

北美中華福音神學院

**Exploring the Necessity and Feasibility
of Introducing Spiritual Disciplines to
Chinese American Christians: Using
LVCCC as An Example**

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Abstract

The concept of spiritual formation disciplines, embraced in many Christian churches in America recently, has yet to gain familiarity among many Chinese Christians. Despite their enthusiasm for Bible knowledge, many find it challenging to translate their theoretical understanding of faith into practical application. Drawn on the author's own spiritual journey, it has become apparent that spiritual disciplines are crucial for Christian's spiritual growth.

Observations within the author's ministry reveal a tendency among Chinese Christians and Chinese American churches to overlook the importance of spiritual discipline. Mere adherence to outward rituals or a theoretical comprehension of faith proves insufficient for transformative living. This reality is not only taught in the Scripture but also testified in the author's life experience. Moreover, the literature research conducted in this project demonstrates that both historical spiritual traditions and contemporary scholarly findings affirm the crucial role of actively participating in spiritual discipline as the pathway to translating faith knowledge into practical action in everyday life.

This project emerges from a desire to comprehend the spiritual condition of Chinese congregations in North America and to introduce spiritual practices to Chinese American churches. The thesis asserts that Chinese Christians need spiritual discipline that is grounded in Scripture and supported by historical spiritual traditions and contemporary studies, and an introduction to spiritual discipline, facilitated through preaching and practical training in *Lectio Divina*, holds the potential to bridge the gap between understanding of faith and put it into action.

The research project is structured into two phases, emphasizing both understanding and practical implementation for the holistic growth of the Chinese Christian community. First, practical experiments at Las Vegas Chinese Christian Church (LVCCC), where a themed sermon series and small group practical training in *Lectio Divina* are implemented to explore the feasibility of introducing

spiritual disciplines. Through experiments in LVCCC, the author aims to gauge the acceptance and potential for teaching spiritual disciplines in Chinese American churches. The second phase involves a survey that delves into the spirituality of Chinese American Christians through quantitative analysis. It aims to identify the present spiritual situation of sampled Chinese Christians, elucidate their engagement and attitudes toward spiritual discipline, and evaluate the efforts of churches in supporting spiritual formation. Through the survey, the author seeks to obtain a preliminary overview of the spiritual conditions and needs of Chinese Christians in America. Additionally, the study explores potential approaches of training believers to lead godly lives through active engagement in spiritual disciplines.

In delving into the spiritual landscape of Chinese Christians, specifically those associated with LVCCC, and emphasizing the engagement of its members in learning and practicing spiritual disciplines, the intention is for the insights derived from this study to have broader implications for the Chinese Christian community. The author also hopes to contribute this valuable knowledge to inspire spiritual growth among all believers.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

This chapter serves as the background and summary for this research project in ministry. It begins by explaining the motivations of driving the undertaking of this project. A personal testimony is shared, revealing the significant impact of spiritual disciplines on the author's spiritual journey. Background details about the Las Vegas Chinese Christian Church (LVCCC), where the author served as the sole pastor for seven years, are also provided. Following this, the chapter presents the project's hypothesis and purpose, followed by a detailed description of the project. Finally, key terms are defined, and the dissertation's structure is presented.

Motivations for the Project

In the beginning of his well-known book “Celebration of Disciplines”, Richard Foster, a prominent pastor and theologian, wrote:

Superficiality is the curse of our age. The doctrine of instant satisfaction is a primary spiritual problem. The desperate need today is not for a greater number of intelligent people, or gifted people, but for deep people. The classical Disciplines of the spiritual life call us to move beyond surface living into the depths. They invite us to explore the inner caverns of the spiritual realm. They urge us to be the answer to a hollow world.¹

This statement holds true for the world, the church, and personally for me.

¹ Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*, (New NY: HarperOne, 2007). 5

Personal testimony

Establishing a connection with God has taken on profound significance for me in recent years. Despite maintaining a devotional routine for a long time, it was more of a habitual and dutiful practice rather than something I embraced out of genuine love for God. Although growing up as an atheist in China, I always held the belief in a higher power governing the world. It wasn't until my first year in the United States, when I received a Chinese Bible from the Campus Crusade, that I delved into the Old Testament without knowing anything about Christianity.

My first encounter with discussions about God, through this Bible, revealed the complexity of His nature. It showed that God is not only benevolent but can also display elements of violence and bloodshed, which initially scared me and made me want to keep my distance from Him. However, in my second year in the U.S., I was invited to a small Chinese church—a community of fellow lonely and poor Chinese students. The warmth and friendliness of this environment drew me in, eventually leading me to embrace Christianity. Though accepting God wasn't a daunting task, trusting Him as my heavenly Father took many years to develop.

Over the next decade, I completed my graduate studies, secured employment, got married, and welcomed two children into my life. Throughout this journey, I encountered God through numerous Bible classes and sermons, gaining a wealth of knowledge about Him. However, a genuine relationship with Him remained elusive. My approach centered around trying to please Him in the hope of receiving blessings. I faithfully attended churches and Bible study classes, believing that if I fulfilled my responsibilities, He would reciprocate accordingly.

In the year 2000, our family relocated to Las Vegas due to my husband's job change. Initially, we attended the local Chinese church, but considering our children's

lack of proficiency in Chinese, we transitioned to an American church, Shadow Hills Church. The senior pastor at this church was an exceptional preacher, well informed in biblical knowledge. His sermons, illustrating how God actively operates in our daily lives, captivated me. Additionally, God orchestrated a unique encounter by sending a visiting Chinese pastor to stay in my home when she came to preach in Las Vegas. This influence, coupled with the miraculous intervention of God, led me to enroll in Dallas Theological Seminary, despite being a part-time student.

During my seven years in the seminary, my spirituality underwent a profound transformation. The extensive biblical knowledge and personal testimonies shared by professors deeply touched my heart. God, once perceived as a distant and unknown power, became my personal Savior and Lord. Upon graduating, my initial plan was to serve as a Sunday school teacher and occasionally engage in short-term medical missionary work. However, God had a different path in mind for me – a call to full-time ministry.

Despite my resistance to leaving behind my 20-year career as a pharmacist for an entirely new vocation, God persisted in His call. Initially dismissing it as mere imagination, I eventually surrendered after months of internal struggle. In 2016, I embraced the role of a full-time pastor at the Las Vegas Chinese Christian Church (LVCCC). This marked a significant shift in my life's trajectory as I responded to God's unmistakable calling.

Upon stepping into the role of pastor at LVCCC, an independent Chinese church with approximately 100 members, I encountered a unique challenge. The church had been without a long-term pastor since its establishment in 1996, enduring a seven-year no pastor period before my arrival. Faced with the task of building from the ground up, and lacking practical pastoral experience, I dedicated all my energy to Bible teaching, grounded in the theological knowledge acquired during my seminary years.

My early pastoral sermons centered on the imperative to emulate the life of Jesus, emphasizing the importance of serving the church, fostering love among members, and spreading the gospel. Over three years, the church experienced blessings and growth. Recognizing the need for further guidance and a deeper understanding of leading a church, I, with the miraculous help of God, embarked on a new chapter by enrolling in the Chinese Evangelical Seminary North America (CESNA).

The study at CESNA provided me with valuable knowledge and wisdom for pastoring churches, enhancing my capabilities in this role. However, the demanding workload, coupled with academic pursuits, left me physically and spiritually drained. Faced with a desperate situation, I found myself spending more and more time on my knees, relying on God's strength to navigate each day. In moments of powerlessness during prayer, a desire to draw close to God emerged. While serving the Lord brought immense joy, I yearned to truly know Jesus on a deeper level—to be close enough to touch Him, akin to the sick woman in Luke 8, and to sense His presence throughout each day.

At a providential moment, CESNA presented a class titled "Practice Theology for Spiritual Formation," facilitated by Pastor and Doctor Dora Wang. This transformative course comprised two parts: the first focusing on *practical* theology, and the latter half featuring a *four-day three-night* silent retreat—a pivotal experience that would serve as a guiding light for my journey ahead.

During these *four* days of retreat, approximately 15 ministers gathered for guided prayer, meditation, and prolonged periods of silence. Much of our time was spent in absolute quietude, even refraining from speaking during mealtimes. Initially apprehensive, I soon sought companionship with God and discovered profound comfort. The intimacy with God I experienced during those *four* days was unparalleled. Despite

my limited knowledge of meditation and other spiritual disciplines, I departed with newfound approaches to drawing closer to God.

Throughout the retreat, we were introduced to Ignatius' *Spiritual Exercises*, a concept unfamiliar to me until then. Each day, we meditated on different Bible verses and shared our reflections with a spiritual director in the evenings. Walking along the stations of the cross in the retreat monastery, I felt the palpable reality of Jesus, as if engaged in hours-long conversations with Him. Through Ignatius' imaginative prayer, I journeyed alongside Jesus through each station, experiencing His pain and profound love. It was during this retreat that I grasped, for the first time, the concept of salvation by grace. I understood that it was His actions, not mine, that saved me. God had been patiently waiting for me, and only now had I allowed myself to fully open up to Him.

This retreat, along with a few other spiritual formation classes provided by the seminary, introduced me to various spiritual disciplines. I was urged to document my spiritual journey and prayers to God. This practice of journaling has evolved into a cornerstone of my spiritual development. In my journal, I meticulously record meditations on Scripture, engage in self-examination regarding my ministry, and grapple with the challenges of discerning the will of God. At times, journaling serves as a form of spiritual therapy, occupying a significant portion of my devotional time. Yet, engaging in this dialogue with God through my journal has been a source of genuine joy. Within its pages, God witnesses all my emotions—whether it be anger, depression, or profound joy.

Christian meditation, a discipline introduced during the retreat, has also become pivotal for my spiritual formation. Initially cautious due to its associations with eastern religions and the new age movement, I discovered the rich Christian heritage of meditation. Encouraged by renowned Christian authors and recognizing the Bible's call

for believers to meditate on God's words, I embraced meditation as an integral part of my devotional time. Often, I immerse myself in a scripture passage, ensuring a deep understanding and enjoyment of its messages. Imagining myself as a character in a Bible story, sensing healing or love from Jesus, has become a frequent meditation practice. I've learned to read the Bible both devotionally and informatively.

Previously, the Psalms and Song of Songs held limited interest for me, but now, I make it a daily practice to read them. These books have become a channel for expressing my love to the Lord and receiving His love in return. The emotions conveyed by the authors often resonate with my own, providing encouragement during dark days and prompting praise when joy is intense.

Prayer stands as the central spiritual discipline in my journey of spiritual formation. Previously, my approach to prayer was ritualistic, focusing on personal needs and the needs of others—a sort of to-do list for both God and myself. However, prayer has since evolved into an intimate opening of my heart to the Lord. I've incorporated elements like music and candles to aid in entering His presence, and I've been amazed at how tangibly present He truly is. Rather than a list of petitions, my prayers now involve more heartfelt conversations about my feelings and the events unfolding in my life. There are times when words are unnecessary, and I simply sit with Him, soaking in His love and embracing His peace. In His presence, worldly concerns diminish, and my petitions become shorter while my praises extended.

Devotion has transformed from a task into an eagerly anticipated time of meeting with my friend, Jesus. The use of fasting has also become a regular practice for me. While I had previously fasted for "important" prayers, my fasting now serves the purpose of experiencing the truth in Matthew 4:4, "Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God." Through fasting, I encounter the genuine power

of the spirit that can triumph over physical needs. It also serves as a training ground for self-control, enabling me to manage my emotions, feelings, and words more effectively. Fasting provides a tangible connection to Jesus' suffering; realizing that for love of me, He endured far worse than hunger motivates me to express my love by sacrificing some of my meals.

The impact of these spiritual disciplines on my own life has been profound, leading me to experience the tangible reality of God, quenching the thirst of my soul, and providing the strength to overcome the challenges of the world. Inspired by these transformative experiences, I have committed myself to helping others encounter these precious moments. In my ministry, I've come to realize that the people I meet need Christ more than anything the sermons alone can offer.

Motivated by this understanding, I initiated a research project with the goal of helping people recognize that Christian faith extends beyond external actions—it's about nurturing an internal life. God desires us to be His children, not merely individuals engaged in "Christian things." While it may be easier to conform to right actions, the true challenge lies in becoming individuals who are fundamentally different from our natural selves. Once people can grasp this concept, they begin to understand the vital importance of spiritual discipline.

Encouraging people to consistently practice these disciplines can be challenging before they taste the sweetness and depth they bring. However, based on my own journey, I can attest that the effort is unequivocally worthwhile. I firmly believe that true peace, joy, and hope in the imminent return of the Lord can only be found within the security of a growing relationship with Him, fostered through spiritual disciplines. Thus, I propose that the church prioritizes these matters, making them a regular feature in congregational

life. My sincere hope is that by introducing and emphasizing these disciplines, they will become an integral part of every church.

Through personal experience, I've witnessed a transformation in my ministry. Being recognized as a godly and prayerful pastor carries far more significance than success in managing tasks. What value is there in organizational talent if it doesn't reflect the character of God? This project, born out of my personal journey, holds implications that extend beyond me or my congregation, reaching into the broader landscape of Christian life and ministry.

Ministry Context

Founded in 1996 by a group of Chinese Christians from Taiwan, Las Vegas Chinese Christian Church (LVCCC) originated as a non-denominational independent church, stemming from a Bible study group. As of 2023, it draws an average of approximately 200 attendees for Sunday worship. This congregation comprises around 150-170 adults in the Chinese congregation, about 20 in the youth/English congregation, and 20-30 children.

LVCCC is characterized by a diverse demographic, with about half of its congregation originating from Taiwan and the other half from mainland China. The youth and children predominantly consist of America-born Chinese (ABC). The church community is largely composed of retired couples from major cities in other states, with a minority of younger families employed by the local university, casinos, or small businesses. Notably, the majority of attendees are highly educated, holding master's or doctorate degrees.

The retired individuals split their time between caring for grandchildren at their children's homes and embarking on global adventures to enjoy their retirement. They are

mostly long-term Christians, some of them had held significant positions such as elders, deacons, or Bible study teachers before their retirement. Despite possessing abundant knowledge of the Bible, many retired people have chosen to step back from active church ministry due to busy travel schedules or negative experiences in their previous church engagements.

On the other hand, the younger families face demanding work schedules, exacerbated by busy weekends dedicated to their children's various extracurricular activities, such as sports, music classes, arts, Chinese schools, martial arts, etc., aimed at preparing their offspring for prestigious universities. In comparison to neighboring cities like Los Angeles, Las Vegas has a relatively small Chinese population, contributing to language barriers that impede Chinese immigrants from securing desirable employment opportunities. Consequently, these families place their American dreams on their children, investing significant time and resources to ensure their offspring have a better future than themselves.

LVCCC serves not only as a place for Chinese Christians to worship God but also as a gathering spot for local Chinese individuals to connect, share life experiences, celebrate Chinese festivals, and build friendships. Due to everyone's hectic schedules, only a few people can participate in Sunday school classes and weekday fellowships. Despite the congregation's firm belief in the gospel, there is not an active pursuit of spiritual growth, rendering the church more akin to a spiritual retirement community.

LVCCC, established by a handful of conservative-minded Christian families from Taiwan, stands firm on its foundational principles. However, the absence of a seminary-trained leader over the years has presented unique challenges. The congregation's lack of theological expertise has fostered a deep-seated fear of theological deviations, leading to a reluctance to embrace new ideas for fear of doctrinal error. The congregation's exposure

to teachings from guest speakers with diverse backgrounds has resulted in a confused theological landscape. Without the guidance of a denominational framework, the church leaders struggle to effectively fulfill their role in shepherding the congregation. Despite these obstacles, there exists a palpable hunger for spiritual enrichment and growth within the community.

LVCCC faces a significant challenge due to the absence of a clear and unified vision, hindering its ability to move forward with confidence. Without a shared mission, the congregation finds itself adrift, lacking direction and purpose. Leaders wrestle with the challenging endeavor of inspiring and uniting the community towards a shared objective. The congregation's reluctance to stray from familiar traditions stifles its willingness to explore new avenues of spiritual experience and growth. As a result, the church's focus has shifted toward preserving congregational satisfaction, sometimes at the detriment of pursuing meaningful growth and deeper engagement with God.

LVCCC faces a delicate balance between respecting the traditions cherished by its elder members and fostering a dynamic community that appeals to younger generations. With the majority of the congregation being older individuals, there's a growing reliance on younger members for ministry roles and leadership positions, which can overwhelm them with added responsibilities. This tension between the needs and expectations of different age groups often leads to conflicts within the ministry.

The author has held the position of pastor at LVCCC for seven years since 2016. During this period, the church has witnessed growth from about 100 to 200 attendees. Several fellowship groups have been established, and approximately a dozen new converts are baptized each year. Before the research project began, the author had led the congregation in reading through the entire Bible twice in four years. Despite their commendable Bible knowledge, the author noticed that the spiritual lives of the

congregation did not progress as much as their understanding. Issues such as the separation of young and old generations, misplaced priorities in life, and immature church leadership remained largely unaddressed. This indicates that biblical knowledge alone is not sufficient to resolve these problems; we need additional tools to help the congregation grow spiritually. Developing a close relationship with God and obtaining the ability to follow His will are essential. By doing so, we can overcome our own desires and love God and others more, which fundamentally helps solve our problems.

To address this concern and draw from the author's own spiritual journey, the introduction of the spiritual disciplines project commenced in 2022. The goal is to foster deeper spiritual growth and engagement within the congregation, aiming to bridge the gap between knowledge and the lived experience of faith.

Introducing new devotional practices has been met with resistance rooted in misconceptions about spiritual disciplines and traditions. Some members conflate these practices with salvation by works or associate them exclusively with Catholicism, while others fear the perceived influence of non-Christian religions. Therefore, the author chose to start from the fundamental teaching at the pulpit each Sunday for nine months, which convinced many members that practicing spiritual disciplines is biblical and necessary for Christian growth. The details of this process will be discussed in the later chapters.

Spiritual Characteristics of Chinese American Christians

Chinese American churches possess unique characteristics that distinguish them from mainstream American churches. Two notable traits are their theological conservatism and organizational independence, according to Pyong Min, who is professor of Sociology of Queens college, ² Chinese American churches are

² Pyong Gap Min and Jung Ha Kim, *Religions in Asian America: Building Faith Communities*, (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press), 2002. 87

predominantly theologically conservative, which means that they place emphasis on academic, rational understanding of the Bible than on social justice issues. Min elaborates that Chinese American churches emphasize traditional Evangelical beliefs, which stand in contrast to the more liberal perspectives found in many mainstream American churches. This conservatism is reflected in their adherence to Biblical inerrancy, the importance of personal conversion experiences, and a strong focus on evangelism. Organizationally, these churches tend to operate independently. They often emerge from fellowship groups and maintain a non-denominational stance. This independence allows them to cater specifically to the cultural and spiritual needs of their congregations without external denominational constraints.³

Chinese American churches differ from mainstream American churches in their ideologies and values. Majority of these churches are of the evangelical theme, focusing heavily on moral education and family values.⁴ This orientation towards moral and family values resonates with many Chinese immigrants who seek stability and continuity in their new lives. As well-educated professionals living in middle-class suburbs, these immigrants are less concerned with social justice issues, which dominate the agendas of liberal Christians. Instead, they focus on social group belonging and moral education for their children. Evangelical Christianity offers clear and absolute moral guidelines that appeal to this desire for certainty.

As Kuo states, and as the author observes, the reasons Chinese immigrants attend church are varied.⁵ While some are genuinely interested in Christianity, others view the church as a way to build social networks and receive practical support. Many parents encourage their children to attend church to instill family-oriented values and maintain

³ Pyong Gap Min and Jung Ha Kim, *Religions in Asian America: Building Faith Communities*, (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press), 2002. 87

⁴ Yi-Hsuan Chelsea Kuo, "Identity Formation in Chinese Christian Churches in the United States," *Sociology Mind* Vol.04 (No.04, 2014). 6

⁵ Ibid. 7

cultural heritage. Church attendance is seen as a way to convey both Christian teachings and traditional Chinese values, helping to ensure that children grow up with a strong moral foundation.

Based on Chinese unique culture and background presented by Benjamin Shin, who is a pastor and professor of Biola University, there are at least three advantages and three disadvantages for the spiritual formation of Chinese Christians. The first advantage is that Chinese Christians hold a high view of God and Scripture.⁶ According to Shin, due to the influence of Confucianism which emphasize obedience as a virtue, Chinese Christians have a high view of God and a strong acknowledgment of the authority of Scripture. In author's ministry, this deep reverence fosters a robust theological foundation, encouraging believers to live lives that reflect biblical teachings. Such a high regard for God and Scripture makes some spiritual disciplines in evangelical tradition, such as the Bible study, prayer, and corporal worship, widely practiced by Chinese Christians.

Second, Chinese Christians emphasize high moral values and ethical living, which aligns with traditional Confucian principles like righteousness, propriety, and integrity.⁷ This cultural connection strengthens their commitment to living out their faith in everyday actions, fostering a life of moral integrity. According to Pew Research, Asian American Christians' views on moral issues such as homosexuality and abortion vary based on religious affiliation. Evangelical Protestants, particularly, tend to hold more conservative positions, opposing both homosexuality and abortion. This contrasts with the more liberal views of non-Christian Asian American groups, such as Buddhists, Hindus, and the religiously unaffiliated, as well as with the broader public opinion in the U.S.⁸

⁶ Benjamin C. Shin and Sheryl Takagi Silzer, *Tapestry of Grace: Untangling the Cultural Complexities in Asian American Life and Ministry*, (Eugene OR: Wipf & Stock, 2016) Kindle Edition. 74

⁷ Ibid. 74

⁸ Asian Americans: A Mosaic of Faiths, Pew Research Center, <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2012/07/19/asian-americans-a-mosaic-of-faiths-social-and-political-attitudes/>, (Accessed on 09/21/24)

Second, Chinese Christians promote high moral values and ethical living. The focus on moral integrity and ethical behavior aligns with traditional Confucian values, which emphasize righteousness, propriety, and integrity. This cultural alignment reinforces the commitment to living out one's faith in practical, everyday actions. This view is also supported by Pew Research. Asian American Christians' moral positions on homosexuality and abortion vary according to religious affiliation. Much more evangelical Protestants tend to hold more conservative views, opposing both homosexuality and abortion, comparing with Non-Christian Asian American groups (Buddhists, Hindus, and the unaffiliated), and the general opinion of American.

Third, Chinese believers often demonstrate a strong commitment to their local church.⁹ This commitment fosters a sense of community and belonging, which is vital in a Chinese culture where group identity is paramount. Active involvement in church life through service and participation in various ministries strengthens Chinese Christians overall spirituality.

However, Chinese Christians also have at least three disadvantages for their spiritual formation. First, Chinese have higher tendency to focus on seeking approval from others.¹⁰ In honor-shame cultures, individuals often measure their worth based on the recognition and esteem they receive from their community. This emphasis on external validation can lead to a performance-oriented spirituality, where actions are motivated more by the desire for approval than genuine faith.

⁹ Benjamin C. Shin and Sheryl Takagi Silzer, *Tapestry of Grace: Untangling the Cultural Complexities in Asian American Life and Ministry*, (Eugene OR: Wipf & Stock, 2016) Kindle Edition. 75

¹⁰ Ibid.37

Second, Chinese Christians are severely influenced by shame, which inherently relational and deeply personal, can profoundly affect spiritual formation.¹¹ This feeling can lead to withdrawal, hiding, and a lack of authenticity with God and others. Furthermore, shame often results in a range of coping mechanisms, from excessive pious spirituality to resignation, which can hinder true spiritual growth.

