance the spiritual vitality of the leadership of Healing Stream Centre by deepening their intimacy with God through devotion to personal and communal prayer, I accept that the research

outcome may have benefited from my influence on the participants to trust the efficacy and the impact of these prayer practices in their lives as I have experienced the same through my spiritual formation program at Tyndale.

This project has undoubtedly opened my eyes to the possibility of reaching out to other immigrants and church leaders in my community who need to invigorate their prayer lives. My next focus is seeing this project extended beyond the church and its application of benefit to other Christian immigrants new to Canada.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1

Pre-Interview Guiding Question

1. How effective is your prayer life?
2. What are those things that have either negatively or positively impacted your prayer time since you arrived in this Country?
3. How much do you know about yourself?
4. How much do you know about God?
5. Do you love praying alone or with others?
6. Do you have a daily prayer rhythm?
7. How familiar are you with the Divine Hours prayer?
8. Are you familiar with Holy Reading (*Lectio Divina*)?
9. Are you familiar with any contemplative practice?
10. What attracts you to joining this research project?

Appendix 2A

Lectio Divina Practices (Session 1)

Scriptures:

“You have searched me, Lord, and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue you, Lord, know it completely. You have hedged me behind and before, and you lay your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain. Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast. If I say, “Surely the darkness will hide me and the light become night around me,” even the darkness will not be dark to you; the night will shine like the day, for darkness is as light to you. For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful; I know that full well” (Psalm 139: 1-14)

Facilitator Actions

The selected passages were read aloud and slowly 4-5 times by the facilitator as all participants settled into God's presence.

The facilitator paused periodically to let the words and phrases take hold of all listeners.

The facilitator and all participants allowed themselves to participate in the Bible scene.

Participants Actions

During the first reading, the participants looked for words or phrases that stood out to them.

In the second reading, the participants asked how their lives were touched by the words or phrases.

During the third reading, the participants asked what God was inviting them to understand or act upon.

Focus/Sharing: Open the sharing (10-15 minutes)

What characters or images from both Scriptures caught your attention?

What have you learned from both Scriptures?

How might what you learned be helpful to others?

Prayer:

The Facilitator led the participants to respond to God's invitation in prayer.

Appendix 2B

Lectio Divina Practices (Session 2)

Scriptures:

“Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God” (Psalm 43:5)

“At least there is hope for a tree: If it is cut down, it will sprout again, and its new shoots will not fail. ⁸ Its roots may grow old in the ground and its stump die in the soil, yet at the scent of water it will bud and put forth shoots like a plant” (Job 14:7-9)

“I can do all this through him who gives me strength” (Philippians 4:13 NIV)

Facilitator Actions

The selected passages were read aloud and slowly 3-4 times by the facilitator as all participants settled into God's presence.

The facilitator paused periodically to let the words and phrases take hold of all listeners.

The facilitator and all participants allowed themselves to participate in the Bible scene.

Participants Actions

During the first reading, the participants looked for words or phrases that stood out to them.

In the second reading, the participants asked how their lives were touched by the words or phrases.

During the third reading, the participants asked what God was inviting them to understand or act upon.

Focus/Sharing: Open up the sharing (10-15 minutes)

What characters or images from both Scriptures caught your attention?

What have you learned from both Scriptures?

How might what you learned be helpful to others?

Prayer:

The Facilitator led the participants to respond to God's invitation in prayer.

Appendix 2C

Lectio Divina Practices (Session 3)

Scriptures:

That day when evening came, he said to his disciples, "Let us go over to the other side." Leaving the crowd behind, they took him along, just as he was, in the boat. There were also other boats with him. A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped. Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?" He got up, rebuked the wind, and said to the waves, "Quiet! Be still!" Then the wind died down and it was completely calm. He said to his disciples, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?" They were terrified and asked each other, "Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!" (Mark 4:35-41)

Facilitator Actions

The selected passages were read aloud and slowly 4-5 times by the facilitator as all participants settled into God's presence.