Third, Chinese Christians find it more difficult to be open in front of others.¹² Shame can significantly impact the quality of ministries such as small groups. The fear of being shamed and the desire to maintain honor can restrict openness and sharing within these groups, making spiritual disciplines such as confession and spiritual direction very difficult. Consequently, many Chinese Christians struggle with sins on their own, so they lie and keep themselves very busy in the church to cover their problems.

By acknowledging the unique advantages and disadvantages of Chinese Christians in their spiritual formation, we should approach them with thoughtful and sensitive methods. On one hand, it is important to encourage them to continue practicing the disciplines they are already familiar with, such as Bible study, prayer, and worship. These practices form the backbone of their faith and provide stability and guidance in their spiritual lives. However, to foster a deeper relationship with God that transcends cultural honor-shame principles, we should also introduce them to additional spiritual disciplines. These might include practices such as meditation, journaling, silence, and solitude. Such disciplines can help Chinese Christians focus on their personal relationship with God, emphasizing internal spiritual growth over external validation.

¹¹ Benjamin C. Shin and Sheryl Takagi Silzer, *Tapestry of Grace: Untangling the Cultural Complexities in Asian American Life and Ministry*, (Eugene OR: Wipf & Stock, 2016) Kindle Edition. 35

¹² Ibid. 38

Purpose and Proposal of the Project

Purpose

The purpose of this project is to confirm the needs of spiritual formation in Chinese American Christians and explore the feasibility of introducing spiritual discipline as a method to transform the Christian's life to the image of Jesus Christ. The cultivation of spiritual growth holds significant importance for Christians, driven by various compelling reasons.

Firstly, it aligns with the biblical mandate to be conformed to the image of Christ (Romans 8:29). Believers are called to grow in their faith and exhibit the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23), reflecting the character of Christ in their lives.

Secondly, spiritual formation is essential for cultivating a deeper relationship with God. In evangelical theology, salvation is not just a one-time event but a journey of ongoing transformation. As individuals engage in spiritual disciplines such as prayer, Bible study, and meditation on the Scripture, they draw nearer to God, fostering intimacy and communion with Him. (Psalm 119).

Thirdly, spiritual formation plays a crucial role in equipping believers for effective service in the world. As Christians mature spiritually, they are better equipped to fulfill the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20) by sharing the message of Christ's love and salvation with others. A spiritually formed individual is better prepared to navigate the complexities of life with a Christ-centered perspective, impacting the world for the Kingdom. (2 Timothy 3:16-17)

Moreover, spiritual formation provides a solid foundation for navigating life's challenges. In the evangelical worldview, the Bible serves as a guide for ethical decision-making and moral living. Through spiritual formation, believers develop a robust ethical framework rooted in biblical principles, helping them make choices that align with God's will. (Matthew 5:21- 48).

The main objective of this research is to understand and improve the spiritual conditions of Chinese American Christians. This goal will be achieved through two main steps, namely a pilot project followed by a large-scale survey. The first step is to explore the necessity and feasibility of introducing spiritual disciplines to a local Chinese American church. The second step is to explore the generalizability of the pilot church results to Chinese American churches at large by surveying the spiritual conditions of Chinese Christians across America, evaluating the needs as well as potential for incorporating spiritual disciplines into their church lives.

The author hopes this research project will help stimulate the embarkment of a transformative journey for Chinese Christians, guiding them from a potentially shallow faith to a more profound and intimate relationship with Jesus Christ. Recognizing the diverse spiritual landscapes within the Chinese American Christian community, the research seeks to provide practical information to help bridge the gap between their faith and action.

Proposal

The thesis asserts that Chinese Christians need spiritual discipline grounded in Scripture and supported by historical spiritual traditions and contemporary studies, and an introduction to spiritual discipline facilitated through preaching and practical training, thereby will have the potential to bridge the gap between Bible knowledge and practice of faith.

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e.g. Research questions:

- 1.What is the current spiritual state and formation needs of Chinese American Christians?
- 2.What kind of attitude, engagement and support do Chinese American Christians have towards spiritual disciplines?
- 3.How feasible is it to introduce spiritual disciplines to LVCCC to stimulate the members spiritual formation?
- 4.How effective are sermons and small group lectio practice in enhancing LVCCC members' spiritual growth?

This research delves into the spirituality of Chinese American Christians through a quantitative analysis of survey results. It aims at understanding their current spiritual state, as well as their engagement, attitude, and support for spiritual disciplines. This research hopes to explore the feasibility of introducing spiritual disciplines to the Chinese congregation at Las Vegas Chinese Christian Church (LVCCC). The research conducts experiment in preaching a themed sermon series and in leading small groups practice of the Lectio Divina.

By scrutinizing the distinctive spiritual formation needs of Chinese American Christians, the research seeks to provide pertinent insights, and to encourage Chinese Christians to embrace spiritual disciplines, fostering a profound and transformative relationship with Jesus Christ. This dissertation aspires to illuminate the significance of spiritual formation not only for Chinese Christians but also for Christians in general. It is intended to capture the attention of both individuals and church leaders, offering valuable perspectives on the enriching journey of spiritual growth.

Description of the project

This dissertation presents a thorough investigation encompassing literature research on the biblical foundation and Christian tradition of spiritual disciplines, an assessment survey of the spiritual condition of Chinese Christians, and practical experiments in teaching spiritual disciplines at Las Vegas Chinese Christian Church. The project addresses nine key questions:

1. Are spiritual disciplines grounded in Scripture?
2. Do spiritual disciplines effectively enhance Christian spiritual growth?
3. How essential are spiritual disciplines for today's Christians?
4. What characterizes the spirituality of Chinese Christians in America?

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The research questions here are:

- 1.Are spiritual disciplines biblical?
- 2.Are spiritual disciplines helpful in enhancing Christian spiritual growth?
- 3.How essential are spiritual disciplines for today's Chinese American Christians?
- 4.What are the spiritual conditions and needs of Chinese American Christians?

In a later section, p.202 on, you have listed your research questions, which are different than the ones above, though there are some overlap. So I am wondering if you want to evaluate both lists and integrate them into one list of research questions. Then rewrite this part and the part later accordingly?

Later list of research questions:

The project aims to explore 6 research questions: (feel free to modify questions to make them more accurate?)

- QR1. What characterizes the spirituality of Chinese Christians in America?
- QR 2. Which spiritual disciplines are Chinese Christians actively engaging in?
- QR 3. What are the sentiments of Chinese Christians regarding spiritual disciplines?
- QR 4. How do Chinese American churches currently contribute to the spiritual formation of their congregation?
- QR 5. What responses can be anticipated if spiritual disciplines were to be introduced in churches?
- QR 6. What advantages could be gained if churches offered practical training in spiritual disciplines?

5. Which spiritual disciplines are Chinese Christians actively engaging in?
6. What are the sentiments of Chinese Christians regarding spiritual disciplines?
7. How do Chinese American churches currently contribute to the spiritual formation of their congregation?
8. What responses can be anticipated if spiritual disciplines were to be introduced in churches?
9. What advantages could be gained if churches offered practical training in spiritual disciplines?

This research aims to provide both a foundation for understanding spiritual disciplines within the context of biblical teaching and practical guidance for integrating these disciplines in the life of the church.

To answer the first three questions, the literature review is divided into three main sections. Firstly, an examination of the biblical texts focusing on identifying the presence of spiritual formation disciplines in Protestant theology, the Old Testament (OT), and the New Testament (NT). My hypothesis regarding the question of whether spiritual disciplines are biblical is that they are indeed present in Scripture, particularly through the form of Laws in the Old Testament and the life examples of Jesus and the Apostles. This involves analyzing how these disciplines serve as the means through which God trains His followers to live a godly life. In the OT, the study includes exploring how God employs the Law to instruct Israel in living as His people. In the NT, the research involves examining how the life examples of Jesus and the Apostles serve as discipline guides for Christians to embody God's will.

Secondly, my hypothesis regarding the effectiveness of spiritual disciplines in helping believers grow spiritually is that their value has been proven by church fathers

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and mothers over thousands of years. This study involves an examination of relevant historical literature to highlight the enduring practice of spiritual disciplines across generations of Christians, from the desert fathers and monastic communities to the Pietist movement. This section of the research explores how these disciplines played a role in enabling numerous saints to encounter the power and presence of God.

Lastly, my hypothesis regarding the necessity of spiritual disciplines for modern Christians is that they are absolutely essential. This research involves reviewing contemporary literature to affirm the indispensability of spiritual disciplines for Christian spiritual growth. This process includes analyzing findings that highlight how spiritual disciplines contribute to changed actions and transform Christian faith from mere knowledge into the power to live a godly life. Despite limited available resources, the study seeks to confirm that this ancient tool of spiritual discipline continues to benefit modern Christians.

Research questions 4 through 7 focus on assessing the spiritual condition and needs of Chinese Christians. My hypothesis is that, while most Chinese Christians engage in regular devotions, they tend to limit their practices to basic forms—namely, Bible study, prayer, and corporate worship. Many desire a closer relationship with God but lack both practical methods and support to deepen their spiritual journey.

To test this hypothesis, a survey was conducted among Chinese ethnic Christian churches across America. The survey comprised a 49-question questionnaire divided into four categories: self-assessment of current spiritual condition, engagement in spiritual disciplines, evaluation of church support, and attitudes toward spiritual disciplines. The data collected was carefully analyzed, leading to conclusions that address research questions 4 through 7.

To address the final two questions, a spiritual disciplines workshop and a series of 16 sermons were conducted at Las Vegas Chinese Christian Church (LVCCC). My hypothesis was that the LVCCC congregation would respond positively to this teaching and benefit from it.

From September 2022 to May 2023, three sermon series totaling 16 sermons focused on spiritual formation were delivered. To evaluate changes in attitudes toward spiritual disciplines, pre- and post-sermon surveys were administered. Additionally, a 12-week training in Lectio Divina was conducted in Sunday school from January to March 2023. Following the training, a post-survey gauged participants' reactions to practicing this discipline. Survey results were collected and analyzed, providing data to test and confirm the hypothesis in relation to these research questions.

The evaluation of the feasibility of introducing spiritual disciplines to Chinese Christian churches in America is based on the collective findings of all three parts. Recommendations for actions are suggested, drawing from these results, and future research avenues are proposed. The author's intent is to guide churches in implementing effective strategies for introducing and integrating spiritual disciplines within their congregations, fostering a deeper and more transformative spiritual experience among Chinese Christians in the American context.

Definition of Key Terms

There are many varied definitions concerning spirituality. In this study, the key terms help establish the context and objectives for the spiritual formation of Christian professionals within the specific frameworks detailed below. These terms are organized from the most general to the more specific. Most of these definitions are based on Evan B. Howard's book, *The Brazos Introduction to Christian Spirituality*, unless otherwise specified. Page references of Howard's book will be included below.

Spirituality (靈性): among many different definitions of spirituality, the author uses the definition of Even Howard. He defines that spirituality primarily refers to the interaction between humans and the transcendent or divine.¹³ This term can be used in any religion and belief, but in the Christian tradition, it refers to human relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

Spiritual Formation (靈命塑造): Howard defines Christian spiritual formation as “the intentional or semi-intentional process for believers to reach complete union or unity with Christ, in order to achieve spiritual maturity and calling of life.”¹⁴ When used in this dissertation to describe a field of study, spiritual formation specifically means to explore ways to improve the growth of Christians towards maturity in their lives.

Spiritual Disciplines (屬靈操練): Calhoun defines this term as “the intentional activities that create space in our lives for worshiping God and training ourselves to live out our faith.”¹⁵ These activities should not be harsh but grace-filled responses to the presence of Christ in our lives. This dissertation uses the plural form to refer to various spiritual training activities, which are discussed in more detail in Chapter 2. The singular form of this term is used to represent the overarching concept of these activities.

¹³ Evan B. Howard, *The Brazos Introduction to Christian Spirituality*, (Ada, MI: Brazos Press, 2008), 20

¹⁴ Ibid. 701

¹⁵ Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices That Transform Us*, InterVarsity Press. Kindle Edition. 20

Spiritual Practice (靈性習練) : a term the author used as interchangeable with spiritual discipline, is an activity of mind or body that promotes or expresses Christian spiritual formation.

Protestant Traditional Spiritual Disciplines (新教的傳統屬靈操練) : The author uses this term to describe the common spiritual disciplines accepted by most Protestant churches. These primarily include Bible study, prayer, and corporate worship. This term is used to distinguish these practices from other spiritual disciplines developed throughout Christian history.

Devotion (靈修) : Howard defines it as “the time we set apart to fellowship with God in prayer and His Word, during which He strengthens, nourishes and refreshes us.”¹⁶ It might also involve using repetition, physical movement, imagination, or other methods to meditate on God's presence. This dissertation uses this term mainly to refer to the regular habits through which Christians fellowship with God.

Contemplation (默觀): it is one of spiritual disciplines. Howard defines it as follows:

It usually refers to awareness of God through love and God. If it is a way of praying, it refers to deliberate prayer without the use of words or other means; if it is the attitude of prayer, it refers to quietness and openness our souls can receive inspiration from God; if it is the purpose of prayer, it refers to obtaining God's presence through prayer and the vision that the individual united with God.¹⁷

¹⁶ Evan B. Howard, *The Brazos Introduction to Christian Spirituality*, (MI, FL: Brazos Press, 2008), 695

¹⁷ Evan B. Howard, *The Brazos Introduction to Christian Spirituality*, (MI, FL: Brazos Press, 2008), 695

Meditation (默想) : according to Howard, it is a form of prayer that combines thoughts and feelings about God with thoughts and feeling focus on God.¹⁸ Meditation is one of the spiritual disciplines frequently mentioned in the Bible (e.g., Joshua 1:8; Psalm 1:2; Philippians 4:8). Christian meditation involves believers focusing on God's Word and reflecting on its meaning.

Lectio Divina (聖言心禱) : Howard's definition is as follows, but more detail discussion about the term is in chapter 5. It is one of spiritual disciplines.

It is literally translated as "sacred reading." It refers to reciting in the form of prayer, as a method of reading scripture or other texts. It usually contains four steps: lectio (reading), meditation (contemplating what is read), oratio (a prayerful expression of thoughts that arise during reading), and contemplation (simply stay with God).¹⁹

Spiritual Direction (屬靈指導) : Howard defines this as the relationship between a mentor and a mentee, focusing on God's active presence and the mentee's response.²⁰ It is one of the spiritual disciplines.

The structure of the dissertation

There are a total of seven chapters in this dissertation. The title of each chapter is as follows:

Chapter 1: Introduction

¹⁸ Ibid. 698

¹⁹ Ibid. 698

²⁰ Ibid. 701

Chapter 2: Biblical Foundation of Spiritual Discipline

Chapter 3: Christian Tradition of Spiritual Discipline

Chapter 4: Review of Spiritual Discipline as Discussed in Contemporary Literature

Chapter 5: Methodology and Rationale

Chapter 6: Results and Discussion

Chapter 7: Conclusion and Recommendation

Summary

The gospel of Jesus Christ is to provide forgiveness for the sin of believers and reconcile their relationship with God the Father, so that the believers can repent from their sins and live godly lives by the power of the Holy Spirit. Yet reflecting on the lives of Christians today, many believers have often too dangerously taken the salvation as the pass to heaven. Their faith is just to acknowledge the gospel without any evidence of a new life in Christ. They attend church worship, fellowship with each other, and even offer money to the ministry, but they don't have personal relationship with God, nor experience the transforming power of the Holy Spirit. As it is said in the author's personal spiritual journey, we could be good Christians but completely missed God. We could know a lot about Jesus but don't know Jesus.

Salvation is a process, we had been saved from the realm of darkness to the kingdom of light, we are being saved from power of sin to the freedom of God, and we will be saved from presence of sin to the eternal glory of God. As the elected of God, we have the Holy Spirit dwelling in us, who will work with our souls to transform us into the image of the Christ. The importance of spiritual formation cannot be overstated. It is a dynamic and ongoing process that shapes believers into Christlike individuals, deepens their relationship with God, equips them for service, and provides a moral compass for

navigating life. As believers engage in this transformative journey, they contribute to the flourishing of both their individual lives and the broader Christian community.

In essence, this research seeks to contribute to the spiritual flourishing of Chinese American Christians, offering them resources and pathways that lead beyond surface-level faith to a profound, life-altering engagement with the gospel. By addressing the spiritual needs of this community through an informed and culturally sensitive approach, the research endeavors to pave the way for a holistic and enduring transformation grounded in the timeless truths of Christian spirituality.

Chapter 2

The Biblical foundation of Spiritual Discipline

There is a significant surge of interest in spiritual formation within churches, seminaries, and American culture, as noted by David Kinnaman, Barna CEO. In his article “A majority of U.S. adults desires a spiritual dimension to life. Are Christian leaders ready?” he reported “In an October 2022 Barna survey of 2,000 U.S. adults, three out of four (74%) say they want to grow spiritually. Additionally, the same proportion (77%) say they believe in a higher power. Nearly half (44%) say they are more open to God today than before the pandemic.”²¹ As this interest continues to grow, spirituality has come under intense scrutiny from a Christian perspective, particularly in recent decades. However, the term “spirituality” has acquired various ambiguous meanings, leading many churches to distance themselves from it, rather than getting entangled in the confusion it can bring.

One of the reasons for this reluctance is primarily due to the proliferation of counterfeit spirituality offered by the world, Eastern and mystical religions.²² These belief systems emphasize self-focus, meditation, and the emptying of the mind to attain a state of tranquility or karma, where one supposedly becomes at one with themselves and God. Such practices are at odds with the core tenets of evangelical Christian theology.

²¹ David Kinnaman, “A majority of U.S. adults desires a spiritual dimension to life. Are Christian leaders ready?” *Barna*, <https://www.barna.com/research/rising-spiritual-openness/> (Accessed Mar. 16, 2024)

²² Joseph D. Driskill, *Protestant Spiritual Exercises: Theology History and Practice*, (New York, NY: Morehouse Publishing, 1999), XV

Another reason is that spiritual formation disciplines have traditionally been closely tied to Catholic traditions.²³ Catholic traditions have long emphasized spiritual formation disciplines as essential components of the Christian journey, incorporating practices such as contemplative prayer, spiritual direction, and the Ignatian Examen. These disciplines are viewed as transformative tools that deepen one's relationship with God and foster spiritual growth. Yet, within Protestant Christian circles, Driskill points out, there is frequently a lack of understanding concerning these disciplines, resulting in a reluctance to fully embrace them. Furthermore, due to the split between Catholicism and Protestantism, many evangelical Christians reject all early Christian traditions.²⁴ It is crucial for Protestants to acknowledge that spiritual formation disciplines are a shared heritage for all Christians, as they are taught in the Bible and have been practiced by Christians since biblical times.

Within this chapter, we will explore the biblical foundation of spiritual formation disciplines from four perspectives. First, we will discuss the spiritual disciplines practiced in the Old Testament (OT). Second, we will examine the spiritual disciplines continued in the New Testament (NT). Third, we will clarify the biblical concept of spiritual disciplines. Fourth, we will discuss spiritual disciplines within Protestant theology. The goal is to show that Christian spiritual formation and disciplines are not arbitrary or merely traditional but are firmly established in biblical teaching. Though they may share similar forms with practices found in other religions, they are fundamentally different in their purpose and origin, being centered on a relationship with the God of the Bible.

²³ Joseph D. Driskill, *Protestant Spiritual Exercises: Theology History and Practice*, (New York, NY: Morehouse Publishing, 1999), XVI

²⁴ Ibid. XVII

Practicing Spiritual Disciplines in the Old Testament

It is important to embrace a holistic approach to spiritual formation and disciplines throughout the entirety of the Bible.²⁵ Averbeck, a professor of Old Testament and Ministry at Dallas Theological Seminary, highlights at least two compelling reasons for this approach. Firstly, a thorough exploration of what the Bible teaches about Christian spiritual disciplines demonstrates that its roots are deeply embedded in the Old Testament. Secondly, the teaching of spiritual disciplines emphasized in the New Testament centers more on inner faith than outward behaviors. Nevertheless, the New Testament was never intended to be read in isolation from the Old Testament, upon which it heavily relies. The writers of the New Testament assumed their readers would have a firm foundation in the Old Testament as the sacred Scriptures of the church. Ignoring the Old Testament risks serious misunderstandings, as both testaments complement each other.

Peter Vogt who is the dean of Bethel Seminary rightly asserts that spiritual disciplines were inherently woven into the fabric of the Mosaic law in the Old Testament era.²⁶ This law served as the written expression of the holiness that the Israelites believed God had revealed to them. God's call to them was clear: to be a holy people, reflecting the holiness of their God (Exodus 19:5-6, Leviticus 19:1-2). However, holiness wasn't merely an abstract concept; it was to be lived out in practical and ethical ways, demonstrating reverent service to God and care for one's neighbor.

Furthermore, Grisanti explained that at the heart of this divine law were the Ten Commandments, which present a scale of values that reflects God's design for human

²⁵ Richard E. Averbeck, *The Kingdom Life: A Practical Theology of Discipleship and Spiritual Formation*, eBook, (NavPress, 2010), 15

²⁶ Peter Vogt, *Interpreting the Pentateuch: An Exegetical Handbook*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2009), 9

life: God, society, family, life, sex, and property.²⁷ They laid the foundational principles for communal cohesion and integrity in the presence of God. Each commandment addressed a different facet of holy living, designed to set Israel apart from the surrounding pagan nations. By physically practicing these laws, they could live out the holiness that God required and avoid assimilation into pagan cultures.

The law not only reflected God's character but also mandated specific actions. It served as a guiding framework for the Old Testament saints, showing them how to live as God's people. Without it, they would not know how to follow God. The Law was not viewed as a burden by the people of God in the Old Testament; rather, they appreciated it, for it brought them life. This can be frequently seen in Psalms, such as "The law of the Lord is perfect, refreshing the soul. The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy, making wise the simple" (Psalm 19:7).

As Vogt rightly notes, "When the law was given later at Sinai, it was not provided as a means to establish a relationship with God (since the Israelites were already in relationship with Yahweh), but rather as a means to live out the relationship with a holy God who would be in the midst of His people."²⁸ In contrast to the nations surrounding Israel, God's desire is for His people to establish a society that reflects His divine character. Each of the Ten Commandments plays a crucial role in molding Israel into a unique nation, setting them apart in both cultural and moral aspects.

²⁷ Michael A. Grisanti, "Deuteronomy," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Numbers–Ruth (Revised Edition)*, ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 534.

²⁸ Peter Vogt, *Interpreting the Pentateuch: An Exegetical Handbook*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2009), 15

Grisanti further explains that the worship and sacrificial laws prescribed by God were exclusive to the Israelites, intended to create a unique culture for God's people.²⁹ The observance of the Sabbath day, various holy days, and festivals, as mandated by the law, was a privilege reserved for the Israelites. These celebrations not only commemorated significant events in their history but also fortified their national and spiritual identity. By honoring these occasions, the Israelites demonstrated their separation from the customs of other nations.

These commandments also instilled a set of elevated moral and ethical standards among God's people, set them apart from neighboring nations characterized by idolatry and immorality.³⁰ The law emphasized the importance of spiritual purity and acted as a restraint, preventing God's people from adopting unjust and brutal customs from other nations that could lead them astray from the true God. This discipline served as a safeguard for their faith, protecting it from syncretism.

As Guinan pointed out, the law encompasses not only the foundational principles of life but also practical disciplines that manifest as external transformations in people's lives. Take, for instance, the fourth commandment regarding the observance of the Sabbath day. This command necessitates a cessation of work on that day, serving as a reminder to Israel of Yahweh, the creator of the universe, and the redeemer of the nation. Therefore, keeping the Sabbath not only behaves as an act of remembrance. but also symbolizes spiritual rest and trust in God's provision. The Sabbath law is also the discipline of solidarity and worship. Thus, this law woven spiritual disciplines into the recurring rhythms and patterns of the weeks and the years, as we live our life.³¹

²⁹ Michael A. Grisanti, *Deuteronomy*, in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Numbers–Ruth* (Revised Edition), ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 542

³⁰ Ibid. 543

³¹ Michael D. Guinan, *The Pentateuch*, (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1990), 78

What's noteworthy is that the Sabbath law extends its reach to encompass not just people but also animals, emphasizing the interconnectedness of human lives with one another, with animals, and with the natural world itself. This holistic perspective underscores the profound implications of this commandment on the way people live their lives and interact with the world around them. As Michael D. Guinan rightly said, “We live from God’s creating and redeeming activity and are called to extend and share this activity in and through all our relationships.”³²

The Sabbath day law is just one example of how God's commandments communicate His holy character and His requirements for His people. Each commandment given by God serves a similar purpose. For instance, the commandments regarding our relationship with God establish the exclusivity of worship and loyalty that He demands. They instruct specific actions to avoid, such as idol worship and disrespectful language, revealing His nature as the one true God who desires all love and reverence from His people. The commandment to honor one's parents reflects the value God places on family structure and respect within the community, mirroring His authority and the importance of order in His creation. The prohibitions against murder, adultery, theft, and false testimony are rules for social order; they reflect the sanctity of life, the fidelity of relationships, and the integrity of truth—all of which are central to God's character. These commandments guide the people of God to live their life in a disciplined way that mirrors His holiness and justice.

In summary, the OT laws function as guidelines and practices for establishing a unique community of God's people. They serve as instructional tools, guiding and training Israel in the righteous path for the sake of their blessings. God’s each commandant can be literally rendered as a spiritual discipline because God's desired relationship with humanity isn't merely abstract knowledge but grounded in concrete actions stemming from that relationship. Therefore, the law can be understood as spiritual

³² Michael D. Guinan, *The Pentateuch*, (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1990), 79

disciplines, offering Israel the training needed to live out their identity as God's chosen people. By following these commandments, the people of God demonstrate their commitment to Him and their desire to embody His holiness in their daily lives.

Practicing Spiritual Discipline in the New Testament

As we've explored earlier, the Mosaic laws in the Old Testament served as spiritual disciplines for ancient Israelites. Through the daily practice of these laws, their spirituality was to be molded by God, leading them towards the holiness God desired. However, because these laws could only regulate outward behaviors and lacked the power to transform one's heart, they fell short of accomplishing the mission of restoring God's image in people. This shortfall is why the ancient Israelites struggled to fulfill their role as God's chosen people and why there was a need for Jesus Christ and the new covenant He established.

In the New Testament era, instead of relying on the law, God presented His people with a person: Jesus Christ. As Bowe aptly expressed, in contrast to the stone tablets given to the Israelites, God incarnated as a man and dwelt among His people.³³ Consequently, Christians do not possess a new set of laws as spiritual disciplines; rather, they have the teachings and life of Jesus as their guide for spiritual growth and discipline.

Jesus' first sermon is his affirmation of the enduring validity of the law, as he said, "do not think that I have come to abolish the law" (Mat5:17). Jesus confirms the authority of the law, but he also gives the new interpretation of it. Jesus intensifies the demands of law and goes to the heart of the intent of the law as it was intended to guard the harmony and integrity of God's people.

³³ Barbara E. Bowe, *Biblical Foundations of Spirituality: Touching a Finger to the Flame*, (London: Sheed & Ward. 2003). 141

Averbeck pointed out that the Beatitudes serve as the foundational definition of the character that God blesses.³⁴ While they do not function as laws for Christians as they did in the Old Testament, their message is straightforward: God blesses those who place their dependence on Him and those who embody God's nature. The lifestyle of the Christian community is pivotal to its discipline; It must serve as salt and light within the world and maintain a righteousness that surpasses even that of the scribes and Pharisees.³⁵ Therefore, In NT times, the Christian life isn't governed by a rigid set of outward rules but should reflect godly behaviors stemming from the attributes of God within. Christians are called to joyfully obey God's law out of love for Christ. This obedience surpasses the righteousness of the Pharisees because it originates from the heart (Matthew 5:20 NIV). It serves as an indication that we have genuinely been saved.

The Sermon on the Mount also addresses the practice of piety, particularly in the context of three significant areas of Jewish piety: charitable giving, prayer, and fasting. The essential aspect of practicing these disciplines is to perform them as acts directed "to your Father who is in heaven," rather than merely for the sake of being seen by others. Averbeck explained that Jesus' teaching emphasizes living life in response to God.³⁶ Charitable giving should be done in secret before God. Prayer should not seek public recognition but be directed "to your Father who is unseen," (Matthew 6:6 NIV) recognizing that God knows our needs before we ask. Jesus' teaching underscores the importance of inner motivation, correct intentions, and principled moral actions as the cornerstones of the spiritual life. His emphasis lies on the radical ethical demands and practical spirituality required of those who follow Him.

³⁴ Richard E. Averbeck, *The Kingdom Life: A Practical Theology of Discipleship and Spiritual Formation*, eBook, (NavPress, 2010), 194

³⁵ Ibid. 194

³⁶ Ibid. 195

Dallas affirms that while the New Testament doesn't prescribe fixed rules for Christians to follow, it doesn't imply that God only seeks abstract faith.³⁷ Jesus made it clear when He said, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven" (Matthew 7:21). The harmony between professing faith and living righteously through one's actions is crucial, a principle exemplified in the life of Jesus and expected of those who wish to be His disciples. So to be followers of Christ, we should emulate the life of Jesus on Earth as described in the four Gospels. In His life and teachings, we can discover the importance of spiritual disciplines.

First, Jesus practiced spiritual discipline by participating in communal worship. The Gospel of Luke documents Jesus attending the Jewish synagogue on the Sabbath day, where he read from the scroll of the prophet Isaiah with great authority. He proclaimed, "The Spirit of the Lord is on me because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" (Luke 4:18-19). Jesus boldly declared, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." This message of God's salvation, announced and embodied by Jesus, is intended for all of us as a source of healing, forgiveness, and salvation. Even though he is the Son of God, Jesus still observed the Sabbath and joined in communal worship and serving of reading Scripture.

Second, Jesus demonstrated practicing spiritual discipline through acts of service to others. His proclamation of the good news wasn't confined to words; he lived it in his

³⁷ Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives*. (New York, NY: HarperOne, 1999), 32

actions. He showed compassion to those who were suffering, healing the sick, comforting the afflicted, and forgiving sinners.

Third, Jesus engaged in spiritual discipline by delving into the study of Scripture. The Word of God is meant to be continually read and pondered, serving as our guide and source of wisdom for daily life. Jesus exhibited his deep knowledge of Scripture when he resisted the temptations of Satan and, notably, during his final moments on the cross. He didn't merely read the Scriptures; he internalized them, making them a source of strength in times of adversity. This underscores the importance of the discipline of attentive listening and reading of Scripture.

Fourth, Jesus diligently practiced the discipline of prayer. The New Testament contains around many references to Jesus engaging in prayer, in addition to his teachings on prayer. A consistent pattern in Jesus' prayer life was his withdrawal for moments of solitude and prayer, especially during times of crisis and before significant events, such as: his baptism (Luke 3:21), the temptation experience (Luke 4:1-13), after the press of many needing healing (Mark 1:35, Luke 5:16), before selection of the twelve (Luke 6:12), after the feeding of the 5,000 (Matt. 14:23), before asking his disciples who he is (Luke 9:19), before the transfiguration experience (Luke 9:28-29), in Gethsemane (Mark. 14:31-40), Jesus' lament from the cross quoting Ps. 22:1 (Mark 15:34, Matthew 27:46) and his surrender of his spirit to God in Luke. 23:46. These passages illustrate how prayer both informed and empowered Jesus' actions, highlighting that prayer is not a burdensome obligation but rather a source of divine strength.

The examples mentioned here are just a few of the spiritual disciplines that Jesus practiced. He also engaged in solitude, simplicity, obedience, and numerous others. Often, we tend to focus primarily on his teachings, inadvertently overlooking the profound impact of his spiritual discipline, which empowered him to fulfill God's will.

As Averbeck indicates, there is no indication that Jesus rejected the law of Judaism, but there is evidence to suggest that he approached it with a freedom that was distinct from the attitudes of the Pharisees of his time.³⁸ The post-Exilic period in Judaism, particularly the Pharisees, was marked by a deep concern for sin, purity, adherence to liturgical correctness, and strict obedience to Mosaic laws. While Jesus did not reject the law, he exhibited a profound confidence in his relationship with God, which allowed him to interpret and apply the law with a freedom that might have been considered unconventional by many of his Jewish contemporaries. This freedom is evident in his willingness to perform miracles on the Sabbath and his famous declaration, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath" (Mark 2:27 NIV).

He continues explaining that Jesus' approach to Jewish prayer also reflects his unique freedom. He initiated prayers not with traditional liturgical formulas but by addressing God as "Father" and even using the Aramaic term "Abba". Jesus was not bound by the conventional spiritual practices of his time; instead, he used them as a framework for cultivating his personal relationship with God and clarifying the responsibilities that this relationship entailed.

In examining Jesus' prayer life, we can learn that spiritual disciplines should be fundamentally practices of nurturing one's relationship with God, which is a divine gift. It involves spending time with God, reaffirming the relationship, aligning with God's concerns, recalling the significance of God in our lives, shaping our values and priorities, and finding the spiritual resources necessary for life and action. Just as any relationship requires time for both its development and maintenance, a connection with God can become stale and lose its significance if it is not regularly nurtured. Even though God, as our gracious Father, never gives up on us, as illustrated in the Parable of the Prodigal Son

³⁸ Richard E. Averbeck, *The Kingdom Life: A Practical Theology of Discipleship and Spiritual Formation*, eBook, (NavPress, 2010), 197

in Luke 15, we must choose to return to our Father. Engaging in spiritual disciplines helps us carve out time and space to center our attention on God. This is underscored in the story of Mary and Martha, where we learn to discern what truly matters amidst the busyness and demands of life (Luke 10)

Jesus not only engaged in these spiritual disciplines but also expected his followers to do the same. This expectation is evident in verses like Matthew 11:29, where he invites us to "Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me," and in Luke 9:23, where he emphasizes that to be his disciple, one must "deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow me." These verses underscore that being a disciple of Jesus entails learning from and following his example.

Whitney affirms that to be a disciplined follower of Jesus, we need to adopt a similar lifestyle as Jesus'.³⁹ Following Jesus isn't accidental; it requires intention and discipline. Just as the apostles learned from him through disciplined following, we can learn from Jesus by intentionally seeking to emulate his life and teachings.

Practicing spiritual disciplines becomes increasingly important for Jesus' followers after His departure, a concept Jesus alluded to when questioned about why His disciples didn't fast. In response, Jesus said, "Jesus answered, 'How can the guests of the bridegroom fast while he is with them? They cannot, so long as they have him with them. But the time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them, and on that day they will fast.'" (Mark 2:19-20 NIV). Jesus taught that, when His physical presence is not visible, his disciples must engage in spiritual disciplines to maintain a connection with His spiritual presence and the promises He made.

³⁹ Donald Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, (Carol Stream, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc. 2014), 15

In his letter to Timothy, the apostle Paul offered specific encouragement, urging Timothy to "discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness" (1 Tim 4: 8 NIV). The exegesis of the word translated as "discipline" has a literal meaning of "to train." In Greek, it's the root word for our English term "gymnasium."⁴⁰ Therefore, Paul was instructing Timothy to undergo rigorous training to attain godliness. Paul intends to emphasize disciplines and endeavors that cultivate focus, endurance, and self-control in competition with false doctrines and their proponents, weariness, distractions, and other adversities.

Yarbrough articulates that Paul's motivation for promoting godliness among Christians is the incomparable value it brings. He contrasts the value of godliness with that of physical exercise. Although physical exercise offers certain benefits to our earthly bodies, the pursuit of godliness far outweighs it. The fruits of godliness are evident in our lives during our time on Earth, yet they also extend into eternal life. Therefore, the "purpose" of our practice is godliness, and our lifelong responsibility is to "discipline yourself."⁴¹ The key to cultivating practical godliness in real life is through disciplines, which involves intentional and ongoing engagement with the God-given means of grace found in God's Word.⁴²

Indeed, practicing spiritual disciplines is crucial to Christian growth because strengthening of godly habits can reduce believers vulnerability to sinful habits and inclination to sin (Romans 3:23). This sin can manifest as habitual behaviors, including addictions to substances, actions, and thoughts, which essentially enslave us with self-

⁴⁰ Robert W. Yarbrough, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, ed. D. A. Carson, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2018), 239.

⁴¹ Ibid. 240

⁴² Ibid. 240

imposed chains. These addictions compel us to worship the very objects to which we are addicted, hindering us from freely and genuinely loving God and our fellow human beings. Paul vividly describes this internal struggle, stating, "So I find this law at work: Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me." (Romans 7:21-23 NIV).

Averbeck rightly pointed out that addiction, in its dual nature, is both a part of our human condition and an adversary to our nature.⁴³ It stands as a direct challenge to human freedom and is in direct opposition to our love. Paradoxically, our addictions can lead us to a profound appreciation of grace, as Paul continues, "What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death? Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!" (Romans 7:24-25). Our recognition of our sinful nature and hopelessness can humble us, and it's through Jesus that we find deliverance from the bondage of sin (Rom 8:2). Spiritual disciplines serve as the means for us to learn how to live the liberated life that Jesus offers. It helps us break free from the chains of addiction and discover the true freedom found in Christ.

The Holy Spirit plays an essential role in our reformation from the old self, as it is the source of our spiritual life in Christ, Romans 8:11 indicates that God's life and power is now in us through the Holy Spirit: "And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who lives in you." (Romans 8:11, NIV)

⁴³ Richard E. Averbeck, *The Kingdom Life: A Practical Theology of Discipleship and Spiritual Formation*, eBook, (NavPress, 2010), 278

In addition, Apostle Peter also wrote, "His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires." (2 Peter 1:3-4, NIV). These verses highlight the sufficiency of God's provision for our spiritual growth. "His divine power" refers to the Holy Spirit, who equips us with everything we need to live a godly life.⁴⁴ This divine empowerment is essential for spiritual formation, as it enables us to overcome our natural inclinations and live according to God's will. Through our knowledge of Christ, who calls us by His glory and goodness, we gain access to "great and precious promises." These promises include the Holy Spirit's presence, guidance, and transformative power in our lives. By embracing these promises, we "participate in the divine nature," meaning that we increasingly reflect God's character and virtues. This transformation allows us to escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires, leading to a life that honors God.

The Holy Spirit not only motivates us to be transformed but also guides us in the practice of spiritual discipline. As the Apostle Paul says, "Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit" (Galatians 5:25, NIV). The Holy Spirit renews our minds, enabling us to think and act according to God's truth. This renewal is crucial for engaging in spiritual disciplines, as it helps us discern God's will and practice the disciplines in a way that pleases Him. While the Holy Spirit instills within us the desire for godliness, it's important to understand that progress in godliness does not happen automatically. The Spirit serves as our motivation and empowerment to train ourselves, but He doesn't perform the training on our behalf. We should maintain a posture of openness, allowing the Holy Spirit to guide us into the necessary spiritual disciplines for our transformation into the image of Christ.

⁴⁴ Peter H. Davids, *The Letters of 2 Peter and Jude*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2006), 168.

Unlike the Old Testament, which provides clear and specific laws for particular actions, the New Testament doesn't offer a predefined list of authorized spiritual disciplines as established by Jesus or the apostles. This lack of clear guidance has led to confusion regarding what constitutes biblical spiritual discipline and whether we should engage in it at all. In fact, the New Testament doesn't extensively discuss the concept of spiritual disciplines. We must glean insights from brief references, undeveloped admonitions, the examples set by Jesus and His disciples, and the teachings of the apostles to discover these spiritual disciplines in the background. Although the NT does not provide explicit instructions on spiritual disciplines, we have the Holy Spirit as our personal guide. The Holy Spirit acts as a personal trainer, motivating and leading each believer into the training necessary for godliness according to their unique spiritual condition.

In summary, growing into spiritual maturity is akin to acquiring any other skill. Initially, we are given a set of fundamental exercises to follow rigorously. Once we've grasped these basics, we are presented with a goal to achieve, using the foundational skills we've acquired. In the second stage, we move beyond fixed exercises and instead identify exercises that address our specific weaknesses for further practice. Similarly, in the Old Testament era, people were introduced to godly living through a set of fixed laws. In the New Testament, God presents Jesus as the exemplar of godly living. Becoming Christ-like is our ultimate objective, and to reach this goal, we should engage in various spiritual disciplines tailored to individual needs.

Biblical Concept of Spiritual Discipline

Descriptions of spiritual disciplines

The term “spiritual discipline” is widely used and encompasses a variety of interpretations in different contexts. In his article titled "WAKING UP TO SPIRITUAL

DISCIPLINE" published in *Ministry: International Journal for Pastors*, the author pastor Jeff Scoggins presents one definition: "spiritual discipline is the way we actively pursue a closer relationship with God."⁴⁵ He expands on this notion by drawing a parallel with human relationships. Scoggins explains that in a fractured relationship, one party may take the initiative to reconcile, much like Jesus has done. However, eventually, the other party must contribute their own efforts to rebuild the relationship. Similarly, anyone seeking a closer connection with Christ must actively work on building that relationship.

Scoggins rightly concludes that "spiritual discipline, as a term, cannot be narrowly defined because it is varied and often unique to each individual. Yet, there is one unchanging aspect: regardless of its form, spiritual discipline demands that we invest some form of effort in being with Jesus in a manner that allows Him to communicate with us, and in turn, we can actively listen to His guidance."⁴⁶

Spiritual disciplines refer to the specific pathways leading to spiritual formation. In essence, spiritual discipline constitutes the set of practices that individuals employ in their pursuit of spiritual transformation. Thus, these two concepts are closely related but with distinct emphases. As Scoggins explains, "Spiritual formation" underscores the overall outcome of spiritual disciplines, while "spiritual discipline" spotlights the individual practices that people engage in to achieve spiritual formation.⁴⁷ It's worth noting that these terms are often used interchangeably in various contexts. Although

⁴⁵ Jeff Scoggins, "WAKING UP TO SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE", *Ministry: International Journal for Pastors*, (Jun 2010). <https://www.ministrymagazine.org/archive/2010/07-august/waking-up-to-spiritual-discipline> (Accessed Feb. 22, 2024)

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Jeff Scoggins, "WAKING UP TO SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE", *Ministry: International Journal for Pastors*, (Jun 2010). <https://www.ministrymagazine.org/archive/2010/07-august/waking-up-to-spiritual-discipline> (Accessed Feb. 22, 2024).

neither term finds explicit mention in the Bible, they are illustrated in the teachings and lives of God's people.

Donald Whitney, who served as an associate professor of spiritual formation at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary for a decade, and later as a professor of biblical spirituality and associate dean of the School of Theology at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, is the author of nine books, one of which is "Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life." He offers a comprehensive definition of spiritual discipline based on the Bible as follows: "The Spiritual Disciplines are those practices found in Scripture that promote spiritual growth among believers in the gospel of Jesus Christ. They are the habits of devotion and experiential Christianity that have been practiced by the people of God since biblical times."⁴⁸ In simpler terms, while there are numerous practices that aid spiritual growth, spiritual disciplines specifically refer to activities taught or employed in the Bible. Whitney expands on this idea from different perspectives.

Practicing spiritual disciplines is not only a private matter. The Bible prescribes a combination of personal and interpersonal spiritual disciplines, with each holding equal importance and one not substituting the other.⁴⁹ For instance, private prayer is vital, yet it should complement public worship within the community of believers. Jesus imparted teachings on private prayer in Matthew 6:5-6, advising, "But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen." Concurrently, He introduced the prayer beginning with "Our Father in heaven," suggesting the importance of communal prayer. Certain Spiritual Disciplines, like journaling, solitude, and fasting, are inherently solitary in nature. In contrast, other Disciplines, such as fellowship, hearing

⁴⁸ Donald Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2014) , 4

⁴⁹ Ibid. 5

God's Word preached, and participating in the Lord's Supper, inherently require the presence of people and are inherently congregational.

Spiritual disciplines are essentially activities, not mere attitude.⁵⁰ These disciplines entail specific practices rather than being synonymous with character qualities or mind sets. For instance, before Israel entered the promised Land, God instructed Joshua to be courageous, as stated in Joshua 1:8, "This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success." This verse demonstrates that courage is found in consistently "meditating" on the Law. On the other hand, courage, strictly speaking, is not categorized as spiritual discipline since it's more about an attitude than a specific action. Meditation itself isn't the ultimate objective; rather, courage is one of the outcomes of meditation on the Law. Courage doesn't manifest in a spiritually passive state; rather, it is cultivated through deliberate actions. In essence, Joshua couldn't embody courage without immersing himself in God's word. This underscores that spiritual disciplines serves as the training ground for cultivating a particular mindset according to God's will.

It is important to confine spiritual disciplines to those activities taught, implied or exemplified in the Bible.⁵¹ Failing to establish this boundary could lead to virtually anything being categorized as a spiritual discipline, and more significantly, it would allow us to determine, according to our preferences, which practices are most beneficial for our spiritual well-being and growth, instead of adhering to those practices that God has

⁵⁰ Donald Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2014), 6

⁵¹ Donald Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2014), 7

revealed in Scripture. For examples, the following spiritual disciplines are endorsed by Scripture: Bible study (Psa 143: 10; 25:8-9), prayer (Mat 6:6-8), worship (Psa 100:2, Heb 12:28), evangelism (Mat 28:18-20), service (Mat 25:35- 40, 1Pet 4:10 -11, Gal 5:13), stewardship (1Tim 5:8, Act 20:35, Col 3:23), fasting (Mat 6:16-18), silence and solitude (Psa 46:10, Isa 30:15, Hab 2:20), and learning (Mat 11:28-29). These represent examples of spiritual disciplines explicitly mentioned in the Bible, although this is not an exhaustive list.

The Spiritual Disciplines outlined in Scripture are fully adequate for gaining knowledge of God, experiencing His presence, and advancing toward Christlikeness.⁵² The scripture of 2 Timothy 3:16-17, “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.” emphasizes that, due to its divine inspiration, the Scripture offers the essential guidance required by Christians to become “thoroughly equipped for every good work,” which encompasses the noble endeavor of pursuing “the purpose of godliness.” Consequently, every discipline which is necessary for spiritual growth and progress in holiness, has been documented and endorsed within the Scripture.

Whitney stresses that spiritual disciplines serve as the means to a greater end, which is godliness.⁵³ He defines godliness as both drawing nearer to Christ and becoming more like Him, a transformation that encompasses both the inner and outer aspects, leading to a growing resemblance to both the heart and life of Christ, as Paul taught, “You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your

⁵² Donald Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2014) , 7

⁵³ Ibid. 9

minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.” (Eph 4: 22-24). These verses teach us that this pursuit of Christlikeness stands as the ultimate objective, providing the very reason for engaging in spiritual disciplines which are continuously “put off” old and “put on” new self. Engaging in these practices for any other motivation may result in legalism and human arrogance.