The facilitator paused periodically to let the words and phrases take hold of all listeners.

The facilitator and all participants allowed themselves to participate in the Bible scene.

Participants Actions

During the first reading, the participants looked for words or phrases that stood out to them.

In the second reading, the participants asked how their lives were touched by the words or phrases.

During the third reading, the participants asked what God was inviting them to understand or act upon. They must become aware that Jesus is in the storm with you.

Focus/Sharing: Open up the sharing (10-15 minutes)

What characters or images from both Scriptures caught your attention: Is it dark? Can you see any shoreline? Do you see lightning? Waves? Do you smell the sea water? Are you grabbing onto the sail, the side of the boat? Is what you touch slippery? Does a sliver go into your hand? Are you hanging on to another person?

What have you learned from both Scriptures and how might what you learned be helpful to others?

Prayer:

The Facilitator led the participants to respond to God's invitation in prayer

Appendix 2D

Lectio Divina Practices (Session 4)

Scriptures:

"They came to Bethsaida, and some people brought a blind man and begged Jesus to touch him. He took the blind man by the hand and led him outside the village. When he had spit on the man's eyes and put his hands on him, Jesus asked, "Do you see anything?" He looked up and said, "I see people; they look like trees walking around." Once more, Jesus put his hands on the man's eyes. Then his eyes were opened, his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly." (Mark 8:22-25)

"Open my eyes so that I may contemplate wondrous things from your instruction." (Ps. 119:18)

Facilitator Actions

The selected passages were read aloud and slowly 4-5 times by the facilitator as all participants settled into God's presence.

The facilitator paused periodically to let the words and phrases take hold of all listeners.

The facilitator and all participants allowed themselves to participate in the Bible scene.

Participants Actions

During the first reading, the participants looked for words or phrases that stood out to them.

In the second reading, the participants asked how their lives were touched by the words or phrases.

During the third reading, the participants asked what God was inviting them to understand or act upon.

Focus/Sharing: Open up the sharing (10-15 minutes)

What characters or images from both Scriptures caught your attention?

What have you learned from both Scriptures?

How might what you learned be helpful to others?

Prayer:

The Facilitator led the participants to respond to God's invitation in prayer.

Appendix 3

Post-Interview Guiding Question

1. Have these prayer practices improved your prayer life?
2. How have these prayer practices helped your spiritual life?
3. What are the specific things learned during this project?
4. Were there any identified struggles and challenges? What are the challenges? How did you overcome them?
5. How did you experience God's presence?
6. How did this prayer help you to center (focus) on God?
7. What stood out in the contemplative practices of reading the Word?
8. What noticeable change has occurred in you during this communal gathering?
9. Now that you have participated in regular Divine Hour prayer and *Lectio Divina*, how have these practices impacted your personal and communal worship?
10. Are you pleased with these practices?

Appendix 4

Phases and Timetable

Table 5: Phases and Timetable

Phase	Timetable	Who	Description of Action
Ethical Approval Phase	Oct 02	REB Chair	Tyndale REB approval Received
Briefing and Distribution of the Consent Forms	Oct 02 – Oct 08	The Business Intelligence and Security officer	The project facilitator has engaged the Business Intelligence and Security officer (BISO) to coordinate the briefing and distribution of the consent forms. The BISO collated and delivered the signed consent forms to the project facilitator.
Pre-Implementation Phase (Training Session)	Oct 9 – Oct 11	Project facilitator	The project facilitator conducted a training session for the participants to discuss the project's intention. He also conducted a pre-interview session with each participant to determine their baseline regarding their prayer practices. He kept a log of the report on the session.

<p>Implementation Phase</p> <p>The Participants engaged in Divine Hours Prayer on Mondays and Fridays for four weeks and Communal Prayer on Wednesdays for four weeks concurrently.</p>	<p>Oct 14–Nov 8 and Wednesday Oct 16 Oct 23 Oct 30 Nov 6</p>	<p>All Participants</p>	<p>All participants engaged in a personal prayer practice of Divine Hours prayer three times a day, which was conducted concurrently with the weekly Wednesday <i>Lectio Divina</i>. The participants kept a log of them.</p> <p>On the last day of the four-week cycle, the facilitator held a post-interview session with each participant via Zoom and documented their reflections and encounters.</p>
<p>Analysis, Interpretation, and Reporting</p>	<p>Oct 14 – Dec 02</p> <p>Dec 03, 2024 – Jan 26, 2025</p> <p>March 28, 2025</p>	<p>Project facilitator</p> <p>Project facilitator</p> <p>Project facilitator</p>	<p>Arranged data, commenced an initial data review and coding, and categorized the emerging themes.</p> <p>Finding Interpreted and compiled into reports.</p> <p>Final Field Research Report.</p>

Appendix 5

Research Study Verbal Consent Briefing

Research Facilitator: Rev. Ola Vincent Boluwaduro

This research, titled “Enhancing the Spiritual Vitality of the Leadership of Healing Stream Centre through Devotion to Personal and Communal Prayer,” is part of Rev. Ola Vincent Boluwaduro's doctoral program, and the project has been authorized to be conducted by Tyndale University, Toronto. Moreover, Rev. Ola Vincent Boluwaduro will conduct this project within Healing Stream Centre, Kitchener, Ontario. Additionally, this research is a response to the yearning of both the church leadership and the membership for an experiential relationship with God and their belief that prayer is crucial to enhancing their spiritual vitality. The expected duration of the project's research phase is from October 14 to November 8, 2024. Between December 2024 and January 2025, your help will be appreciated in interpreting the data generated from the research.

Furthermore, this research will entail the participants soaking the day with a pattern of prayer through the Divine Hours prayer, also called fixed-hour prayer—morning, mid-day, and evening sessions. This prayer practice will be conducted every Monday and Friday, and the essence is to develop personal time with God. In the evening of each Wednesday of the week, the participants will come together for an hour and a half of communal prayer and group discernment. Furthermore, this prayer exercise will last for one month.

During the intervention, evaluative research methodology will be employed, and the research will assess the transformative impact of praying the Divine Hours in conformity with the weekly communal gathering of the participants. The participants will comprise the Healing Stream Center leadership teams. All information shared will remain strictly confidential, and the identity of participants will not be disclosed to the public domain. Also, the use of pseudonyms will be deployed. All data collected through logs, group interaction notes, and participant observation will be compiled, reviewed, encoded, interpreted, reported, and electronically kept on a secure server.

There are no serious risks associated with participating in this study. Nevertheless, one foreseeable risk posed to the participants is emotional stress from the rigorous prayer sessions. Some of the likely experiences of stress include fatigue, dull headaches, muscle tension, etc. Moreover, participants can mitigate stress by engaging in deep breathing, getting enough sleep, and going for a walk. The church's Business Intelligence and Security officer will distribute the consent forms to all interested leadership teams, both male and female, on behalf of the lead pastor. Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You have the right to decline to participate or to withdraw your consent at any time without consequences. Declining to participate or withdrawing your consent will not affect any current or future relationship with the church or the pastor.

Conclusively, by continuing with the study, you are giving your voluntary verbal consent to participate in this research study and acknowledge that you have understood the information provided in this consent form. You also agree that

your participation is entirely voluntary, and you may withdraw your consent at any time without penalty. If, during the tenure of the research, you have any questions regarding the research, you may contact the Research Ethics board via email at reb@tyndale.ca or Dr. Mark Chapman via email at mchapman@tyndale.ca.

Please state your verbal consent by saying, "I consent to participate in this study."