In summary, practicing spiritual disciplines encompass a comprehensive array of personal and interpersonal activities that have been divinely ordained in the Bible. These practices stand as the means through which believers in Jesus Christ are called to journey in their pursuit of godliness. This godliness is characterized by two pivotal aspects: closeness to Christ and conformity to Christ, both of which are central in the life of a devout Christian.⁵⁴

Although practicing spiritual disciplines is crucial for spirit growth, it is important to grasp the intricate relationship between the work of the Holy Spirit and our own diligence in practicing spiritual disciplines. Salvation is not earned through our efforts, but we actively engage in the process of allowing its effects to permeate our hearts and lives. The imperative for our spiritual transformation is explicitly stated in the Bible (Romans 12:2), which also provides guidance on the ways and means to achieve it. However, it's essential to recognize that the true source of empowerment comes from the Holy Spirit, not our own will or exertion (2 Corinthians 3:18). Whitney rightly summarizes that the purpose of this disciplined effort is to experience a transformation into what the Spirit ignites a desire for: to be with Christ and become more like Him.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Donald Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2014), 9

⁵⁵ *Ibid.* 14

Spiritual Discipline as Central Theme of the Bible

According to biblical teaching, spiritual formation emerges from the Trinitarian work of God in the lives of genuine believers in Christ. This process is made achievable through the presence and influence of the Holy Spirit, a concept supported by Dr. Richard E. Averbeck, an Old Testament professor at Dallas Theological Seminary.⁵⁶ As conveyed by Paul in Galatians 4:19, the aim of spiritual formation is “Christ is formed in you.” This process fundamentally involves the formative work of the Holy Spirit, executed in accordance with the will of God the Father to conform us to the image of Jesus Christ. Unlike God's salvation, this work requires active participation from Christians who must respond to God's invitation. This response entails a commitment to seeking, inviting, and participating in the work of the Holy Spirit.

The Bible places great emphasis on the spiritual development of God's people. This theme is evident throughout the Scriptures, as Paul called “Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” (Romans 12:2). In fact, God's spiritual formation starts right after the Fall of Adam and Eve. From the OT to NT, God immutable will is to restore human His image and bring us back to His kingdom.

In his renowned theological work, "Human Nature in its Fourfold State," the prominent Scottish puritan theologian Thomas Boston delves into the central stages of human nature after God's creation. Boston examines human nature from a Christian perspective, highlighting four distinct conditions that align with the four states of man in relation to sin. This framework illustrates the stages of spiritual formation in a person's life. Understanding this progression is crucial for Christian spiritual formation, as Boston wrote:

⁵⁶ Richard E. Averbeck, *The Kingdom Life: A Practical Theology of Discipleship and Spiritual Formation*, eBook, (NavPress, 2010), 282

There are four things very necessary to be known by all that would see heaven: 1. What man was in the state of innocence, as God made him. 2. What he is in the state of corrupt nature, as he hath unmade himself. 3. What he must be in the state of grace, as created in Christ Jesus unto good works, if ever he be made a partaker of the inheritance of the saints in light. 4. What he will be in his eternal state, as made by the Judge of all, either perfectly happy, or completely miserable, and that forever.⁵⁷

It is worth noting that throughout the exploration of human nature's condition before being saved, Boston vividly portrays the profound misery experienced by individuals in the fallen state. He emphasizes the absolute inability of humans to extricate themselves from this dire predicament. This truth is unmistakably evident throughout Israel's history, spanning from the book of Exodus to the Kings. Despite God's continual communication, guidance, warnings, and discipline, Israel struggled to obey God's commandments and align themselves with His will. In the book of 2 Kings, the author summarized the failure of Israel,

All this (exile) took place because the Israelites had sinned against the Lord their God, who had brought them up out of Egypt from under the power of Pharaoh king of Egypt. They worshiped other gods and followed the practices of the nations the Lord had driven out before them, as well as the practices that the kings of Israel had introduced... They worshiped idols, though the Lord had said, "You shall not do this." The Lord warned Israel and Judah through all his prophets and seers: "Turn from your evil ways. Observe my commands and decrees, in accordance with the entire Law that I commanded your ancestors to obey and that I delivered to you through my servants the prophets." But they would not listen and were as stiff-necked as their ancestors, who did not trust in the Lord their God. They rejected his decrees and the covenant he had made with their ancestors and the statutes he had warned them to keep... So the Lord was very angry with Israel and removed them from his presence. (2 Kings 17:7-8; 12-15, 18 NIV)

⁵⁷ Thomas Boston, *Human Nature in its Fourfold State*, eBook. (Monergism), 37.

<https://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/sdg/boston/Human%20Nature%20in%20its%20Fourfold%20-%20Thomas%20Boston.pdf> (Accessed Mar. 29, 2024)

Israel fully grasped their status as God's chosen people and firmly held to the belief that they ought to worship Him. However, time and again, they succumbed to the allure of pagan customs and worldly materialism, adopting the lifestyle of the pagans and straying from God's will. Learning from this history, we should recognize our absolute need for Christ and to believe in our own incapacity to rescue ourselves, which leads to genuine humility. This is a stark depiction of humanity's dire predicament apart from the redemptive work of Christ.

After an individual is saved by God's grace, he or she will become the child of God. In this state, a person has been born of the Spirit, although not yet attaining full perfection. This profound regeneration profoundly affects the individual, extending its influence across various aspects of life, including social relationships and duties.⁵⁸ By the grace of God, individuals experience a genuine union with Christ and work of the Holy Spirit. This process involves the mortification of sinful deeds and the growth in likeness to Christ. This is described by the Apostle Paul in the Book of Romans:

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you a free from the law of sin and death. For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. (Romans 8:1-4, NIV)

⁵⁸ Thomas Boston, *Human Nature in its Fourfold State*, eBook. (Monergism). 209, 223 <https://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/sdg/boston/Human%20Nature%20in%20its%20Fourfold%20-%20Thomas%20Boston.pdf> (Accessed Mar. 29, 2024)

It is crucial to note that this rebirth is not something achieved through personal effort, but rather a divine act of grace. As Boston emphasizes, we are entirely passive in our regeneration.⁵⁹ Some remain in their depraved state, while others are brought into a state of grace or regeneration. In either case, it is not through one's own merit but a divine honor and grace. Boston's exposition highlights the transformative power of divine grace in the lives of believers, as the Apostle Paul indicated, "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast".

The various stages of human nature, spanning its creation, its fall into corruption due to sin, its redemption through divine grace, and the ultimate hope of glory for believers, serve as a compelling testament to the ongoing human spiritual formation by the triune God. Simon Chan, a professor of Systematic Theology at Trinity Theological College in Singapore, underscores the different stages of human nature as central narrative of the Bible, which unfolds the extraordinary journey of God's relentless effort to reconcile humanity to Himself.⁶⁰ Through the incarnation of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, a divine plan for redemption is set into motion. Christ selflessly offers His life as a sacrifice to atone for the sins of humanity, serving as the bridge between the fallen state of humankind and God's perfect holiness. Furthermore, He sends the Holy Spirit to indwell in all believers, providing the essential source of guidance and transformation. The Holy Spirit, as the primary catalyst for this transformation, works within the hearts of believers, progressively restoring the image of God within them.

In summary, though the specific phrase "spiritual formation" may not be explicitly used, the Bible consistently conveys the profound truth that individuals are in a continuous process of being shaped and molded in their spirituality. This transformative

⁵⁹ Ibid. 227

⁶⁰ Simon Chan, *Spiritual Theology*, (Lisle, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998). 49

journey is initiated by God the Father, carried out through the work of Jesus Christ, and fulfilled by the guiding influence of the Holy Spirit. Active human participation is integral in employing spiritual disciplines as tools to cultivate trust and obedience toward God. The center of spiritual formation lies in the restoration of the fallen human image to reflect that of God. This salvific process, intricately woven throughout biblical teachings, invites individuals to engage in intentional practices that contribute to their spiritual growth and alignment with the divine purpose. Through the dynamic interplay of divine grace and human response, the journey of spiritual formation unfolds as a transformative and redemptive endeavor.

Protestant Theology of Spiritual Discipline

Spiritual formation, deeply embedded in the relationship between God and humanity, is a profound journey that encompasses the very essence of our existence. The transformative journey commences with the Creator Himself yet requires the active participation of believers. Protestant theology upholds spiritual formation disciplines in at least three key areas: human created in the image of God, the sanctification process, and life within the kingdom of God.

Created In the Image of God

Protestant theology upholds the belief that humans are created in the image of God, but this image was distorted by the fall and needs to be restored.⁶¹ The Bible uses term of "image" or "likeness" to signify the profound relationship between human beings and God. This distinctive creation in God's image sets humans apart from other creatures. The inherent capacity for a relationship with God allows us to perceive Him as both the source of our existence and a constant presence in our daily lives. The process of restoring

⁶¹ Joseph D. Driskill, *Protestant Spiritual Exercises: Theology History and Practice*, (Morehouse Publishing, 1999), 13

God's image in humans requires human participation which is referred as spiritual disciplines.

Being created in the image of God is not about physical attributes; it signifies a relational capacity that transcends the material realm. This binding relationship beckons us to surpass the limitations of our physical bodies. It calls us to surround our lives in faithfulness to the Creator. By entering a relationship with God, we move beyond self-absorption and a self-focused existence.⁶² Practicing spiritual disciplines helps our lives take on a new orientation guided by the values derived from our religious faith and sensibilities. As we deepen our connection with God, we uncover the profound presence of God at the core of our lives. This journey into a richer relationship with God allows us to discover His essence and meaning of our lives.

Anthony A. Hoekema, a theologian and professor of Systematic Theology at Calvin Theological Seminary, delves into the essence of humanity in his book "Created in God's Image." He expounds on the profound relationship between God and humanity, emphasizing that our understanding of ourselves significantly shapes our perception of both ourselves and those around us. This truth, that humans can build a relationship with God, cannot be self-derived but is revealed by God in Scripture. The intrinsic meaning and worth of human life, he asserts, originate not from within us but from our Creator. We exist solely because of Him and through Him.⁶³

⁶² Joseph D. Driskill, *Protestant Spiritual Exercises: Theology History and Practice*, (Morehouse Publishing, 1999) , 17

⁶³ Anthony A. Hoekema, *Created in God's Image* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1994), 12

Hoekema asserts that humanity is not an autonomous entity but rather a creation, deeply dependent on God and made in His image.⁶⁴ God has graced humanity with the gift of free will, enabling individuals to make moral and spiritual choices. This divine endowment of freedom is viewed as a reflection of God's own liberty. He fashioned humans with the capacity to make decisions and exercise their will, which is essential for genuine expressions of love, worship, and obedience to God. Thus, humans are created beings with a measure of relative independence. Hoekema thoughtfully reconciles the seemingly conflicting notions of dependence and freedom, drawing from Scripture to emphasize that both aspects coexist.

The theme of human freedom and dependence on God is a central and enduring theme within the Bible and is foundational to the process of spiritual formation.⁶⁵ Because humans are created in the image of God, they inherently reflect His attributes and characteristics. However, the Fall, stemming from the disobedience of Adam and Eve, serves as a stark reminder of the consequences that can result from misusing this gift of free will and straying from dependence on God. This disobedience distorted the divine image within humanity, laying the groundwork for the spiritual formation journey. To live the abundant life God intends for humans, there is a need to restore His image within us. The freedom bestowed upon us by God grants us the ability to cooperate with the Holy Spirit in seeking God's guidance, provision, and grace in every facet of life.

A life of faith is characterized by the ongoing tension between the exercise of one's free will and the acknowledgment of their complete dependence on God.⁶⁶ The Holy Spirit assumes the role of a guide in navigating this delicate balance, offering wisdom and guiding principles for living in alignment with God's will. Simultaneously,

⁶⁴ Anthony A. Hoekema, *Created in God's Image* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1994), 15

⁶⁵ Ibid. 26

⁶⁶ Ibid. 27

it underscores that humans are incapable of achieving salvation and righteousness independently. According to Hoekema, the very purpose of redemption is, in a tangible sense, the restoration of the divine image within humanity.

The process of restoration of God's image is the spirit formation, which is to align human will with God's will under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. It requires human effort but cannot be done solely by human effort. Spiritual discipline is a means to reach the restoration. It has been led by the Spirit and done by human's obedience.

In Michael D. Guinan's book "The Pentateuch", we can draw the insights from his perspective as a Franciscan priest and Professor Emeritus at the Franciscan School of Theology. Guinan's work, which includes contributions to renowned biblical commentaries and spiritual series, aligns with the evangelical Christian view and offers valuable insights into this profound subject.

One central aspect of spiritual formation, as highlighted by Guinan, is the inherent connection between humankind and their Creator. Guinan echoes Hoekema's view that humans are not totally autonomous beings but are intricately linked with God. This dependence on God reflects the first implication of our sonship relationship with the Creator, which is to "recognize and accept being in an image."⁶⁷ In other words, recognizing our existence as bearing the divine image, we acknowledge that we are tightly bound in a relationship with God. This recognition of our created nature implies a purpose that originates from God, and spiritual formation becomes the means through which God fulfills this purpose in us.

⁶⁷ Michael D. Guinan, *The Pentateuch*, (Collegeville, MN: A Michael Glazier Book, The Liturgical Press, 1990), 24

The second implication, as Guinan suggests, is the expectation for humans to live out the image of God. It is important for humans to know that God endows humanity with His characteristics, including creativity, moral standards, and wisdom to make choices. These divine attributes are meant to be used in harmony with God's purpose. In essence, spiritual formation entails living according to not just our own will but aligning our lives with God's will, which encompasses principles of “life-giving, justice-doing, and peace-making.”⁶⁸

Guinan underscores the profound connection between God and human beings and the transformative nature of spiritual formation. It is a process that allows individuals to recognize their inherent relationship with God and to continually strive to live in accordance with the divine image they bear, promoting life, justice, and peace in the world. In practical terms, this means that spiritual formation involves a process of developing and aligning our character and actions with God's image we bear. This transformation is a lifelong journey, and involves prayer, scripture study, communal worship, and moral choices, all of which contribute to shaping believers into individuals who manifest the image of God more fully in their lives.

As created in the image of God, we are called in to the deep and abiding relationship with God. It invites us to order our lives in faithfulness to the presence of God. The spiritual disciplines provide a means to accepting God's invitation to be transformed. They acknowledge the presence of God in daily life, the work of God in the creation and the miracles of God in life. They help us to experience the invisible God.

⁶⁸ Michael D. Guinan, *The Pentateuch*, (Collegeville, MN: A Michael Glazier Book, The Liturgical Press, 1990), 25

Justification and Sanctification

The Protestant theology asserts that we are saved by faith alone and grace alone. Salvation is a gift of God to whoever believes, as John wrote, “Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.” (John 1:12). In other words, God does not require believers to earn His favor, instead, divine favor is bestowed on all who have faith. The ensuing query that arises from this statement is: why does God desire to rescue us?

Salvation is bestowed freely, yet it is far from purposeless; in fact, it is a costly gift, requiring the sacrifice of Jesus' life to offer us redemption. The purpose of salvation is not to maintain our old way of life but to undergo a profound transformation into a new person. Joseph D. Driskill, an assistant professor of spirituality and assistant dean at the Disciples Seminary Foundation, affirms that both justification and sanctification should hold a central place in Protestant Christians lives.⁶⁹ Justification brings the assurance of forgiveness and reconciliation, which is the foundation of sanctification. Sanctification entails the gratitude response as spiritual growth and transformation into image of God, which is the purpose of salvation. In other words, the gift of grace, providing the certainty of forgiveness, necessitates a response marked by gratitude and service. Therefore, salvation and sanctification are inseparable; one genuinely saved will undoubtedly continue the journey of sanctification. This fact has been demonstrated in the lives of true believers in both the Old Testament and the New Testament.

Driskill points out that although Luther rejected the idea that spiritual practices contribute to salvation, he did not dismiss the use of spiritual disciplines in sanctification. In Lutheran groups, sanctification was de-emphasized compared to the Catholic tradition, but in the Calvinist reform movement led by John Calvin, sanctification once again

⁶⁹ Joseph D. Driskill, *Protestant Spiritual Exercises: Theology History and Practice*, (New York, NY: Morehouse Publishing, 1999), 24

played a significant role. Living a holy life, according to Calvinists, becomes a response to God's gift of salvation, driven by gratitude rather than an attempt to earn God's favor.

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In the Protestant perspective, Driskill continues explaining, spiritual disciplines do not conflict with the theology of salvation by faith.⁷¹ Protestant disciplines are motivated by gratitude for salvation and serve as a means to help believers live a godly life. As a Protestant theologian, John Wesley emphasized sanctification within the Protestant community. While accepting justification as God's work alone, Wesley believed in human capacity, through faithful devotions and actions, to renew the image of God.⁷² Sanctification, involving human cooperation and spiritual disciplines such as prayer, Bible reading, worship, and social action, enables believers to undergo a process of regeneration and align themselves with the transformative work of the Holy Spirit.

It is crucial to understand that spiritual disciplines are not about human effort or the works of the flesh; rather, they are a manifestation of the Holy Spirit working within us. Attempting to use spiritual disciplines to prove ourselves is futile, as Paul articulates in Galatians: "Are you so foolish? After beginning by means of the Spirit, are you now trying to finish by means of the flesh?" (Galatians 3:3). Our sinful nature cannot produce good works before we are reborn. However, after our regeneration, we can and should participate in the process of sanctification by practicing spiritual disciplines. Motivated by gratitude for God's grace, these disciplines help us surrender our desires and be transformed by the Holy Spirit.

⁷⁰ Joseph D. Driskill, *Protestant Spiritual Exercises: Theology History and Practice*, (New York, NY: Morehouse Publishing, 1999), 22

⁷¹ Ibid. 23

⁷² John Wesley, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, (Scotts Valley, CA: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2013), 18

Life in the Kingdom of God

In Protestant theology, the idea of the kingdom of God occupies a central position. As Driskill aptly points out, Protestant theology centers on the "now" and "not yet" dynamics of the kingdom.⁷³ Simply put, the kingdom has been inaugurated (Mat 12:28), but its full consummation is still awaiting. In the Christian life, this theological perspective asserts that we currently exist in the kingdom of God while also anticipating its ultimate fulfillment. It signifies a transformative journey, requiring believers to embrace spiritual disciplines as training exercises for living in accordance with the kingdom's principles. It is a divine gift that necessitates active cultivation within the hearts of believers, leading to a life marked by God-centered values and faithful service in the mission of spreading the reign of God.

The kingdom of God, as preached and brought forth by Jesus, represents a radical departure from the former life, demanding a complete transformation. It is a realm where our old selves are incompatible, requiring a process of dying to the former ways and experiencing resurrection of new life. As Willard, a renowned author of Christian spiritual formation, wrote, "Spiritual disciplines are training exercises to give us power to live in the kingdom." He further explained, "To train means arranging our life around those practices that enable us to do what we cannot now do by direct effort. The point of training is to receive power, so we arrange our life around practices through which we get power."⁷⁴

⁷³ John Wesley, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, (Scotts Valley, CA: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2013), 25

⁷⁴ Dallas Willard, *Living in Christ's Presence: Final Words on Heaven and the Kingdom of God*, (IVP, 2017), 43

Contrary to a mere set of rules, the kingdom of God is a gift of a new life bestowed upon all believers.⁷⁵ This life, infused with God-centered values and godly character, is likened to a seed planted in our hearts. The responsibility falls upon believers to cultivate their hearts, creating an environment favorable for the seed to grow and bear fruit. Spiritual disciplines play a crucial role in this cultivation process, suppressing fleshly desires and fostering habits that align with the values of the kingdom.

As we undergo preparation to dwell in the kingdom of God, we are simultaneously anticipating the arrival of the future kingdom of God.⁷⁶ As Jesus concludes His earthly mission, He trusts His disciples with the task of spreading the gospel and expanding the kingdom. This underscores the active involvement of human beings in God's divine plan. Saved into the kingdom, believers are not merely recipients but also participants, called to contribute to the realization of God's reign through faithful service. Through servanthood, we undergo training to obey God and experience transformation through the work of the Holy Spirit.

In summary, while traditionally associated with Catholic churches, spiritual disciplines are also integral to the fabric of Protestant theology. Practicing spiritual disciplines is the way we actively pursue a closer relationship with God, and is a concept deeply rooted in the Bible. In fact, the term "discipline" is closely related to the Latin word "disciple," both indicating a way of learning.⁷⁷ Those who engage in a discipline are, in essence, disciples. If our faith were solely a philosophical or theological pursuit, intellectual discipline might suffice. However, because it revolves around a profound

⁷⁵ 賴特著, 蔡昇達譯, *信主了, 然後呢? 天國的倫理學建構*。(台灣, 臺北, 校園書房, 2019), 157

⁷⁶ Ibid. 161

⁷⁷ Arthur J. Freeman, *Spiritual Formation: The Discernment of God in Life and the Formation of the Christian Life*. eBook, 23 <https://www.moravianseminary.edu/center-moravian-studies/online-resources/spiritual-formation> (Accessed Feb. 22, 2024)

relationship with God our Creator, discipline becomes our means of practicing and nurturing that relationship, and transforming our lifestyle and our very essence. Therefore, discipline plays a pivotal role in how we live and defines our identity as individuals in this spiritual journey.

Summary

Spiritual disciplines, although the precise term "spiritual discipline" may not be directly stated in Scripture, the underlying concept is intricately interwoven throughout the Bible. This foundational aspect is supported and emphasized within Protestant theology, where believers recognize the significance of intentional spiritual practices in nurturing their faith journey.

The bedrock of spiritual disciplines can be traced back to the Mosaic law, where God, through various commandments, instructed His people to engage in practices that fostered a deep connection with Him. These divine commands served as a framework for righteous living and laid the groundwork for spiritual growth. Furthermore, the life of Christ stands as a profound example of the importance of spiritual disciplines. Jesus, during His earthly ministry, demonstrated a consistent commitment to prayer, fasting, and solitude. His deliberate engagement in these practices highlights their transformative power and exemplifies their role in establishing a profound connection with the divine.

In Protestant theology, spiritual disciplines are integral to the understanding of creation, sanctification, and the kingdom of God. They serve as means to sanctify believers, restore the divine image within them, and prepare them for eternal life in God's kingdom. Engaging in spiritual disciplines is viewed as active participation in the ongoing work of God's transformative plan for individuals. It serves as intentional pathways that believers walk on, seeking to align their lives with the divine principles laid out in Scripture and fostering a profound and transformative relationship with God.

Chapter 3

History of Spiritual Disciplines

Throughout Christian history, a fundamental aspect of being a Christian has centered around discipleship. This concept goes beyond a mere set of rules or abstract beliefs; instead, it embodies a comprehensive way of life. To be a Christian, then, means to navigate the world with a distinct manner of living. Notably, in the book of Acts, early followers of Jesus were not referred to as Christians but as followers of The Way or people of The Way (Acts 9:2, 22:4). Their commitment went beyond cultural practices; they were devoted entirely to proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ, cherishing fellowship with God and one another. Their actions earn them a new designation as “Christians”, a term that literally translates to “belong to Christ.”⁷⁸ (Acts 11:26)

To be like Christ, the practice of spiritual discipline has been a cornerstone for Christians since the beginning, offering varied approaches to living out their faith. It extends beyond mere acts of piety or devotion, encapsulating a rich reservoir of spiritual wisdom embedded in specific ways of life. This chapter delves into three major spiritual traditions – the desert saints’ tradition, the monastery tradition, and the piety movement. The selection of these disciplines is rooted in the fact that the initial two are shared traditions for all Christians predating the Reformation, while the last one aligns with the Protestant tradition. The sources of information for this chapter are mainly derived from three books: Gerald Sittser’s “Water from a Deep Well,” Dong-Shen Wu’s “Love of Soul,” (吳東生，〈靈魂之愛火〉) and Sun-Qiang Peng’s “Two Thousand Year History of Spirituality.” (彭順強，〈二千年靈修神學歷史〉). The author intends to examine

⁷⁸ Michael J. Wilkins, ed. David Noel Freedman, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 926.

how these spiritual discipline traditions were employed in the past and continue to be used today to help Christians bridge the gap between their faith and daily life.

Desert Saints Tradition: Discipline for Spiritual Fortitude

In the third to fifth centuries, certain early Christians in the Middle East sought to follow Jesus's lifestyle and combat the temptations of sin.⁷⁹ Recognizing that spiritual struggle was not only normal but essential, they believed that a comfortable life could dull spiritual sensitivity, leading them away from the righteous path. Consequently, they abandoned comfort and embraced the harsh desert environment, engaging in rigorous spiritual disciplines to empower themselves against evil forces.

The desert, with its barren, stark, and lonely landscape, served as a symbolic backdrop for a life stripped of distractions, possessions, and pleasures.⁸⁰ This harsh environment represented a place where individuals could make nothing of themselves, allowing only God to work. There are no provisions to meet physical needs, no conveniences to make life run more smoothly, no friendships to dull the edge of loneliness, no settlements to welcome hungry, thirsty travelers. The desert implies isolation, loneliness, temptation, and combat. For the desert saints, residing in such desolation was a deliberate choice to reclaim a faith that had become too easy and convenient, distancing themselves from a world that could consume them. In other words, they identified themselves as aliens in this world.

The Desert Saints embraced a disciplined routine, harmonizing work, prayer, and moments of solitude.⁸¹ Dwelling in modest stone huts or caves, they engaged in various

⁷⁹ Gerald L. Sittser, *Water from a Deep Well* (InterVarsity Press, Kindle Edition). 73

⁸⁰ Ibid. 31

⁸¹ Ibid. 83

small trades to meet their basic needs. Generosity flowed from their hearts as they shared what they had with the less fortunate, even though they themselves were often in need. Their devotion extended to continuous prayer, seamlessly woven into the fabric of their labor—a commitment resonating with the biblical exhortation to "pray without ceasing."

Their diet comprised simple food such as dry bread with water and salt. Fasting, aligned with the church calendar, punctuated their year, deepening their spiritual connection. They committed Scripture memorizing, a practice deemed essential in their community. They met together on Sundays for worshipping and partaking in the Eucharist. In essence, whether their ascetic practices were rigorous or modest, these Desert Saints embodied a lifestyle marked by asceticism, shaping their daily existence.⁸²

They held the conviction that discipleship inherently brings about conflict and challenges, since it necessitates a lifestyle contrary to natural desires.⁸³ The desert served as a training ground for them in the pursuit of discipleship of Jesus Christ. While recognizing the importance of engaging with the world, as God calls us to serve in it, they emphasized the need for distance and tranquility. The constant busyness, noise, demands, and pressures of the world, if unchecked, could overwhelm and consume individuals. This required the discipline of solitude, which is a specific kind of spiritual discipline demanding absolute separation from society. The Desert Saints believed that such solitude was vital for spiritual growth. In the solitude, these saints were focused to confront the most critical battle—the battle for the soul.

⁸² Gerald L. Sittser, *Water from a Deep Well* (InterVarsity Press, Kindle Edition).⁸²

⁸³ Ibid. 83

Exposed to forces beyond their control, they understood that the "world, the flesh, and the devil" posed threats in every dimension of life.⁸⁴ In this world, there is no safety, no straightforward path, and no convenient or comfortable way to live out their faith. Despite Christ's redemption from sin, victory over Satan, humans are not removed from the challenges of this world. Furthermore, the inclination of human nature leans towards rebellion, indulgence, and laziness, posing additional challenges to the authentic expression of our faith. Hence, with this understanding, the Desert Saints purposefully chose many vigorous spiritual disciplines as weapons for engaging in spiritual warfare. They retreat to the desert not in search of tranquility or leisure for contemplation, but to fight the devil.

A remarkable aspect of desert spirituality is the unwavering determination of Desert Saints to belong to God alone, wholeheartedly and entirely.⁸⁵ Their daily existence is characterized by disciplined prayer and self-control. The Desert Fathers recognized the inseparability and mutual influence of the body and soul, asserting that soul renewal is contingent upon the well-being of the body. Consequently, their guidance extends to various aspects of bodily concerns, such as dietary habits, sleep arrangements, and living arrangements.

One of the significant contributions of the Desert Fathers to the history of spirituality lies in their explicit desire to seamlessly integrate spiritual discipline with physical labor.⁸⁶ Their insistence on manual labor serves the dual purpose of preventing them from falling into laziness and moral decay. The Desert Saints view the interplay between the inner mind's teaching, reflection, and vigilance, coupled with the outer

⁸⁴Gerald L. Sittser, *Water from a Deep Well* (InterVarsity Press, Kindle Edition). 74

⁸⁵ Ibid. 58

⁸⁶ 吳東生, *靈魂之愛火*, (台灣, 台北: 聖經資源出版社 2018), 58

body's labor and action, as essential and interdependent components of desert ascetic training. Choosing a humble and uncertain lifestyle, they strive to approach God with undivided hearts, placing complete dependence on Him. Rejecting religious falsehoods and spiritual pretenses, they maintain that attempts to construct one's identity through personal achievements are unnecessary. They assert that true identity is revealed through the grace received from God.

Their perspective on the body encompasses three distinct views, providing valuable insights even for the modern Christians.⁸⁷ Firstly, they consider the body as the outer casing or vessel of the soul, with the soul being considered as the most significant. The emphasis in practicing physical restraint lies in prioritizing spiritual attention, aiming to liberate oneself from the dominance and constraints of the body, ultimately attaining spiritual openness and freedom. They followed the principle of contemplating heavenly matters and allocating minimal time to the body's needs for survival, dedicating the majority to nurturing the soul.

The second viewpoint posits the body as the locus of sin, wherein the fall leads to the flesh succumbing to various sinful desires, subsequently invading and even controlling the soul with extreme emotions. Recognizing the tendency for people to excessively prioritize the body, neglecting the soul's needs, saints like Augustine stressed the necessity of asceticism to curb bodily impulses. The purpose of penance in this context is to benefit the soul, ensuring that the body obeys the soul and preventing the soul from being stifled by the clamor of bodily desires.

The third perspective emphasizes the need for discipline in the body, asserting that bodily discipline contributes to the overall discipline of the soul. Acknowledging the interconnectedness and mutual influence of the body and soul, they draw parallels

⁸⁷ 吳東生, *靈魂之愛火*, (台灣, 台北: 聖經資源出版社 2018), 66

between fasting and prayer in the Bible. Fasting is seen as a means of disciplining the body, while prayer serves as the discipline of the soul. These two disciplines are deemed complementary and are encouraged to be practiced together.

One of the renowned Desert Fathers was Anthony the Great, who underwent prolonged spiritual disciplines in the desert, resulting in remarkable spiritual growth.⁸⁸ Born in A.D. 251, Antony grew up in a prosperous Egyptian household. Following the passing of his parents, he assumed responsibility for managing the household affairs. Over time, he became more earnest in embracing the Christian faith inherited from his parents.

Motivated by a desire to emulate the apostles and follow Jesus more closely, Antony made a radical decision to sell all his possessions and distribute the proceeds to the poor. Seeking guidance, he found a mentor among the Desert Fathers and engaged in rigorous disciplines, including vigils, fasting, celibacy, embracing poverty, solitude, and intensive memorization of Scripture.⁸⁹ To sustain himself physically, Antony engaged in manual labor, weaving mats.

As his reputation grew, so did the adversary's attempts to destroy him.⁹⁰ Antony faced intense spiritual conflict with the devil, resisting temptations related to desires of the flesh and physical challenges. Despite these trials, Antony attributed his success to

⁸⁸ 吳東生, *靈魂之愛火*, (台灣, 台北: 聖經資源出版社 2018), 41

⁸⁹ Ibid. 42

⁹⁰ Anthony Curley, *The Thirty-Eight Sayings of Saint Antony the Great: Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, (Scotts Valley, CA: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2017), 83

the assistance of Jesus and the ascetic exercises he embraced, believing that the soul's strength increased when bodily pleasures diminished.

In his letters, Antony emphasized God's continual atoning work and advocated for people to practice disciplines to enhance spiritual discernment.⁹¹ He saw spiritual disciplines as directed against the forces of the devil, not physical weaknesses. The latter part of Antony's life was devoted to practicing disciplines, serving those who suffered for their faith, healing the sick, engaging in debates with heretics, and mentoring disciples. His commitment to strict disciplines allowed him to restrain his flesh and believed that reducing physical satisfaction strengthened the soul.

Antony's story encapsulates the essence of this unique spiritual tradition, spending years in the desert contending with the devil and seeking God. The Desert Fathers' heroic efforts in spiritual discipline reflected a deep respect for the example set by Jesus. They withdrew into the desert to honor the God incarnated in Christ, viewing the incarnation not as a means to escape suffering but as an inspiration to choose suffering, recognizing its redemptive nature.⁹² Likewise, contemporary Christians ought to willingly endure suffering for the glory of God when the alternative would be disobedience. Just as Jesus laid down His life and died on the cross to fulfill God's will, Christians should embrace the challenges of love, even when they inevitably lead to suffering. Certainly, this is not inherent to human nature; it requires intentional discipline, akin to the ascetic practices of Desert Saints, to achieve this objective.

⁹¹ Anthony Curley, *The Thirty-Eight Sayings of Saint Antony the Great: Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, (Scotts Valley, CA: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2017), 92

⁹² 彭順強, *二千年靈修神學歷史*, (香港: 天道書樓有限公司, 2005), 79

The Desert Saints did not view extreme physical disciplines as their ultimate goal; rather, their primary aim was the growth of their spiritual life. The battle for the soul held the most importance for them. They believed that the Christian journey necessitates a struggle against the darkness within the heart, symbolized by the prevalent egoism in every individual. True life and freedom, according to the Desert Saints, could only be discovered by confronting this darkness.

Among these saints, Evagrius Ponticus stood out as a profound explorer of this idea, earning the title of the great psychologist of the desert tradition. Evagrius delved into understanding why humans are so prone to temptation and quick to commit sins. He identified eight categories of "thoughts," aligning roughly with the seven deadly sins popularized during the Middle Ages. They are (1) vainglory, or pride, (2) greed, or covetousness, (3) lust, or inordinate or illicit sexual desire, (4) envy, (5) gluttony, which is usually understood to include drunkenness, (6) wrath, or anger, and (7) sloth. Each of these can be overcome with the seven heavenly virtues of (1) humility, (2) charity, (3) chastity, (4) gratitude, (5) temperance, (6) patience, and (7) diligence.⁹³

Overcoming these thoughts, Evagrius asserted, requires acknowledging one's vulnerability, resisting temptation with courage, practicing spiritual discipline, standing firm, and enduring patiently.⁹⁴ Through consistent discipline, a spirit of calm, peace, and serenity would gradually emerge. Evagrius emphasized that mere resistance to these thoughts wouldn't suffice; they must be replaced with positive virtues.

⁹³ Mary M. Funk, *Thoughts Matter: Discovering the Spiritual Journey*, (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2012), 9.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.* 11

Evagrius's guidance underscores that spiritual disciplines are not about showcasing external performances but about internally transforming sinful thoughts. The goal is not to mimic the appearance of saints but to cultivate a mindset akin to Jesus. It serves as a reminder that external achievements in disciplines can easily distract us, and without internal change, the outward disciplines achieve little.

The Desert Saints implore us to resist the prevailing cultural values by embracing solitude. This intentional withdrawal from modern culture provides a necessary separation, enabling us to recognize, expose, and combat our vulnerability to its seductive power. Antony succinctly expressed this, stating, "The man who abides in solitude and quiet is delivered from fighting three battles—those of hearing, speech, and sight. Then he will have but one battle to fight—the battle of the heart."⁹⁵ In other words, choosing outward discipline helps people win the inward battle against worldly distractions, as John wrote, "Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them. For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—comes not from the Father but from the world" (1 John 2:15-16). The discipline of solitude and silence can reduce the power of worldliness to a minimum, enabling us to focus our hearts maximumly on loving God.

Identifying comfort and prosperity as adversaries of spiritual life, the Desert Saints were wary of the dangers they posed.⁹⁶ They viewed a life of ease as detrimental, comparing it to smoke driving out bees and robbing them of their honey. Consequently, they embraced spiritual discipline or asceticism—a daily commitment to self-denial and obedience to God. This practice aimed not only to wean them from worldliness but also to fortify them against temptation, making them adept masters of spiritual discipline.

⁹⁵ Gerald L. Sittser, *Water from a Deep Well* (InterVarsity Press, Kindle Edition) , 94

⁹⁶ Ibid. 89

The lifestyle and teachings of the Desert Saints have had a profound impact on Christian monasticism and spirituality. However, their traditions have also faced various criticisms from different perspectives over the centuries, , especially in extreme practices and theological weaknesses. One major criticism of the Desert Saints' traditions, pointed out by Harpham who is an humanities author and scholar, is their extreme asceticism:⁹⁷ the Desert Fathers and Mothers practiced severe forms of self-denial, including prolonged fasting, sleep deprivation, and physical self-mortification. Critics argue that these practices can be seen as unhealthy, both physically and psychologically. Some contend that such extreme asceticism can lead to a neglect of the body, which is also considered a temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19-20).

Some critics have raised theological and doctrinal concerns about the teachings of the Desert Saints.⁹⁸ For example, their emphasis on achieving spiritual perfection and battling demonic forces can sometimes overshadow the core Christian doctrines of grace and salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. While their teachings on spiritual warfare and asceticism are valuable, they should not eclipse the foundational truths of the Gospel.

Additionally, the writings and sayings of the Desert Fathers and Mothers are often anecdotal and lack systematic theology.⁹⁹ This can make it difficult to discern clear doctrinal positions and can sometimes lead to confusion or misinterpretation. Critics argue that while their insights are valuable, they should be supplemented with robust theological study and grounded in the broader Christian tradition.

⁹⁷ Geoffrey Galt Harpham, *The Ascetic Imperative in Culture and Criticism*, (Chicago IL: The University of Chicago Press Chicago and London), 1987. 237

⁹⁸ Ibid. 243

⁹⁹ Geoffrey Galt Harpham, *The Ascetic Imperative in Culture and Criticism*, (Chicago IL: The University of Chicago Press Chicago and London), 1987. 227

Despite these criticisms, the traditions of the Christian Desert Saints have made significant contributions to Christian spirituality. Their commitment to prayer, solitude, and asceticism has inspired countless believers to seek a deeper relationship with God. However, it is essential to engage with their legacy critically and thoughtfully, recognizing both the strengths and potential pitfalls of their practices.

In an age where Christianity seamlessly blends into the cultural status quo, the Desert Saints might seem extreme in their abandonment of worldly possessions to follow Jesus. Yet, they were cognizant of the pitfalls of busyness, ambition, and self-indulgence, even in their own time. Their perspective emphasized that life's purpose transcends ease, prosperity, and success, focusing instead on intimacy with God, character maturity, and influencing the world positively.

The Desert Saints' comprehension of the relationship between the body and soul serves as a poignant reminder for modern-day Christians. In a world dominated by secular influences, they recognized the potential for believers to forget their Christian identity and live like non-believers without intentional discipline. Just as the Desert Fathers went to extremes to prioritize God, modern Christians should engage in spiritual disciplines to keep their focus on God amidst the demands of daily life.

Monastic Traditions: Discipline for Centering Life on God

In the midst of the second century, Constantine's commitment to Christ and his favoritism toward the church left an indelible mark on Christianity. Suddenly, being Christian became almost fashionable, leading to an unprecedented surge in church attendance. However, this rapid growth seemed to coincide with a decline in the standards of discipleship. Some scholars estimate that around A.D. 300, Christians constituted no more than 10 percent of the empire. After 60 years, Christians made up over 50 percent

of the empire.¹⁰⁰ This marked a significant transformation, as Christianity and Rome gradually merged, shifting from the church of martyrs to the church of the empire—a stark reversal of the previous norm.

However, the expansion of the church under Emperor Constantine didn't do well with everyone. A group of fervent believers, committed to upholding the biblical standards of discipleship established by the martyrs, believed that true Christian faith demanded the sacrifice of one's life for God. Unlike the urban congregations were being overrun by individuals joining the Christian movement merely for its perceived fashionable status and immediate worldly benefits, these Christians chose to follow the Desert Saints steps and establish communities of faith in the desert, intending to bear witness against and create an alternative to the city churches.¹⁰¹

Ironically, the challenge faced by these Christians in the desert was not an evil empire but a worldly church, not persecution but privilege.¹⁰² Their withdrawal was not an attempt to escape problems but a deliberate engagement with them. The desert community became a battleground where they confronted the devil, discovered God, purged themselves of sin, cultivated holiness, practiced ascetic disciplines, and prayed unceasingly to God. In opposition to the worldly advantage offered by the new form of Christianity under Constantine, these monks initiated a countermovement, marking the inception of the Monastic Movement.

¹⁰⁰Gerald L. Sittser, *Water from a Deep Well* (InterVarsity Press, Kindle Edition), 80

¹⁰¹ Gerald L. Sittser, *Water from a Deep Well* (InterVarsity Press, Kindle Edition), 101

¹⁰² Ibid. 101

The monk's experience is one of abandoning worldly concerns to uniting with God.¹⁰³ To achieve this goal, the monks are to purify the body and mind through the practice of the asceticism and the meditation of God on the Bible and prayer. So, in practice, monasticism involves a communal life of seclusion, with prayer, reading, and work constituting the main life of the monks.

The fundamental sentiment ingrained in all genuine spiritual experiences is the fear of God.¹⁰⁴ Monks are encouraged to consistently resonate with the sound of God before them throughout their entire day of activities. This practice aims for them to be in solitude, both in form and as individuals, enveloped in the fear of God. This fear serves as the foundational motivation for cultivating silence, exercising prudence in words and deeds, showing respect to elders, honoring fellow brothers, and extending hospitality to strangers. Fear, in this context, is a response to God, while humility is a response to oneself—a reflexive reaction stemming from the fear of God.

The monastic life is characterized by the rhythmic interplay of prayer and work, representing the core purpose for which humans were created.¹⁰⁵ God's call is for us to seek His face in prayer and to carry out His work in the world. Monastic spirituality asserts that engaging in both these activities is essential for fulfilling the purpose for which God created us. Monks follow this rhythm every day except Sunday, dedicating themselves to prayer and work. This balanced approach ensures that prayer guards against transforming work into an idol, and work prevents prayers from becoming mere empty exercises.

¹⁰³ 彭順強，*二千年靈修神學歷史*，（香港：天道書樓有限公司，2005），41

¹⁰⁴ 吳東生，*靈魂之愛火*，（台灣，台北：聖經資源出版社 2018），103

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.* 102

The monastic rhythm of prayer and work establishes an age-old routine followed by monasteries for centuries.¹⁰⁶ This routine involves the repetition of the same activities day in and day out—praying and then engaging in work. This established routine lays the groundwork for a subtle, profound, and transformative work in both our souls and the world. It demands patience and endurance, as it unfolds over time.

While routine has the potential to make us impatient, yearning for a quicker path to the maturity of spirit and life's productivity is human nature. Often considered tedious and monotonous, routine is indispensable. True mastery arises from persisting in an endeavor when the inclination to quit is strong. This principle holds true in various earthly pursuits, be it music, athletics, scholarship, or, importantly, in the realm of spiritual life. Thus, despite its potential for boredom and weariness, routine becomes a necessary component for growth and accomplishment.

Contemplation holds a central position in monasticism, demanding a deep attentiveness to God and an openness to discerning divine messages through events and people.¹⁰⁷ This heightened attentiveness forms the core of the monastic commitment to silence, a practice aimed at learning the language of the heart and cultivating the virtue of discerning wisdom. The contemplation-attentiveness-silence pattern necessitates a state of stillness, free from numerous distractions, as emphasized in monastic teachings about the significance of stability.

Stability is another important requirement for monks.¹⁰⁸ In this context, stability extends beyond the physical notion of staying in one place; it fundamentally involves

¹⁰⁶ Ibid. 103

¹⁰⁷ 吳東生，*靈魂之愛火*，（台灣，台北：聖經資源出版社 2018），112

¹⁰⁸ Ibid. 116

maintaining focus rather than dispersing one's attention. It signifies a commitment to remaining faithful to the spiritual journey's demands, steering clear of distractions that might divert one from the path of spiritual growth. These monasteries aim not only to establish a disciplined regimen but primarily to foster spiritual growth—thus focusing on internal transformation.

Monastic community constitutes another vital aspect for monks.¹⁰⁹ In addition to their individual scriptural meditation, prayer, and contemplation, they convene for worship and labor. Communal life is deeply intertwined, resembling a familial bond, with members adhering to the same daily schedule. Monasticism exerts its influence both within the community and in solitude, as even when alone, the overarching rhythm of monastic life permeates one's day. Within this community, time, space, and possessions are shared among all residents, reflecting the ethos of mutual support and care, as instructed by Jesus.

Various saints in the monastic tradition share akin views on disciplining the body to orient life toward God. This shared perspective among monastic figures highlights a universal dedication to spiritual advancement through purposeful cultivation of virtues and ascetic practices. Their diverse insights into comprehending the role of our bodies in spiritual growth offer valuable guidance for the spiritual formation of contemporary Christians.

Benedict of Nursia (480- 550 AD), a highly influential monastic leader in the Western church, grew up on an estate in Italy. Dissatisfied with the worldly behavior of his peers in Rome, he embarked on a solitary's life at the age of twenty, practicing severe asceticism in a cave for several years. Eventually, a group of enthusiastic believers sought his guidance, leading to the formation of a monastic community. Benedict penned a set

¹⁰⁹ Ibid. 117

of guidelines for this community, now known as "The Rule of St. Benedict," which continues to be used worldwide.¹¹⁰

The Rule advocated for a simple monk's life, emphasizing common labor to foster humility through mundane tasks serving the community's common good.¹¹¹ Monks, regardless of the success of their labor, were forbidden to possess personal belongings, promoting simplicity and contentment. Virtue cultivation was paramount, with three virtues highlighted: the discipline of silence to control the tongue, the practice of obedience to Christ, Scripture, the Rule, and mentors, and the cultivation of humility through twelve outlined steps.

Benedict's Rule emphasized stability, order, and simplicity, balancing and moderating various aspects, including prayer and work, corporate and private activities, obedience and personal conscience, renunciation and application of material possessions, zeal, and prudence in penance.¹¹² The code aimed to enable individuals to live out Christ's teachings in their daily lives, and it valued wisdom over law, emphasizing a way of life rather than a set of conduct rules and prioritizing inner motivation and life over external laws and observance.

Monks were mandated to pray, primarily through the Divine Office, consisting of eight short worship services daily.¹¹³ This routine centered their attention on God, reminding them of their ultimate purpose—to know God as Creator, Savior, and Provider. Monastic study, conducted through *Lectio Divina*, involved reflective, repetitive, and

¹¹⁰ Benedict, *The Rule of St. Benedict in English*, ed. by Timothy Fry and Timothy Horner (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1981) 68

¹¹¹ Ibid. 99

¹¹² Benedict, *The Rule of St. Benedict in English*, ed. by Timothy Fry and Timothy Horner (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1981), 99

¹¹³ Ibid. 110

meditative reading of texts, particularly the biblical text, with the understanding that study served spiritual concerns. Benedict viewed knowledge not as an end but as a means to holiness, humility, and contemplation of God.

John Climacus, also recognized as John of the Ladder (579 - 649 AD), stands among the renowned monks, credited with authoring the profoundly influential work titled "The Ladder of Divine Ascent."¹¹⁴ John's emphasis lays on the indispensability of personal experience, asserting that just as one cannot learn to see with their eyes solely through the words of others, the art of prayer cannot be acquired from teachings alone. Unlike the Code of St. Benedict, John's work, "The Ladder of Divine Ascent," offers minimal detailed instruction on prayer techniques, communal worship, penance, designated practice periods, or dietary norms. Instead, John's focus shifts toward a path leading to God, a journey marked by a profound yearning for love.