[Participant's Verbal Consent:]

[Participant's Name:] _____ [Date:] _____

Appendix 6

Information Letter

Research Facilitator: By Rev. Ola Vincent Boluwaduro

Dear friends in Christ,

As the pastor of Healing Stream Centre, I invite you to participate in a research project that I will be conducting at our church as part of my studies as a Doctor of Ministry student at Tyndale Seminary. I will be the facilitator of the project, as well as a fellow participant. All those who choose to be involved will also be given the opportunity to help shape the project, as well as to interpret the results.

The research project, titled *Enhancing the Spiritual Vitality of the Leadership of Healing Stream Centre through Devotion to Personal and Communal Prayer*, will include all those who choose to be part of the participants at Healing Stream Centre during the fall of 2024. The expected duration of the research phase of the project is from October 14 to November 8, 2024. Between December 2024 and January 2025, your help will be appreciated in interpreting the data generated from the research.

The purpose of this research is to respond to the yearning of both the church leadership and the membership for an experiential relationship with God and their belief that prayer is crucial to enhancing their spiritual vitality. The power of prayer is immeasurable, and the connection it fosters with God is unparalleled. In order to achieve this, the participants will soak the day with a pattern of prayer

through the prayer of Divine Hours, also called fixed-hour prayer—morning, midday, and evening. This prayer practice will be conducted every Monday and Friday, and the essence is to develop personal time with God. In the evening of each Wednesday of the week, the participants will come together for an hour and a half of communal prayer and group discernment. Moreover, this prayer exercise will last for one month.

Considering the risks and benefits of participating in this research, there are no serious risks associated with participating in this study. However, one foreseeable risk posed to the participants of this research project is emotional stress, which comes from the rigorous sessions of prayer. Some of the likely experiences of stress include fatigue, dull headaches, gastrointestinal problems, muscle tension, etc. More so, some ways participants can mitigate stress include engaging in deep breathing, getting enough sleep, and going for a walk.

During the intervention, evaluative research methodology will be employed, and the research will assess the transformative impact of praying the Divine Hours in conformity with the weekly communal gathering of the participants. The participants will comprise the Healing Stream Centre leadership teams, and it is anticipated that the outcome of this project will enhance the participants' deepening experience and strengthen their devotion to God. All information and identity of participants will not be disclosed to the public domain. Also, the use of pseudonyms will be deployed, and all feedback received, and all data collected through logs, group interaction notes, and participant observation will be

compiled, reviewed, encoded, interpreted, reported, and electronically kept on a secure server.

Moreover, I acknowledge that I am in a dual role throughout this research project as your pastor and a research facilitator. However, I pledge not to pressure each participant in any way and always to seek your and the congregation's best interests. To prevent personal bias, favoritism, and power differential in the relationship with the participants, I will engage a third party, the church Business Intelligence officer, in the selection process. The church's Business Intelligence officer will coordinate the selection process and distribute the consent forms to all male and female leadership teams on behalf of the lead pastor. No interested participants among the leaders will be prohibited from participating in the prayer research. Moreover, I affirm that your participation in this research project is completely voluntary. You are also completely free to discontinue your involvement in the research at any time without consequence and to withdraw any of your data from the study.

If you have any questions, feel free to contact me, Pastor Ola Vincent Boluwaduro, either via office phone (226-647-1080), email (pastor@healingstreamorg), or in person. I may also direct any questions or concerns about the ethical nature of this study to the Chair of the Tyndale Research Ethics Board at Tyndale Seminary at reb@tyndale.ca. You are also welcome to contact Pastor Ola Vincent Boluwaduro's research supervisor, Dr.

Mark Chapman, Associate Professor of Research Methods, Tyndale Seminary, via email (mchapman@tyndale.ca) or office phone (416-226-6620, Ext. 2208).