John's purpose did not revolve around teaching abstract ascetic theology or endorsing specific ascetic practices; rather, he underscored the significance of inner disposition over outward asceticism. Inner humility and purity, according to John, held greater importance than mere outward conformity to rules.¹¹⁵

In John's perspective, the human predicament stemmed from various evil desires that needed to be confronted and overcome. He held a dual view of the body, seeing it as an adversary with its fallen nature and protocols, yet recognizing its vital role in participating in spiritual life and its need to be triumphed alongside the soul. John's approach to battling the flesh did not involve suppression or eradication but rather

¹¹⁴ John Climacus: *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, trans. Colm Luibheid and Norman Russell (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press 1982). 102

¹¹⁵ Ibid. 145

guidance and virtuous living. He asserted that the fire of the flesh's lust is not extinguished with cold water but with the fervor of heavenly love.¹¹⁶ According to John, the lust of the body itself is neutral and has the potential to glorify God. However, it is only when humans misuse it according to their own will that sin arises. Hence, the purpose of spiritual discipline is not merely to regulate sins but to serve as a tool for training the body to align with the spirit.

Bernard of Clairvaux (1090 – 1153 AD), a founder of numerous Benedictine monasteries in Europe, advocated that the journey back to God initiates at a physical level. He acknowledged the inherent goodness of the physical body created by God but stressed that the proper relationship between body and soul had been disrupted post-Fall, particularly in the soul's struggle to govern the various instinctual passions of the body. Bernard advocated for the implementation of ascetic disciplines to restrain and conquer bodily urges while maintaining an optimistic view of our ability to control physical desires with the aid of grace.¹¹⁷ This is especially crucial in today's world, which prioritizes authenticity and often perceives any restriction of physical desires as a constraint on freedom. This distorted notion of freedom leads many Christians to succumb to their own sinful inclinations and resist disciplining themselves for a godly life.

Francis of Assisi (1181-1226), one of the most influential Catholic leaders and reformers, often referred to as the "saint of the saints," rooted his theology in Scriptures and the profound Christ of the Trinity. His concerns revolved around the three significant actions of the Triune God in salvation history—creation, redemption, and ultimate perfection. Creator, Redeemer, and Deliverer were central concepts in his theological framework, applied comprehensively to the Triune God. All Christians were urged to

¹¹⁶ Ibid. 153

¹¹⁷ Bernard McGinn, *The Growth of Mysticism: Gregory the Great through the 12th Century*. Vol 2. The Presence of God: A History of Western Christian Mysticism (New York, NY: Crossroad, 1994), 173

follow and imitate Christ, with the goal of being molded into Christ's likeness through the practice of fundamental virtues like repentance, obedience, humility, and simplicity. Francis dedicated himself to emulating the life of Jesus in the Gospels, treading the path of poverty, suffering, and the cross, even identifying with Christ's crucifixion and death. His intention was to remain Christ-centered, emphasizing that recognition and following of Christ could only occur through the Spirit of Christ.¹¹⁸

Francis also believed that following Adam's fall, the human body became an instrument of sin, an adversary to humanity, and a significant focus of spiritual warfare; and he advocated for the conquest of one's body through fasting and various austerities, ensuring that the body remains under one's control.¹¹⁹ The objective was to wisely guard against the temptations arising from bodily indulgence, preventing submission to the desires of the flesh. This echoes the teaching of Jesus, "Then Jesus said to his disciples, 'Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.'" (Matthew 16:24). Many Christians may find this teaching too challenging to embrace and consequently give up without attempting it. Evidently, they overlook God's promise to assist us in following His will. With the help of triune God, we can start disciplining ourselves in small steps to practice self-denial.

There is no miraculous method to change our hearts after becoming Christians. Instead, it is a gradual process involving ordinary, everyday work. Monasteries employ the rhythmic cycle of prayer and labor as the means to transform the lives of monks.¹²⁰ Exemplified by Jesus himself, this rhythmic pattern involves withdrawing into prayerful

¹¹⁸ Bernard McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism: Men and Women in the New Mysticism 1200-1350*. Vol 3. *The Presence of God: A History of Western Christian Mysticism* (New York, NY: Crossroad, 1994), 43

¹¹⁹ Bernard McGinn, *The Growth of Mysticism: Gregory the Great through the 12th Century*. Vol 2. *The Presence of God: A History of Western Christian Mysticism* (New York, NY: Crossroad, 1994), 61

¹²⁰ Gerald L. Sittser, *Water from a Deep Well* (InterVarsity Press, Kindle Edition), 114

solitude and then returning to the world to preach, heal, confront injustice, and ultimately sacrifice for the sins of humanity. Separating these two activities poses risks. Without work, prayer may become routine and disconnected from a deep concern for the world, losing its purpose and passion. On the other hand, work can become an idol, driven by material gain, power, and prestige, devoid of reliance on God for wisdom and power.

Monasteries have served as centers of prayer, learning, and community life, profoundly influencing Christian spirituality and culture. However, monastic traditions have not been immune to criticism. David Andrews, a professor at Christian Heritage College in Australia, points out that monastic traditions often lack engagement with the world around us.¹²¹ Monks and nuns typically live apart from mainstream society, focusing on prayer, contemplation, and community life. Critics argue that this withdrawal can be seen as neglecting the biblical call to be "the salt of the earth" and "the light of the world" (Matthew 5:13-16).

In addition, Andrews also criticizes that monastic traditions is the perceived lack of evangelistic focus.¹²² While monasteries are centers of prayer and contemplation, critics argue that they do not prioritize evangelism and outreach as much as they should. The Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20) calls Christians to go and make disciples of all nations, and some contend that monastic life can sometimes neglect this fundamental mission. By emphasizing prayer and contemplation, monastic communities might be seen as inward-focused rather than outward-looking. Critics suggest that a balanced

¹²¹ David Andrews, "A Critical Reflection On Monasticism - Old And New," accessed on 6/30/24, <https://www.daveandrews.com.au/articles/A%20Critical%20Reflection%20On%20Monasticism%20-%20Old%20And%20New.pdf>

¹²² David Andrews, "A Critical Reflection On Monasticism - Old And New," accessed on 6/30/24, <https://www.daveandrews.com.au/articles/A%20Critical%20Reflection%20On%20Monasticism%20-%20Old%20And%20New.pdf>

approach should include a strong commitment to evangelism and outreach, alongside contemplative practices.

While monastics seek deeper communion with God, this separation can lead to a lack of engagement with the pressing social issues and needs of the broader community. Critics suggest that Christians are called to actively participate in the world, demonstrating Christ's love through service, justice, and evangelism. The challenge lies in balancing contemplative life with the imperative to witness and serve.

Despite these criticisms, Christian monastic traditions have made significant contributions to the Church and society. Christian monasticism, encompassing a range of styles from solitary living to formally structured communities, centers around spiritual discipline. The pursuit of God as the ultimate destination demands a singleness of heart, eliminating everything extraneous through a life of simplicity and discipline. The monastic traditions offer valuable examples of wholehearted devotion, providing modern-day believers with inspiration. Their commitment to seeking God through disciplined living serves as a valuable lesson for Christians across diverse contexts. However, engaging critically with these traditions is essential to address their potential pitfalls and ensure a balanced approach to faith.

Today, numerous monasteries still thrive worldwide, holding fast to age-old traditions and maintaining a rhythmic balance between prayer and work. This enduring rhythm, with its profound teachings, remains relevant in our modern world, where there is a desperate need to establish and follow healthier patterns. God continues to call His people to two primary duties—prayer and work. Prayer serves to draw us closer to God, offering centering and tranquility, while work propels us into the world, providing energy and a means to participate in God's restoration of the world.

Piety Movement: Discipline for Encountering God

The Reformation points to a widespread movement of religious renewal that thrived in sixteenth-century Europe, a time marked by significant transformations. Europe, in this era, experienced profound changes as political entities sought autonomy from papal dominance. The emergence of urban culture gave rise to a populace demanding greater attention from the church regarding their specific needs like commerce, family matters, travel, and leisure.¹²³

Throughout Europe, a growing number of individuals became critical of the evident shortcomings of the church.¹²⁴ There was a unanimous recognition that the church urgently required reform. However, consensus on the nature of these reforms was elusive. The Roman Catholic hierarchy, comprising monks, clergy, bishops, and scholars, proved unhelpful and, in many ways, contributed to the predicament. The hierarchy often appeared distant, irrelevant, incompetent, and corrupt.

The most significant issue was the state of the Renaissance papacy.¹²⁵ Popes in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries exhibited more interest in art collection, constructing opulent cathedrals, and leading luxurious lives than in offering spiritual guidance to the church. Their scandalous behavior was frequently ridiculed and criticized. Due to these and other factors, the Reformation seemed like an inevitable event waiting to unfold.

¹²³ Gerald L. Sittser, *Water from a Deep Well* (InterVarsity Press, Kindle Edition), 212

¹²⁴ Ibid. 213

¹²⁵ Gerald L. Sittser, *Water from a Deep Well* (InterVarsity Press, Kindle Edition), 213

The renowned reformer Martin Luther (1483-1546) proposed that the emerging churches arising from the Reformation identify themselves as "evangelical."¹²⁶ Luther himself wrote his "Shorter Catechism" in 1529. The focal point of public gatherings shifted towards preaching, prompting alterations in church architecture to facilitate better hearing of sermons. Congregational singing was introduced, and Luther became a prolific hymn writer. The Reformers underscored the significance of accurate doctrine, asserting that salvation is attainable solely through Christ, grace, and faith, discerned through Scripture alone. Preaching took precedence as their primary duty, reflecting their deep-seated belief in the Word of God, constituting the core of Reformation spirituality.

As Willard points out that at the genesis of evangelical religion, two crucial elements defined its essence: unwavering devotion to the Bible as the ultimate source of authority and divine life, and a personal experience of conversion coupled with practical communion with God.¹²⁷ These foundational aspects, laden with inherent tensions, should continue to serve as the bedrock of evangelical religion, persisting both in the contemporary context and throughout history.

Following Martin Luther's Reformation, almost two centuries later, Protestantism evolved into a Lutheran and Reformed orthodoxy, marked by a strong emphasis on doctrinal precision. Luther's followers deviated from the original evangelical elements of

¹²⁶ John T. McNeill, *The History and Character of Calvinism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1954). 368

¹²⁷ Dallas Willard, "Discipleship Article for the Oxford Handbook of Evangelical Theology", ed. Gerald McDermott, *The Spiritual Life Network*, 2010. <https://www.thespiritlife.net/73-process/process-publications/702-discipleship-by-dallas-willard->, (accessed Mar. 5, 2024)

in diverse ways, resulting in the emergence of splintering "orthodoxies," institutional stagnation, and societal conformity.¹²⁸

The Lutherans, elevating justification by faith and God's grace, inadvertently neglected the law and human efforts, leading to moral corruption among many Lutherans.¹²⁹ Ordinary believers, overly fixated on rational doctrines, overlooked the pursuit of life growth. The prevailing rationalist intellectualism in the church emphasized the mind's rational function, neglecting the soul's experience and knowledge, as well as the imperative of personal spiritual encounters. Faith comprehension remained confined to the intellect, failing to integrate into the hearts of believers, let alone manifest in their actions.

For many, the vitality of the Reformation movement appeared to be drained by doctrines, institutions, and organizations. In the late 17th century, Lutheran pastor Philip Jakob Spener sought to rejuvenate Protestantism by promoting godliness. He advocated a focus on prayer, reading traditional Protestant teachings and liturgies, prioritizing a pure life over pure doctrine. This movement, known as the piety movement, brought about a great revival among German Lutherans for over a century, spanning from the 17th to the 18th centuries.¹³⁰

The devastating Thirty Years' War (1618 -1648) in Europe claimed one-third of Germany's population. After the war, the country faced widespread destruction, with ruined farms and a depleted population grappling with famine, disease, and moral

¹²⁸ 吳東生,《靈魂之愛火》, (臺北, 台灣: 聖經資源出版社, 2018), 295

¹²⁹ Ibid. 296

¹³⁰ Ibid. 297

exhaustion. The average believer was weary of religion, craving not just the knowledge of truth but the reality of truth – the testimony and life of love. They believed that the essence of preaching Christianity lay not in the intellect or precise doctrines of learned theologians but in putting one's heart and will fully into the love of God and neighbor, transforming into a new person reflecting God's character.¹³¹

The mainstream of the piety movement emphasized the experience of being born again, the inner heart's sentiments, and the godly love of life.¹³² Its spirituality encompassed spiritual disciplines, life experiences, and testimonies, urging believers not to merely be Christians in name or mind but to be new creatures embodying God's life character in Christ. Teaching wasn't just for knowledge but for action, emphasizing spiritual fervor, discipline, and discipleship. Simple living was advocated, rejecting the prevalent hedonism of greed, waste, and self-indulgence.

A life of love and unity was promoted, advocating the love of sinners while hating sin, embodying the principles of loving one's neighbor as oneself and even loving one's enemies.¹³³ The movement stressed missionary work and service to marginalized communities, with a focus on universal mission and care for society's oppressed, neglected, suffering, and imprisoned. Advocating the separation of church and state, as well as the freedom of individual conscience, the movement rejected the coercion of faith. Abstract theology was disregarded, with a disdain for theological debates and religious wars, favoring what was referred to as "the ordinary truth of ordinary people." This

¹³¹ 吳東生,《靈魂之愛火》,(臺北,台灣:聖經資源出版社,2018).295

¹³² Ibid. 298

¹³³ Ibid. 297

movement addressed the overemphasis on intellectual orthodoxy among Lutherans and effectively integrated faith with actions.

John Arndt (1555-1705) is one of the founders of the piety movement. He mentioned the purpose of his writing in the preamble to "True Christianity."¹³⁴ He aimed to convince theologians and lay believers to shift from contentious debates to fellowship and love and moving from conversion to a focus on faith itself. He believed it was important to add a life of holiness to pure faith. Arndt's devout ideals had a significant impact on both contemporary and later eras. Like all Lutherans, he believed that spiritual renewal in individuals was a result of God's grace. However, instead of emphasizing the "once-for-all" completion of Christ's redemption, he stressed the ongoing work of salvation within individuals. Through His Word and the Holy Spirit, Christ works true faith in the hearts of individuals, bringing about an inward-to-outward transformation. This participant-driven process is genuine repentance. Arndt repeatedly emphasized this theme, describing repentance as a true, correct, internal, and sincere turning towards God and change. Without such repentance, Christ is of no benefit to individuals.

Life in Christ is undeniably a gift from God, but Arndt believed that God would not bestow this gift unless individuals actively sought it; and the most crucial pathway is fixing one's gaze on Christ.¹³⁵ Upward gaze must align with inward reflection. Arndt proposed that Christians should, at the very least, take time every day to separate themselves from worldly affairs and meditate on spiritual warfare. Most importantly, prayer should not be neglected. He emphasized that nurturing the spiritual life of Christians must teach that mere knowledge is insufficient for Christianity; practice is

¹³⁴ Johann Arndt, *True Christianity*, trans. A. W. Boehm, ed. Charles F. Schaeffer (Gutenberg ebook, 2010), 25

¹³⁵ *Ibid.* 28

paramount. The constant message should be about loving God and others, with theological debates considered secondary.

Pietists all agree that the essence of Christianity is the individual and meaningful relationship between Christians and God. Arndt's book, "True Christianity," begins with a lament, stating the sacred Gospel has been severely and shamefully mutilated in our age. This testifies to the non-devout and unrepentant, who loudly boast about Christ and His words, yet simultaneously live a non-Christian life as if among pagans. Arndt asserts that true Christianity needs to manifest a genuine, living, and dynamic faith, displaying the sincere character of God and bearing the fruits of righteousness; and he laments that in contemporary times, genuine repentance, love, and divine life among Christians have been forgotten.¹³⁶ The focus and essence of Christian faith seem to be on debates and literary battles rather than the true holy life and pure attitude demanded by the Gospel. Without a holy life, the purity of doctrine cannot be preserved. If there is no holy life, the purity of doctrine is meaningless. This represents a significant shift from considering faith purely as a conceptual matter, as seen in traditional Reformation theology.

In the seventeenth century, a strand of Protestantism known as Puritanism thrived in England and later in America, particularly in New England, where it manifested itself in the significant religious revival of the eighteenth century. Rooted in Calvinist theology, Puritanism focused on spiritual and moral renewal and found itself somewhat out of place within the mainstream of the Church of England. It accentuated the inherent depravity of humanity, and emphasis on a serious and disciplined moral life.¹³⁷

¹³⁶ Johann Arndt, *True Christianity*, trans. A. W. Boehm, ed. Charles F. Schaeffer (Gutenberg ebook, 2010), 31

¹³⁷ Packer, J. I. *A Quest for Godliness*. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1990). 21

Puritans highlighted God's mercy, love, and the desire inherent in human relationships with the divine, acknowledging the possibility of immediate communion with God.¹³⁸ Embracing sanctification as a spiritual process of conforming to God's will, Puritans produced notable works like John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, a revered spiritual classic known to both Catholics and Protestants. This allegorical masterpiece portrays the Christian life as a journey through trials, temptation, and tribulation towards union with Christ.

For Puritans, preaching, often spiritually evocative alongside being expository, served as a crucial medium for conveying spiritual life. Additionally, there was a strong emphasis on spiritual disciplines, including personal prayer, Bible study, spiritual reading, meditation, examination of conscience, and fasting within the Puritan tradition. Each Puritan household is mandated to engage in these disciplines collectively to foster spiritual growth.¹³⁹

George Fox (1624-1691) gained fame as a Puritan, an English preacher, missionary, and the founder of the Society of Friends, commonly known as the Quakers. His personal religious journey led him to reject conventional church practices, relying instead on what he perceived as "inner light" – a God-given inspiration that took precedence over scriptural authority or creeds.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁸ Packer, J. I. *A Quest for Godliness*. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1990). 22

¹³⁹ Packer, J. I. *A Quest for Godliness*. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1990). 23

¹⁴⁰ 吳東生，*靈魂之愛火*，(台灣，台北：聖經資源出版社 2018)，286

Quaker worship takes the form of a collective, silent prayer of waiting.¹⁴¹ During this quiet time, they open their hearts together to the Spirit of Christ, anticipating the awakening of God's power within them and listening for His voice. If anyone receives a message from God, they can stand up and share it with the community. Subsequently, the group collectively discerns and consents to follow God's revealed guidance.

Quakers prioritize the experience of God over theological language.¹⁴² They view theology as a human construct and believe that the true essence lies in the actual experience of the Holy Spirit. Consequently, they prefer using verbs over nouns and emphasize sharing personal experiences rather than doctrinal discussions. They freely describe the inner light they have encountered, using interchangeable terms such as the indwelling Christ, the Son, the Root, the Spirit, or the Light. One could say that the Quakers initiated the practice of community silence, where the collective silence awaits the manifestation of the light of Christ.

Gerhard Tersteegen (1697-1769) served as a pastor, author, hymnist, and a significant figure in radical Pietism. He advocated for a simple, childlike path to God, discouraging the pursuit of complex intellectual knowledge and extensive wisdom. Tersteegen believed that the essence lay in living a life entirely for God—an inward, new life marked by simplicity, certainty, lovability, and fruitfulness; and this transformative experience did not result from intellectual pursuits but rather through the profound disciplined approach.¹⁴³

¹⁴¹ Douglas Gwyn, "Quakers, Eschatology and Time," in *The Oxford Handbook of Quaker Studies*, ed. Stephen W. Angell and Pink Dandelion, (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2013) 287

¹⁴² Ibid. 291

¹⁴³ Hansgunter Ludewig, "Gerhard Tersteegen" in *The Pastiest Theologians*, ed. Carter Lindberg (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005). 191

Tersteegen distinguished between two types of knowledge: intellectual knowledge and contemplative knowledge.¹⁴⁴ Intellectual knowledge, born from rational thinking and the assertion of understanding, required hard work and effort, yielding only a mirrored image. In contrast, contemplative knowledge, arising from the illumination of grace and passive understanding, was easy, simple, and provided a direct insight into the essence of truth. Tersteegen emphasized the necessity to cease speculative mental activity to open one's soul fully to God and receive a genuine revelation from the Son of God.

Tersteegen also urged individuals to be masters of their bodies, not slaves to them. He cautioned against indulging the body's demands excessively for comfort and advised managing the body wisely.¹⁴⁵ By entrusting our bodies, health, lives, souls, time, and eternity into the hands of God's Messenger, we avoid becoming distracted from spiritual matters and remain mindful and considerate of them.

According to Tersteegen, prayer is closely linked to self-sacrifice, and it becomes easier with self-denial.¹⁴⁶ Praying for self-denial and dying to oneself is vital, as it counters the natural inclination towards the comfort of the flesh, making continuous prayer challenging. Despite temptations to abandon prayer, Tersteegen stressed the importance of persistence, even if the prayer feels incomplete. He emphasized that prayer is primarily an attitude and action of the human heart, encompassing all workings of the spirit and the lived-out faith before God. Tersteegen asserted that any action done out of love for God is a form of prayer, emphasizing that prayer is akin to walking with God and looking at Him while allowing Him to gaze upon us.

¹⁴⁴ Hansgunter Ludewig, "Gerhard Tersteegen" in *The Pastiest Theologians*, ed. Carter Lindberg (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005). 192

¹⁴⁵ Ibid. 195

¹⁴⁶ Ibid. 198

The Puritan and Piety movements have profoundly influenced Christian history, emphasizing moral purity, personal piety, and heartfelt devotion. However, they have also faced criticisms regarding legalism, intolerance, social control, subjectivism, individualism, and neglect of social engagement. One of the most common criticisms of the Puritan and Piety movement are their perceived legalism and moral rigidity, as pointed out by Laura Guebert ¹⁴⁷.

The Puritans sought to live strictly by biblical principles, often implementing rigorous moral codes and societal norms. Critics argue that this strictness sometimes led to an oppressive and judgmental community atmosphere. The emphasis on moral purity could foster a sense of guilt and fear, detracting from the message of grace and forgiveness central to Christianity. Additionally, the Puritans' legalistic tendencies could result in an external focus on behavior rather than an internal transformation of the heart.

As the result, the externalism will overshadow the core Christian doctrine that salvation comes through faith in Christ, not merely through moral behavior (Ephesians 2:8-9).

Another significant criticism is the Puritans' intolerance towards those who did not share their beliefs.¹⁴⁸ This intolerance often manifested in persecution and harsh treatment of dissenters, including Quakers, Catholics, and even other Protestant groups. The Puritan effort to create a "pure" community sometimes led to a theocratic approach, where church and state were intertwined, and dissent was not tolerated. This approach

¹⁴⁷ Laura Guebert, "A Critique of Puritan Values and Social Restrictions", Murray State University, accessed on 6/30/24, <https://digitalcommons.murraystate.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=&httpsredir=1&article=1171&context=scholarsweek>

¹⁴⁸ Laura Guebert, "A Critique of Puritan Values and Social Restrictions", Murray State University, accessed on 6/30/24, <https://digitalcommons.murraystate.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=&httpsredir=1&article=1171&context=scholarsweek>

contradicts the principle of religious freedom and the biblical teaching of loving one's neighbor (Mark 12:31). The Puritans' actions towards dissenters have been seen as a betrayal of Christian love and compassion, undermining their spiritual ideals.

Despite the criticism, the piety movement of the Reformers significantly shifted a Christlike lifestyle over rigid adherence to religious orthodoxy.¹⁴⁹ This movement recognized the transformative power of spiritual disciplines, including but not limited to silence, prayer, study, and meditation, as integral tools to achieve its objectives. The spiritual disciplines were seen not merely as rituals but as pathways to embody the values and virtues exemplified by Christ. However, it is important to critically engage with these traditions to address their potential weaknesses and ensure a balanced approach to faith.

The recognition of the Bible's authority served as a guiding light, but the piety movement distinguished itself by prioritizing the experiential aspect of faith. This understanding empowered adherents to effectively spread the gospel and extend their services to marginalized communities globally. Their commitment to applying biblical principles in practical ways enabled them to connect with people at a profound level, fostering a genuine expression of Christian love and compassion. As Packer summarized, "The healthy Christian is not necessarily the extrovert, ebullient Christian, but the Christian who has a sense of God's presence stamped deep on his soul, who trembles at God's word, who lets it dwell in him richly by constant meditation upon it, and who tests and reforms his life daily in response to it."¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁹ 吳東生, 靈魂之愛火, (台灣, 台北: 聖經資源出版社 2018), 345

¹⁵⁰ Packer, J. I. *A Quest for Godliness*. (Crossway, 1990.) 116

Summary

In summary, the spiritual discipline traditions explored have deep roots in both Catholic and Protestant Christian communities, constituting a fundamental aspect of their spiritual odyssey. Even after the Reformation, these disciplines continue to hold significance for Protestants, serving as vital methods to authentically live out their faith.

The dwindling emphasis on spiritual disciplines among some modern Christians cannot be solely attributed to any theological flaws. Instead, it reflects the fallen nature of humanity, marked by a tendency towards sinful rebellion. In recognizing this, it becomes crucial to view the potential resurgence of spiritual disciplines not as a return to outdated practices but as a timeless response to the perennial struggle against human sinfulness.

For Evangelical Christians, the relevance of spiritual disciplines persists and is indispensable. Much like their early Christian counterparts, Evangelicals find in these disciplines effective tools to navigate the challenges posed by temptation, the unbelieving world, and the desires of the flesh. The practice of spiritual disciplines remains a timeless and powerful means to cultivate resilience against the forces that might lead them astray from their faith.

In essence, the call for a revival of spiritual disciplines is not a nostalgic gesture but a pragmatic response to the perennial human struggle with sin. Evangelicals stand to benefit profoundly from embracing these disciplines, recognizing them as potent and timeless methods to foster a deeper, more resilient faith in the face of life's myriad challenges.

Chapter 4

Review of Spiritual Discipline as Discussed in Contemporary Literature

As American society continues to distance itself from traditional Christian beliefs and practices, our churches face significant challenges. Many Christians, as the author has observed, sense a growing feeling of powerlessness in resisting the temptations of the world. Confronted with this mounting challenge, churches must provide a fitting response to strengthen believers spiritually. Church leaders must discern whether the congregation's needs lean more towards increased knowledge of God or deeper and more tangible relationship with God. While both are essential and irreplaceable, a delicate balance must be struck. As previously discussed, since the Reformation, Protestant Christians have progressively moved away from devotional practices in favor of a more intellectual grasp of the Bible. The church must now decide whether to continue along this trajectory or start shifting resources towards spiritual disciplines, a practice that is firmly rooted in the Bible and in Christian traditions.

In this chapter, the author will explore the multifaceted realm of spiritual discipline, drawing upon contemporary literature to meticulously examine four key facets. Firstly, attention will be given to the pressing spiritual needs faced by today's Christians. In an era flooded with information, biblical knowledge abounds; yet mere knowledge has failed to empower believers to live out their faith authentically. Many seek a deeper, more tangible connection with the living God to navigate life's challenges.

Secondly, the discussion will address the prevalent misconceptions surrounding spiritual disciplines. These misconceptions center around the relationship between God's

grace and human effort, the necessity and process of sanctification, and the difference between spiritual disciplines and legalism. While these are not the sole hindrances, they represent common barriers to engaging in spiritual disciplines.

The third topic will explore how the practice of these disciplines effectively bridges faith with action. Drawing upon relevant literature, the author will demonstrate how spiritual disciplines are essential for reshaping thought patterns and aligning behavior with our belief. Additionally, this section will offer cautionary insights into the practice of spiritual disciplines.

Finally, the chapter will scrutinize research dissertations to confirm the effectiveness of the practice of spiritual disciplines as embraced within Protestant churches. These studies indicate that engaging in spiritual disciplines helps the congregation to deepen their relationship with God and fosters character transformation among practitioners. By thoroughly addressing each aspect, this section aims to provide a nuanced understanding of the significance and relevance of spiritual disciplines in the modern Christian context.

Spiritual Needs of Modern Christians

Contemporary society exhibits a pervasive preoccupation with spirituality. Gallup surveys reveal a notable increase in individuals seeking spiritual fulfillment, as evidenced by the growing attendance at retreat centers and monasteries.¹⁵¹ This shift in focus from outer to inner space marks a distinct trend from the twentieth to the twenty-first century. Moreover, books addressing meditation, prayer, and spirituality filled bookstores, highlighting the rising interest in spiritual matters. Furthermore, the internet is flushed

¹⁵¹ "How Religious Are Americans?" Gallup, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/358364/religious-americans.aspx> (Accessed May 13, 2024)

with an abundance of resources dedicated to spirituality, reflecting the widespread availability and accessibility of such content.

In this section, we will discuss some pressing spiritual needs of contemporary Christians highlighted by various Christian writers, which resonate with the author's own experiences. Demarest points out that there is an emptiness in the spirituality lives of many Christians, because they possess knowledge without experiencing a real relationship with God. Sider presents evidence showing that Christians often feel powerless to live out their faith in daily life, indicating that their knowledge alone cannot help them face real challenges. Willard suggests that “a consumer mindset, a self-centered culture, and a lack of practical teaching on following Jesus' lifestyle” contribute to a theoretical Christian life devoid of real transformation. These writers all urge church leaders to provide effective solutions for their congregations in the face of such needs.

As beings created in the image of God, humans have a deep void in their souls that only God can fill. There is an innate sense that true communion with God should impact our lives in meaningful ways. While nonbelievers often go to great lengths in their spiritual quests, Christians can sometimes overlook their spirituality due to their satisfaction with routine religious activities and superficial knowledge about God. Demarest, a theologian and professor of spiritual formation at Denver Seminary, rightly observes that many Christians, despite their efforts to live faithfully and witness to others, confess to feeling no real connection with God.¹⁵² Many believers diligently attend sermons and faithfully tithe, yet often find their hearts unfilled, lacking heartfelt engagement, intimacy, and warmth in their relationship with God.

¹⁵² Bruce Demarest. *Satisfy Your Soul, Restoring the Heart of Christian Spirituality*. (Colorado Spring, IL: Navpress, 1999). 24

As a professor of theology, Demarest discovered a void in his own life that his theological knowledge could not fill. However, many Christians have not yet realized this. They believe that the uneasy feeling inside them is due to a lack of sufficient knowledge, so they spend as much time and energy as possible studying and memorizing Scripture. Although studying God's Word does bring numerous benefits, knowledge alone cannot replace the experience of a personal relationship with God. Tozer agrees and states the following: "for millions of Christians, God is no more real than He is to non-Christians. They go through life trying to love an ideal and be loyal to a mere principle."¹⁵³

Moreover, the thirst of the soul reveals itself through a sense of powerlessness. Despite our understanding of faith, we struggle to live it out. The critique of this disconnect is highlighted in Sider's book: *The Scandal of the Evangelical Conscience*, in which he rightly states that evangelical Christians are sometimes likened to members of the non-believers society, embracing pleasure, materialism, self-centeredness, and immoral behavior.¹⁵⁴ Sider explains that whether such impotence pertains to marriage, sexuality, finances, or caring for the less fortunate, many evangelical Christians are living in contradiction to biblical teachings, leading lives of shame. Sider provided corroborating data, which revealed that evangelical Christians frequently exhibit lifestyles no different from their non-believing counterparts. This blindness to the inconsistency between professed beliefs and actual behaviors underscores a significant gap between faith and practice.

¹⁵³ A. W. Tozer, *The Pursuit of God*, (Abbotsford, WI: Aneko Press, 2015) 45

¹⁵⁴ Ronald J. Sider, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Conscience*, (Baker Publishing Group: Kindle Edition) 17

In the same light, Willard points out that there is a prevalence of “consumer-driven Christianity”.¹⁵⁵

Consequently, numerous believers exploit God's forgiveness and grace, attending church gatherings only on select and convenient occasions. They fail to submit their innermost thoughts, emotions, and intentions to the governance of the heavenly kingdom. This expression of Christianity lacks inner transformation and demonstrates little inclination towards deeper spiritual pursuits. While they may identify with the Christian faith superficially, they fail to embody the reality of being God's children.

Willard aptly describes this spiritual crisis of our time as follows: “Our most serious failure today is the inability to provide effective practical guidance as to how to live the life of Jesus. And I believe that is due to this very real loss of biblical realism for our lives.”¹⁵⁶ According to him, modern culture floods us with self-fulfillment programs through political, scientific, and psychological revolutions. These programs promise personal peace and prosperity, yet we face instead increasing depression, suicide, drugs and alcohol addition, consumerism, and so forth. Most Christians agree that the Christian faith offers a model for human transformation that far surpasses the promises of modern scientific programs. However, when it comes to explaining the methods of this transformation, there is often confusion or silence. Furthermore, evangelical Christians naturally tend to avoid anything that suggests meritorious works, fearing they might imply we can justify ourselves before a holy God. As a result, we often reduce faith to a purely mental exercise, disconnecting the body from the process of living the Christian life. Therefore, many of us are well-versed in Scripture, along with a solid theological understanding; however, upon honest reflection, we find that joy, peace, and power seem to elude us. We yearn for a tangible sense of God's presence and a deeper connection with Him.

¹⁵⁵ 魏樂德著，徐成德，吳震環譯，*21 世紀天國導論*，（臺北，台灣：校園書房出版社，2019）443

¹⁵⁶ Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives*, (New York, NY: HarperOne, 1999) 15

These observations support the author's personal experience that a notable gap exists between the words spoken and the actions observed among Chinese Christians. While there is often intensive discussion about God, there is a noticeable absence of His transformative presence and power in our lives. Despite proficiency in doctrine and participation in evangelism, there is a deficiency in fostering genuine relationships with God. When faced with adversity, our responses tend to rely on personal wisdom and abilities rather than on God's word. Consequently, actions may resemble those of non-believers rather than those whose lives are grounded in faith.

These observations highlight the current spiritual state of American Christians and underscore the urgent need to reassess their commitment to embodying their faith in their daily lives. The profound impact of cultural and societal influences on the expression of Christian values necessitates a critical examination of the challenges which can hinder the authentic manifestation of faith contemporary Christians. To tackle this issue effectively, we must scrutinize our endeavors through the lens of faith principles, fostering a unique Christian identity within the multifaceted milieu of the modern world. To accomplish that, we must next identify any misconception about spiritual disciplines that are potential stumbling blocks to their practice.

Misconceptions About Spiritual Discipline

While there are many possible factors behind the disconnect between the faith and the lives of Christians, one major cause stems from certain misunderstandings of spiritual discipline. Three primary confusions are discussed here: relationship between God's grace and human effort, the necessity and endeavor of sanctification, and difference between spiritual disciplines and legalism. It is important to note that this list is not exhaustive. In fact, other misconceptions may also arise from either a deficiency in comprehending Christian doctrines or our hesitance to exert the necessary effort in obeying God and striving for sanctification.

Relationship of God's Grace and Human's Effort

As God's grace is freely given to all believers, it has become a common belief that salvation through faith precludes any human effort; no one should strive to earn God's grace. However, the definition of "work" within this context requires careful examination. Driskill and Willard offer insights to clarify this understanding. Driskill contends that salvation entails not only intellectual comprehension but also experiential reality. In other words, believers should actively engage in their salvation to encounter the reality of reconciliation with God. Willard distinguishes between two types of "work": work for earning salvation and work to living out the saving faith. The former holds no merit, while the latter is the authentic expression of true salvation. Jones shares a personal anecdote to underscore the significance of recognizing these two types of work. All three authors assert that participatory action by humans is not excluded from salvific grace. Below, we delve into the detailed arguments of each author.

Driskill, Assistant Professor of Spirituality and Assistant Dean of the Disciples Seminary Foundation at Pacific School of Religion in Berkeley, explores potential reasons why Protestants tend to neglect the study of spirituality and spiritual practices in *Protestant Spiritual Exercises*. The thrust of Driskill's argument is that two imbalances have brought about the current misunderstanding. Firstly, as a Protestant himself, Driskill noted the deeply rooted influences from scholastic and puritanical traditions, which prioritize foundational theology focused on divine actions in God's redemptive work over personal relationships with God or the personal responses to salvation. Such traditions also emphasize a reverence for Scripture as the primary source of revelation and truth for spiritual life, with a belief in humanity's total depravity and the inability to contribute to

its own salvation.¹⁵⁷ While recognizing the strength of this emphasis on redemption, Driskill acknowledges the its limitations in accounting for human efforts in this process.

Secondly, Driskill contends that since Protestantism values critical reflection and is influenced by Enlightenment ideals on reason and rational thought, it tends to shy away from the subjective and experiential aspects of spirituality and prioritizes the objective truths of Scripture and doctrine.¹⁵⁸ In line with Driskill's viewpoint, the author observed that although contemporary believers indeed acknowledge the grace of God, the significance of Scripture, and the importance of faith, there tends to be a reluctance toward development of a personal relationships with God on an experiential level. This hesitancy to embrace a personal, experiential bond with God is evident in their lack of interest in seeking practices to deepen relationship with God.

Therefore, within the framework of Protestant theology, which rightly emphasizes God's grace as the primary catalyst for salvation, the significance of human effort in the process of sanctification may be marginalized or disregarded. This oversight can foster a passive approach to faith, where individuals fail to actively participate in spiritual practices and disciplines essential for spiritual growth.

In discussions concerning key themes in Protestant discourse on spiritual practices, which are directly tied to fundamental doctrine within the Protestant tradition, Willard, a respected Christian philosopher and leader within the conservative Southern Baptist tradition as well as a prolific author on spiritual formation, rejects this prevalent Protestant notion that spiritual practices are simply efforts to merit salvation.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁷ Joseph D. Driskill, *Protestant Spiritual Exercises: Theology History and Practice*, (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 1989) 7

¹⁵⁸ Joseph D. Driskill, *Protestant Spiritual Exercises: Theology History and Practice*, (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 1989) 8

Willard's main thrust is that while grace is not gained by human merits, grace comes to humans through effort. In other words, human effort is a means to God's grace. He came to these conclusions based on personal encounters within the Southern Baptist tradition, where effort is sometimes discounted as illegitimate attempt to gain favor with God.

In his 2001 article titled "Living Life to the Full," Willard explores the Protestant notion of grace, where he offered a reinterpretation in terms of effort versus earning as follows: while affirming salvation through faith rather than works, Willard suggests that grace is not antithetical to effort itself but rather to the mindset of earning; that engaging in spiritual disciplines is not an attempt to earn salvation but rather a practice of devotion aimed at drawing closer to God.¹⁶⁰ In essence, spiritual disciplines serve as the means by which believers access the "means of grace" available to them, enhancing the presence of God's grace in their lives.¹⁶¹ These disciplines may assist believers in aligning their lives with God's purposes, thus facilitating the transformative work of the Spirit.

Willard supports the Protestant view that spiritual transformation is fueled solely by grace, emphasizing that grace, as undeserved favor, is evident in "the action of God within and through believers' lives."¹⁶² In other words, believers must engage in tangible actions to fully experience the transformative power of grace, allowing it to manifest within our hearts and through our righteous deeds. Practicing spiritual disciplines trains

¹⁵⁹ Dallas Willard, "Spiritual Formation: What it is, and How it is Done", *Dallas Willard Ministries*, <https://dwillard.org/articles/spiritual-formation-what-it-is-and-how-it-is-done> (Accessed on Mar.19, 2024)

¹⁶⁰ Dallas Willard, "Live Life to the Full" *Renovare*, <https://renovare.org/articles/live-life-to-the-full> (Accessed on Mar. 19, 2024).

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Ibid

our bodies to yield to the guidance of the Holy Spirit, enabling us to experience God's grace in its entirety.

An illustration of Willard's ideas can be found in a narrative shared by Jones, a professor at Yale Divinity School. Her experience supports the notion that effort is a means of grace, not as an exchange for grace. Briefly, she recounts her experience as a member of a local church planning committee.¹⁶³ In order to attract more community members to their church, the committee devised a plan to initiate a series of outreach ministries. The committee members diligently gathered input from neighbors and congregants, resulting in a visionary list of ambitious projects. One member felt that achieving these goals would make the church appear vibrant and Spirit-filled.

However, as implementation time neared, enthusiasm dwindled. Meeting attendance dropped, and those who attended appeared weary. When asked for her opinion, a senior member admitted that the long list made her feel exhausted. This prompted others to share their feelings of being overwhelmed by both church commitments and daily life stresses, leading to a collective sense of guilt over their lack of enthusiasm. One member then asked if feeling worn out and guilty was truly what it meant to be a church, questioning whether their approach aligned with the Good News they celebrated. This question sparked a moment of theological reflection. Instead of pushing forward with their plans, the committee decided to pause and reassess. They resolved to refocus on understanding their lives and their congregation's mission in relation to God, prioritizing this spiritual foundation over their ambitious projects.

Through deep reflection, the group explored the dynamic relationship between identity and action as God's people. They delved into Scripture, discerning the core

¹⁶³ Serene Johns, "Practice Theology in Congregation", *Alban at Duke Divinity School*, <https://alban.org/archive/practicing-theology-in-the-congregation/> (Accessed Apr. 1, 2024)

principles of salvation by grace. They reaffirmed that the gift of saving grace is bestowed by God, not earned through their own efforts. Furthermore, they realized that their ministries are expressions of gratitude for God's saving grace, reflecting an ongoing process of being shaped by grace. Consequently, they relinquished the exhausting burden of trying to earn favor and joyfully embraced a posture of thanksgiving, viewing their service as a heartfelt expression of gratitude for God's grace.

Jones writes, "We came to see our plans for the future of the church as plans that bore witness to the gracious embrace with which God holds us. As such, our plans shifted from being a list of how we might save the world to a list of the ways we were witnessing to and celebrating the reality that God saves the world. Our relativized practices were subsequently reinvigorated by the very grace that rendered them unnecessary."¹⁶⁴ This shift in perspective about grace helped the committee realize that their efforts should not be motivated from burdensome feelings of obligation, but from joyful hearts of thanksgiving. Consequently, they not only fulfilled their mission, but also enjoyed the journey of walking with God.

Their experience underscores the importance of grasping the true nature of grace, as explained by Willard. Christians are saved not by their good works but for good works, a distinction that shapes their understanding of service and devotion. This is aligned with Apostle Paul's teaching: "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." (Ephesians 2: 8-10) We are not only saved by God's grace, also shaped by grace to do good works.

¹⁶⁴ Serene Johns, "Practice Theology in Congregation", *Alban at Duke Divinity School*, <https://alban.org/archive/practicing-theology-in-the-congregation/> (Accessed Apr. 1, 2024)

In summary, both Driskill and Willard attempted to correct the misunderstanding between God's grace and human's effort. They pointed out that grace and effort are compatible and equally essential for salvation. While salvation is by grace alone, human effort is a means that God delivers his grace. Spiritual discipline does not entail efforts aimed at earning our salvation; rather, it serves as a channel to allow God's grace to flow freely into our lives, enabling us to extend that grace to others through righteous deeds. As illustrated in Jone's story, human effort should be grounded in our love for God, rather than a fear of His condemnation. It represents our endeavor to embrace God's grace because we are the recipients of salvation.

The Necessity and Endeavor of Sanctification

In this section, we will discuss whether Christian sanctification is necessary and requires our effort. Due to the misunderstandings about the concept of grace, as discussed in the previous section, many believe that sanctification works the same way, occurring by the gracious work of Christ with along with our mental assent. This misconception misses the purpose of salvation, which is to cultivate a profound, transformative relationship with God in the present moment, primarily through the process of sanctification. Our discussion will center around the works of Willard, Demarest, and Wright. Willard emphasizes that sanctification is the natural action of a saved soul that desires to follow the example of Jesus and glorify the Father. He further asserts that sanctification requires deliberate effort guided by the Holy Spirit, to transform all aspects of our being, including our will, emotions, body, and social interactions. Demarest believes that Christian salvation and sanctification are inseparable. Salvation is not just for the afterlife but for our current lives. Sanctification is not optional but the natural result of salvation. Practicing spiritual disciplines is central to the process of sanctification. Wright underscores the importance of sanctification, stating that it trains believers to live in the kingdom of God. Sanctification is the process of cultivating Christian virtues, described by the Apostle Paul as the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23).

Addressing the prevalent misconception among modern Christians that salvation exclusively concerns the final judgment in the afterlife and that sanctification is merely optional, Willard asserts that the gospel message not only grants believers eternal life but also includes the transformation of our current lives.¹⁶⁵ When we narrow our faith to focus solely on the post-life realm, we inadvertently imply that Jesus is only concerned with our future state rather than our present existence. This perspective overlooks the central message of Jesus' earthly ministry and the transformative life he modeled. During his time on earth, Jesus not only offered assurances about the afterlife, but also invited people to experience a life lived in communion with God and encouraged personal transformation through a vibrant relationship with Him here and now (John 15:1-5). Jesus challenges Christians to be the salt and light of the world (Matthew 5: 13 -16), and to reflect the truth of biblical teachings through our lives.

As Willard aptly explained, the paramount challenge facing the world today revolves around the genuine commitment of those labeled as Christians to wholeheartedly embrace sanctified living by following the example of Jesus Christ his own earthly life and fulfilling the true purpose of salvation.¹⁶⁶ According to Willard, sanctification fundamentally means to follow the teachings and example of Jesus Christ to live in the kingdom of God. He emphasized that Christians do not necessarily have to replicate every action of Jesus, but they should strive to adopt his attitude in all aspects of their lives; to learn from Jesus how to live out their practical life, rather than attempting to mimic Jesus' life itself; and to act for God's sake what one would typically do for oneself, rather than fundamentally changing one's actions.

¹⁶⁵ 魏樂德著，徐成德，吳震環譯，*21 世紀天國導論*，（臺北，校園書房出版社，2019），443

¹⁶⁶ Serene Jones, "Practice Theology in Congregation", (published by Alban at Duke Divinity School, 2006), accessed online 4/1/24, <https://alban.org/archive/practicing-theology-in-the-congregation/>

Furthermore, in his book *Renovation of the Heart*, Willard emphasizes that one reason behind this misunderstanding is that many Christians believe that sanctification can be derived from Bible knowledge.¹⁶⁷ Many Christians suppose that after we accept Jesus as our Lord in our mind, our life would naturally follow new believes. Willard points out that our action is not determined by mind only, but influenced by our will, feeling, body, and the environment.¹⁶⁸ In fact, without deliberate effort to address all these areas, human nature tends to resist God and move away from Him. Thus, recognizing one's conflicting inner state even after salvation is crucial for initiating the journey of spiritual transformation. (Roman 7: 21-25). Without acknowledging our complete depravity, we cannot redirect our lives toward Christlikeness or embark on the path to inner renewal. Sanctification through repentance and acceptance of our fallenness paves the way for genuine transformation and alignment with God's purposes. Thus, sanctification is not an optional addition to eternal life; rather, it is the natural path believers must embark on after receiving eternal life.

Similarly, Demarest describes salvation and sanctification as inseparable facets of the same divine work, intertwined like two sides of a single coin.¹⁶⁹ In other words, God's saving grace not only redeems individuals but also sanctifies them, transforming their lives to reflect His holiness. Unlike salvation, which is solely by God's grace, sanctification requires the cooperation from human in order to yield our flesh to the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:17). The endeavor of sanctification serves as evidence of one's salvation: as we trust God and yield ourselves to His work in our lives, we are increasingly transformed into the likeness of Christ. If we resist God's transformative work, we do not trust Him as the Savior. Hence, if one is genuinely saved, sanctification

¹⁶⁷ 魏樂德，譚晴譯，*心靈的重塑*。(上海：三聯書店。2002)，85

¹⁶⁸ Ibid. 49

¹⁶⁹ Bruce Demarest, *Satisfy Your Soul, Restoring the Heart of Christian Spirituality*. (Colorado Spring, CO: Navpress. 1999) 58

is not an obligation nor optional, but a natural desire within that individual. Just as children aspire to emulate their parents, spiritually reborn Christians long to reflect the likeness of their heavenly Father. Demarest asserts that because many Christians do not make enough effort to practice spiritual disciplines and engage in the process of sanctification, they do not experience the reality of the relationship with God.