Thank you for considering participation in this research project. Grace and peace be with you,

Rev. Ola Vincent Boluwaduro

Appendix 7

Consent Form

Consent to Participate in the Study:

Enhancing Spiritual Vitality of the Leadership of Healing

Stream Centre through Devotion to Personal and Communal

Prayer

[October 14, 2024 – November 08, 2024]

Conducted by:

Ola Vincent Boluwaduro

(DMin, Research Scholar)

Tyndale University, Toronto, Canada

Contact information:

Phone: 1-416-226-6620

Email: contact@tyndale.ca

Under the supervision of: Dr. Mark Chapman

For the course:

DMin, Spiritual Formation (DMSF)

I understand that I am invited to participate in the research study named above.

This study intends to explore how strategic personal and communal prayer practices build rhythm and vitality into believers' lives of communing with God. It explores how participating in a small group discipleship program that focuses on prayer deepens believers' individual experiences with God and rekindles one's intimacy and awareness of God. By signing this form in the space provided at the end, I indicate my agreement to participate in the study.

What Will Participation Involve?

My participation will consist of the following activities:

- Participants will receive consent forms from the church's Business Intelligence and Security officer after one week. The officer will coordinate the distribution of the consent forms to be signed by the participants on behalf of the lead researcher and the return to the lead researcher. Participants can withdraw from the project at any time without consequence. The anticipated schedule for these events is between October 01 and October 08, 2024
- During the pre-implementation phase (the Focus group), the researcher will discuss the purpose, aims, and use of results with the participants of the project. However, I understand that any participant can withdraw from the project at any time without consequence. The anticipated schedule for the pre-implementation phase is between October 09 and October 11, 2024
- I understand that the Intervention Phase will be in two stages:
 1. During the First Intervention Phase, participants will start to engage in the Divine Hours Prayer. All participants will engage in a personal transformative Divine Hours Prayer practice three times a day, which includes morning, afternoon, and evening sessions on Mondays and Fridays for four weeks. The essence of this practice is to develop personal time with God and revive one's intimacy and awareness of God. During this prayer exercise, the participants will explore prayers such as praying the scriptures. The anticipated schedule for the First Intervention Phase is between October 14 and November 8, 2024. I

understand that participants will keep a log of the report of whether they engage in the exercise or not and how helpful or unhelpful the prayer exercise is to them each day.

2. During the Second Intervention Phase, participants will be engaging in Weekly Wednesday Communal Prayer. The venue of the hour-and-a-half meeting experience is the church auditorium at 283 Duke Street, Kitchener. I will be engaging in communal prayer with other fellow participants for an hour and a half for the entire four weeks. In the evening of each Friday of the week, the participants will come together for an hour and a half of communal prayer and group discernment. The overall goal of this project is to deepen the participants' lives of devoutness and enhance their intimacy and awareness of God. This event is done concurrently with the Daily Hour Prayer. The anticipated schedule for this activity is between October 18 and November 8, 2024.

I understand that throughout the four weeks, participants will spend an hour and a half of Friday meetings in the church. The facilitator observes, notes, and documents all events.

- During the analysis, interpretation, and reporting phase, all data collected through logs, group interaction notes, and participant observation will be compiled, reviewed, coded, interpreted, reported, and electronically kept on a secure server throughout the project cycle for a temporary period.

Are There Significant Risks?

I understand the research is not a restricted and classified data collection but a shared burden that is borne out of a mutual desire for the rebirth of vitality through communal prayer in the church. Nevertheless, I recognize that there is a foreseeable risk of emotional stress that comes from the rigorous sessions of prayers. Some of the likely experiences of stress include fatigue, dull headaches, gastrointestinal problems, muscle tension, etc. More so, I understand that some of the ways participants can mitigate stress include engaging in deep breathing, getting enough sleep, and going for a walk.

What Benefits Will My Participation Bring?

I understand that this research establishes prayer as one vital way to create an atmosphere for encountering God. Engaging in a new kind of Divine Hours Prayer by the participants and praying community with others will bring transformation to the participants. Therefore, I am optimistic that this research project will bring me closer to God.

Will the Information I Share Be Kept Confidential?

I have received assurance from the researcher that the information I will share will remain strictly confidential. I understand that the contents will be used only to determine the impact of prayer in deepening the participants' lives of devoutness and enhancing their intimacy and awareness of God. And how the project can strengthen the readiness of the participant to lead a life of service. I

understand that all information gathered from participants will remain confidential and protected on a secure server.

Will My Identity Remain Anonymous?

I have been assured that my participation and my identity in this study will not expose me to the public domain. I have also been assured that the use of pseudonyms will be allowed through the research.

What Will Happen to the Records of My Participation?

All information gathered from participants will be protected on a secure server. For ethical conduct, data will be destroyed after the completion of all the research purposes, process, and final data analysis has been used for defense.

Will the Study Results Be Shared?

I understand that this project will be published as part of the DMin Spiritual Formation portfolio, which will be accessible to the public on the Tyndale website and affiliates, apart from the research participants' details and locations. The participants will be informed of the results of the research and their publication.

Will I Receive Any Compensation?

I understand that this prospect would not attract any compensation as it was borne out of a passion to see changes in the believers' lives and ministry. The participants share a burden that is borne out of a mutual desire for the rebirth of vitality through communal prayer in the church. No material benefit or compensation shall be involved.

Is My Participation Voluntary?

I understand that I am under no pressure to take part in this project – there is no coercion, and my participation is purely voluntary. Also, there will be no penalty if I choose not to participate, and I will not lose any benefits to which I am otherwise entitled. If I choose to participate, I can withdraw from the study at any time and/or refuse to answer any questions without suffering any negative consequences. If I choose to withdraw, all information gathered about me prior to my withdrawal will be excluded from the study. I understand that if I choose to participate in this research, I will not waive any legal rights.

Consent to Participate

I, _____, have read and understood the above information, and I freely consent to participate in this research study by signing in the space provided below. If I have any further questions about the study, I may contact the researcher, Ola Boluwaduro, at any stage at ola.boluwaduro@mytyndale.ca.

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

Participant's signature _____ Date _____

Appendix 8

Non-Disclosure Agreement

This Non-Disclosure Agreement is made between Rev Ola Vincent Boluwaduro, a student at Tyndale University pursuing his Doctorate in Spiritual Formation, and Mr. Christopher Brook, the Business Intelligence officer of Healing Stream Centre. Given that Ola Vincent Boluwaduro is the Lead Pastor of Healing Stream Centre and a participant in the research, he will be engaging Christopher Brook, the church's Business Intelligence officer, who is a non-member of the church leadership team, as a third party. Christopher Brook will brief the participants about the research and coordinate the selection process. The Business Intelligence officer will distribute and return the consent forms to be signed by the participants on behalf of the lead researcher. This will prevent personal bias, favouritism, and power differential in the relationship with the participants.

Furthermore, Ola Vincent Boluwaduro will conduct research within the Healing Stream Centre and have the key leadership team as co-participants. It is pertinent to state that the church Business Intelligence officer is not part of this key leadership group, so his involvement will not influence the participants' selection and coordination of consent.

The research aims to enhance the spiritual vitality of the Leadership of Healing Stream Centre. The key reason for conducting this research in Healing Stream Centre is the yearning of the church leadership and the membership for an

experiential relationship with God and their belief that prayer is crucial to enhancing their spiritual vitality and devoutness.

Ola Vincent Boluwaduro will disclose the nature of the research to Christopher Brook so that the latter may brief the participants on their consent to participate. The Business Intelligence officer will be involved only in briefing the participants and receiving their consent for the research. The Business Intelligence officer will not be involved in the data collection and other parts of the research. The Business Intelligence officer will agree to keep the disclosed information confidential and to use the information solely for the purpose specified by Ola Vincent Boluwaduro. The Business Intelligence officer will not disclose any information to any third party without prior consent from Ola Vincent Boluwaduro.

Ola Vincent Boluwaduro

Christopher Brook

Signature: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Date: _____

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