Wright, a prominent New Testament scholar and Anglican bishop, takes a somewhat different perspective and emphasizes the importance of virtue formation as part of sanctification in his book, *After You Believe*.¹⁷⁰ A truly saved Christian is characterized by a deep desire to transform from a corrupted nature to virtuous character fit for the kingdom of God (1Peter 2:9 -10). Wright underscores that virtue is not innate but requires deliberate effort and practice. Christian virtue is acquired through the countless small choices made each day with the aim of pursuing goodness and righteousness. By consistently making these decisions, individuals cultivate virtuous habits that shape their conduct, becoming sanctified. Virtue formation, therefore, involves both knowledge and practical application in daily life.

Wright argues that practicing spiritual disciplines are essential for sanctification, as they enable individuals to form new habits that align with the true purpose of life.¹⁷¹ Likewise, the formation of Christian virtues, reminiscent of the character formation depicted in the New Testament (Galatians 6:8), shapes individuals from within, leading to genuine transformation. This transformation is not about blindly following rules imposed from outside, but about living authentically and sincerely in accordance with the character molded within the heart.

¹⁷⁰ 賴特著，蔡昇達譯，*信主了，然後呢？天國的倫理學建構*，（臺北，台灣：校園書房出版社，2019）42

¹⁷¹ Ibid. 47

In essence, godly virtues cultivated in sanctification are the fruit of the Holy Spirit taught by Apostle Paul (Galatians 5:22-23). Sanctification involves both the intentional self-discipline and the love of God, even as individuals strive to embody the character of Christ in their thoughts, words, and actions. Thus, salvation and sanctification are intimately linked. Sanctification is a process not merely about adhering to external rules out of obligation, but about following internal motivations, living authentically according to our heartfelt convictions and desires to please God. This genuine transformation is possible after we are saved, with our inner character renewed and reshaped by God.

In summary, the misunderstanding of the necessity and endeavor of sanctification has caused many believers to neglect engagement of spiritual disciplines. Various writers noted above have demonstrated that the essence of Christian life lies not solely in the consideration of the afterlife, but also in the emulation of Jesus in the present moment with help of the Holy Spirit. Christians should focus to live like Jesus right now. Therefore, sanctification, the process of becoming more Christlike, is neither optional nor separated from salvation. It involves the ongoing transformation of the heart, mind, and soul, guided by the Holy Spirit. Through sanctification, believers can begin to align their lives more closely with God's will, purifying themselves from sin and growing in righteousness. This process is essential because it achieves the ultimate purpose of salvation and deepens the relationship with God. By seeking sanctification, Christians actively participate in God's work of renewal and restoration, ultimately leading to the fullness of salvation in Christ.

Difference of Spiritual Discipline from Legalism

The third misconception revolves around the distinction between practices of spiritual discipline and legalism, which is an attempt at self-perfection through obeying the Law. This misunderstanding comes from ignoring the transformational role of the Holy Spirit present in the former but absent in the latter. It is imperative to acknowledge

that our Christian journey is accompanied by the Holy Spirit. Relying solely on our efforts to obey God's law can divert us from the essence of genuine faith. Spiritual disciplines serve as a means to align ourselves with the Holy Spirit's will and guidance in our lives. Amidst the noise and distractions of daily life, these intentional disciplines help us center our focus on the presence and direction of the Holy Spirit instead of the Law.

It is grace that initially saved us, and it is the same grace, not our own efforts, that also sustains us throughout our spiritual growth in sanctification (Galatians 3:3). In contrast to following the Law, engaging in spiritual disciplines allows us to increasingly depend on God's grace and transformative work of the Holy Spirit within us. Indeed, true change does not merely stem from our own attempts at discipline; rather, as we engage in these practices, we encounter the transformative presence of Jesus Christ, beholding His glory that gradually shapes us from within day by day (2 Cor 3:18). Both Willard and Wright support this distinction between practicing spiritual discipline, which involves an internal transformation, and following the Law, which is merely external.

As Willard aptly conveyed in his book *Divine Conspiracy*, an external appearance of a godly life is insufficient.¹⁷² To authentically follow Jesus, our focus must transcend mere willingness; our goal should be to cultivate new characters aligned with the values of the kingdom. Similar to how fruit trees naturally produce certain fruits, our actions should not and cannot be compelled by the Law but should naturally flow from a transformed heart. This perspective contrasts with the approach of the Pharisees, who focused solely on external compliance with the Law while neglecting the transformation of their inner selves. Ultimately, in contrast to legalism, spiritual disciplines help align

¹⁷² 賴特著，蔡昇達譯，*信主了，然後呢？天國的倫理學建構*，（臺北，校園書房出版社，2019），191

our thoughts and characters with God's will, allowing our actions to naturally reflect the values of the kingdom.

Wright further explains that human behaviors are often influenced by the motivation to obey external rules on the one hand and pursuing our soul's deepest desires on the other.¹⁷³ Alternating between these two attractive forces, we follow certain rules to please God; yet when given the chance, we pursue our dreams and self-satisfaction instead. Wright calls our attention to the Sermon on the Mount, where Jesus taught us to reconcile these two seemingly contradictory inclinations. In book of Matthew chapter 5 and 6, Jesus calls us not simply to perform certain actions but to embody specific characters behind these actions. In other words, kingdom living is not simply about either following rules or pursuing personal desires. Jesus invites us to integrate these two aspects of our motivations, prioritizing God above all else so that following His law becomes an integral part of our character.

Furthermore, biblical writers often use the analogy of rigorous training among athletes to illustrate the spiritual journey. Athletes must not be mere rule followers; likewise, we are called to "train ourselves to be godly." (1 Timothy 4:7-8). Spiritual disciplines serve as our training ground, not simply as a set of rules to follow. The motivation behind engaging in spiritual disciplines is to train ourselves to yield our wills to the work of the Holy Spirit. For example, engaging in practices like reading the Bible and solitude is more than fulfilling a Christian duty; the aim is to experience the reality of God's presence through His word. In other words, the practice themselves are not the goal; the actual goal is to connect with God and being transformed with the help of the Holy Spirit.

¹⁷³ Ibid. 38

Hence, both Willard and Wright noted that the differentiation between spiritual discipline and legalism lies in motivation. The underlying motive determines whether spiritual discipline serves as a means for cultivating godliness or merely following a set of rules that appears godly. If our aim is to genuinely love God and emulate His character, then spiritual discipline becomes a powerful tool for growth. However, if our intentions are rooted in a desire to merely appear religious in the eyes of others to seek self-validation or approval, spiritual discipline may instead become burdensome, resembling legalism. Sincerity and authenticity in our pursuit of spiritual discipline are paramount, as they shape our relationship with God and our journey toward becoming more like Him.

In essence, all three misconceptions noted above hinder our practice of spiritual disciplines. It is important for all believers to conscientiously acknowledge these misunderstandings. First, although salvation is solely by grace, a gift we cannot earn through our merit, it does not preclude our efforts. Second, sanctification is not a separate, optional process after salvation because the purpose of salvation is not solely for the afterlife, but about living a holy life here and now. Third, spiritual discipline is not about rigid rule-following or legalism; it is a means to align our hearts with God's will, resulting in a godly life overflowing from our transformed hearts. As Willard succinctly puts it, our central aim is to become like Christ by adopting the overall lifestyle he modeled through faith and grace. We can therefore emulate the activities Jesus engaged in and arrange our lives around them, remaining in constant communion with God.¹⁷⁴ Despite the world's attempts to shape Christians according to its values, believers must not only comprehend the biblical worldview but also endeavor to align their daily lives with it. Correcting our misconceptions will help us overcome the obstacle to lifelong engagement in spiritual disciplines.

¹⁷⁴ Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives*, (New York, NY: HarperOne, 1999), 3

Bridging Faith and Behavior through Spiritual Discipline

It is a common belief that a deep comprehension of Scripture will naturally lead to corresponding behaviors.¹⁷⁵ However, our fleshly desires, instincts, and emotions often influence our behaviors and occasionally lead us astray. The natural inclination of humanity is not towards following the invisible God. Many Christians diligently study the Bible and actively participate in church. Yet, despite these efforts, they often feel a disconnect in their relationship with God and unable to live out their faith. In other words, there is a gap between their apparent faith and their behavior. The challenge lies in the realization that while biblical knowledge is valuable, knowledge itself does not lead to godly behavior. Indeed, spiritual disciplines encompass much more than Bible reading and church attendance. In order to bridge the gap between faith and behaviors, it is important to address spiritual discipline in a more comprehensive way. In this section, we will explore how spiritual discipline can bridge this gap by modifying the underlying thought patterns that lead to behaviors. In addition, we will explore one potential pitfall in this approach.

Practicing Spiritual Disciplines to Change Thought Patterns

Bridging the gap between our faith and behavior necessitates first the transformation of our ingrained thought patterns to align with God's will. While thought patterns primarily reside in the realm of mental activity, their alteration cannot be achieved solely through acquiring knowledge. Willard underscores that our habitual thought patterns largely dictate our behaviors, emphasizing the necessity of intentionally cultivating new patterns if we are to authentically live out our faith. Furthermore, Ortberg asserts that our behaviors are ultimately driven by our deepest desires. Thus, in order to alter our behaviors, we must first redirect our affections through the practice of spiritual disciplines. Both authors acknowledge the profound influence of the mind on our behaviors, highlighting the indispensable role of intentional mental transformation in bridging the gap between faith and behavior. Therefore, to effectively connect our faith

¹⁷⁵ Ibid. 49

with our behavior, we must engage in spiritual disciplines that address both the needs of our passions and the transformation of our minds.

Willard contends that our behaviors are often driven by unconscious impulses, stemming not from deliberate thought processes but from ingrained patterns: to change our behaviors, we must change the underlying thought patterns.¹⁷⁶ As fundamentally physical beings, our behaviors mostly emanate from our built-in reflexes. To effect genuine renewal and transformation in our behaviors, our thought patterns must first undergo a corresponding change to interrupt the old reflexive thought patterns. Willard's argues that initial attempts to do what is right often result in inadvertently doing what is wrong because of established patterns within our thoughts. Therefore, mere knowledge and intention to change frequently prove insufficient in navigating personal circumstances, because our thought patterns more often than not command the wrong behaviors. Without adequate training, proper responses may lag behind or fail to meet unexpected challenges in a timely manner. Thus, disciplined training equips us to perform instinctively in a godly way.

Practicing spiritual disciplines such as meditation and self-examination is vital for improving our thought patterns in order to respond to situations in alignment with Jesus' teachings. To become a new creature, we should intentionally replace old thought patterns, feelings, and reflexive behaviors in routine activities. Through deliberate exercises in spiritual disciplines, we can reflect on our experiences and prepare ourselves to make decisions with thought patterns that align with His will. This process reorients the entirety of our being away from the old thought patterns under worldly influences, leading us into the image of the beloved Son.

¹⁷⁶ 魏樂德著，徐成德，吳震環譯，*21世紀天國導論*，（臺北，校園書房出版社，2019），417

Consistent with Willard's perspective about thought patterns, Smith, a philosophy professor at Calvin University, and a renowned speaker and author, explores an important thought pattern, that of the affection of the heart, and illustrates how practicing spiritual disciplines can shape this affection. In his book *You Are What You Love*, he delves into the phenomenon wherein knowledge alone fails to modify behaviors, but passions were able to influence behaviors significantly. He emphasizes that spiritual growth must extend beyond the limitations of cognitive approaches to include thought patterns of love and passion, and further posits that human beings are primarily driven by their affections rather than their intellect, and therefore our behaviors ultimately reflect what we love.¹⁷⁷

Despite earnest desires to live a godly life, individuals often find themselves trapped in a cycle of striving for improvement and experiencing relapses without achieving genuine life change. Because true change is rooted in thought patterns including passion, we must first redirect our affections from worldly pursuits to Jesus Christ. Smith further states that the love which directs our behaviors is not merely based on emotions, but also based on habits and familiarity.¹⁷⁸ We love and feel comfortable within our familiar surroundings because these surroundings have trained our thought pattern. Thus, to live out our faith, we need to train our thought pattern to love God and His kingdom by consistently engaging in spiritual disciplines. In other words, through deliberate practices in spiritual discipline, we can change what we love and how love.

The Bible teaches that believers should recalibrate our love from worldly things towards God, as the Apostle John said: "Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them." (1John 2:15). Through intentional and consistent engagement in spiritual disciplines such as prayer, worship, evangelism, baptism, and communion, believers cultivate habits that realign their

¹⁷⁷ 蘇明思著，鍾憫譯，*欲望的門訓：一切從心的習慣開始*，（臺北，台灣：校園書房出版社，2020），21

¹⁷⁸ Ibid. 11

affections with God's purposes. These disciplines are not just tasks to be completed but are habits and thought patterns to transform our passion under the power of the Holy Spirit.

Smith instructs two essential aspects of acquiring new passions: imitation and practice.¹⁷⁹ We can imitate examples of justice, compassion, kindness, and love by reading or watching the lives of godly people. Once we have learned, we can integrate these virtues through intentional practice until they become second nature and part of our ingrained thought patterns. Through consistent imitation and practice, individuals can cultivate a disposition towards virtuous behavior without conscious effort.

Practicing Spiritual Disciplines to Change Behavior

Essentially, all Christians are called to imitate Jesus in this world. This necessitates a profound transformation of our lifestyle, echoing the words of the Apostle Paul who urged, "You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness." (Ephesians 4:22-24). While Paul uses the analogy of taking off old clothes and putting on new clothes to describe this spiritual transformation, altering one's lifestyle is far more challenging than changing attire. Practicing spiritual disciplines provides a method to facilitate this profound change by breaking it down into manageable, incremental steps. Incorporating insights from both the Bible and Christian tradition, the author has shown that spiritual discipline is firmly rooted in biblical teaching and has been proven effective to bridge faith to behavior for centuries. These spiritual practices serve as fundamental components through which God shapes believers' lives in accordance with His divine will and design.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid. 25

A wealth of theological insight and pastoral guidance are available on how to enact meaningful change in our lives as Christians, thus translating our faith into behavior. Willard emphasizes that the spiritual practices demonstrated in Jesus' earthly life are essential for aligning human life with God's will. Thus, Christians must focus not only on Jesus' teachings but also on His life. Spiritual disciplines serve as building blocks to help believers to construct a godly life. Likewise, Foster, regarded as the pioneer of the modern spiritual discipline movement, also advocates that living out our faith entails engaging in various practical activities or spiritual disciplines. Ortberg emphasizes the distinction between merely attempting to live a godly life and undergoing intentional training to do so. Perfunctory effort is insufficient; we must undergo deliberate training to live in accordance with God's standards. This training, Ortberg argues, is facilitated through intentional engagement in spiritual disciplines. Finally, Mulholland Jr. asserts that living out the Christian faith entails withdrawing from worldly pursuits and refocusing our thoughts and behaviors on the principles of God's kingdom. Indeed, each of these writers provides nuanced perspectives on the importance of practicing spiritual disciplines as a means to translate our faith into behavior. They recognize that faith is not merely a set of beliefs to be held passively but should be actively lived out in our daily lives. By engaging in spiritual disciplines, Christians can cultivate a deeper relationship with God and align their behaviors with their beliefs.

In his renowned work *The Divine Conspiracy*, Willard stresses the importance of emulating Jesus as a model for the entirety of life; if Christians aspire to take off their old selves and put on new selves, a critical step is following Christ's practice of spiritual discipline.¹⁸⁰ As Christians, we commonly focus on the teaching of Jesus but overlook His daily practices. As the author has presented previously, Jesus' life integrates many spiritual disciplines such as silence, study of scripture, prayer, and corporal worship. What Jesus deemed beneficial for living in accordance with the Heavenly Father should

¹⁸⁰ 魏樂德著，徐成德，吳震環譯，*21 世紀天國導論*，（臺北，台灣：校園書房出版社，2019），456

hold relevance for believers today. Likewise, Willard draws parallels between these practices of Christ and contemporary spiritual disciplines, emphasizing their importance in spiritual growth and in bridging faith to behavior.

Moreover, in his work *The Great Omission*, Willard contends that aspiring to live out our faith requires active engagement and discipline.¹⁸¹ Without intentional self-discipline, our sinful nature always wants us to live in the familiar way. As Apostle Paul describes, “For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want.” (Galatians 5:17). Overcoming the challenges posed by our fleshly desires is a difficult task, underscoring the necessity of discipline. According to Willard, spiritual discipline entails deliberate behaviors aimed at aiding us in achieving what cannot be accomplished through sheer willpower alone.¹⁸² In this description, spiritual disciplines are the stepstones to develop our capacity for change and connect our faith to behavior.

These specific spiritual activities and their benefits are described in detail by Foster, a Quaker theologian and the acclaimed author of *Celebration of Discipline*, which achieved widespread recognition with over one million copies sold, was acknowledged by Christianity Today as one of the top ten books of the twentieth century, and was credited with popularizing the term “Spiritual Disciplines.” In this book, Foster identified superficiality as a prevalent issue among contemporary Christians, and advocated for the cultivation of a deeper, more profound spiritual life through disciplined exploration of the inner realms of spirituality.¹⁸³ Connecting faith and behavior

¹⁸¹ 魏樂德著，應仁祥，東紋尼譯，*大使命與大抗命：再思耶穌的門徒訓練*，（臺北，台灣：校園書房出版社，2016），155

¹⁸² Ibid.155

necessitates more than legalistic approaches or sheer willpower; it requires engaging with spiritual disciplines that transcend mere belief and prompt active ethical engagement. Foster prioritizes spiritual disciplines over intellectual pursuits, because only through spiritual disciplines can we truly get closer to God.

Foster delineates twelve disciplines categorized into three groups in his book: internal, external, and corporate.¹⁸⁴ The internal disciplines, including meditation, prayer, fasting, and study, are aimed at aiding believers in transcending the internal barriers of our modern adversaries: noise, haste, and distractions. Through the practice of these disciplines, believers carve out a sacred space within their hearts and foster an environment conducive for communion with the Holy Spirit. We can take the initial strides toward genuine transformation by attuning ourselves to the guidance of the Holy Spirit, without which such metamorphosis is unattainable.

Foster introduces the second set of disciplines as outward disciplines, comprising of simplicity, solitude, submission, and service.¹⁸⁵ These disciplines serve as transformative tools, guiding believers towards a lifestyle diametrically opposed to their former ways. Through intentional practices, individuals gradually assimilate these disciplines into their daily routines. This allows them to organically manifest their faith in tangible ways until the disciplines become ingrained habits.

¹⁸³ Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*, (New York, NY: HarperOne, 2007) 7

¹⁸⁴ Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*, (New York, NY: HarperOne, 2007), 25

¹⁸⁵ Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*, (New York, NY: HarperOne, 2007) , 61

The third set of disciplines are corporate disciplines, consisting of confession, worship, guidance, and celebration.¹⁸⁶ These communal practices facilitate the extension of the godly life beyond the private sphere into the public domain. By engaging in these disciplines collectively, believers foster a culture of mutual accountability and support, upholding one another in their journey of spiritual growth and fortifying one another in lifelong adherence to spiritual disciplines. Through corporate disciplines, believers reinforce their interconnectedness and commitment to living out their faith in community.

Foster's list of disciplines guides us on how to live out our faith. It starts with transforming our minds, then moves to changing our behaviors, and finally to reshaping our relationships with others. This process allows our faith to flow from within us to our behaviors and then to those around us. It is also aligned with the long-embraced concept of disciplines as habitual practices in church history. Historically Christian fathers have shown that transitioning from an old way of life to living a godly existence demands more than mere knowledge; it requires tangible training that leads to transformative behavior. Spiritual disciplines serve as the conduit through which we position ourselves before God, allowing Him to work within us to produce a profound change. Through consistent practice of these disciplines, the grip of our former life diminishes, granting us the freedom and capacity to construct a new way of living.

Highlighting the necessity of training for personal transformation, Ortberg, a renowned author, and former pastor at a 4000 member Presbyterian church in Menlo Park, California, emphasizes the importance of spiritual discipline in his book *The Life You've Always Wanted*. Ortberg specifically distinguishes between trying and training, asserting that while mere effort can only yield limited results, true commitment requires training and engaging in a disciplined life. He wrote, "trying hard can accomplish only so much. If you are serious, you will have to enter into a life of training." He rightly underscores

¹⁸⁶ Ibid. 78

that translating faith into behaviors requires more than mere determination; it entails wise training.¹⁸⁷

Understanding the differences between mere attempts and intentional training is pivotal towards the path of transformation in every aspect of life. Some Christians hold the belief that godly behavior would emanate from God's grace without the need for any spiritual training. This belief is misguided, Ostberg argues, because even commonly accepted moral behaviors require training. Since our natural inclinations fail to align with God's will, spiritual disciplines serve as vital training instruments, disciplining us to achieve what sheer willpower alone cannot accomplish. Spiritual discipline allows us not only to aspire but also to attain the ability to live in accordance with the teaching of the life examples set forth by Jesus.

Aligned with the perspectives of all three writers noted above, Mulholland Jr., a professor of New Testament at Asbury Theological Seminary, asserts that practicing spiritual disciplines is inevitable in the Christian spiritual formation. In his work *The Deeper Journey*, he emphasizes that spiritual maturity is the ongoing process of shaping believers into the likeness of Christ away from the likeness of the world.¹⁸⁸ Therefore, true Christian life transcends mere participation in religious communities, adherence to specific beliefs, or the adoption of outward patterns. On the contrary, its origin lies in the fundamental reality of nurturing a profound union with God through engaging in spiritual disciplines, a journey that inevitably results in the transformation of individuals into the likeness of God.

¹⁸⁷ John Ortberg, *Life You've Always Wanted*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 42-43

¹⁸⁸ 梅浩林著，林秀娟譯，*成長靈修學*，（臺北，台灣：校園書房出版社，2020）23

In order to translate our faith into behavior, Mulholland introduces two fundamental and parallel guiding principles: detachment and centeredness, both of which are aimed at shifting our lives from worldly distractions to focusing on God.¹⁸⁹ This echoes the teaching of Apostle Paul, “Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.” (Roman 12:2). To apply our faith in life, we need to practice “detachment” from the pattern of worldly life and “center” ourselves on the will of God. The spiritual disciplines that Mulholland suggests achieving this detachment and centeredness include prayer, meditation on Scripture, and self-examination guided by the Holy Spirit to assess emotions, relationships, and habits. By purposely seeking God's assistance in changing our lives, we can gradually cultivate a life centered on the divine presence. The spiritual practices must be integrated into daily interactions and responsibilities. The purpose behind spiritual discipline is that through consistent practices individuals can become prepared to authentically live out their faith.

All the above writers affirm the profound significance of spiritual discipline as an effective means to translate knowledge into behavior. As followers of Jesus, we are called to live lives that are radically different from the ways of the world. However, this transformation cannot occur spontaneously; aligning our lives with the teachings of Jesus is a gradual process requiring the practice of spiritual discipline. Practicing spiritual discipline serves as the essential training method through which we gradually orient our entire being toward the ways of Jesus. It involves a deliberate and sustained effort to reshape our thoughts, habits, and behaviors in accordance with His teachings, allowing us to progressively embody His transformative message, and thus translate knowledge of God into godly behavior.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid. 212

In summary, the above discussions have shown that practicing spiritual disciplines is effective both to translate our faith into behavior and to change the underlying thought patterns. It is evident that in the absence of intentional training, our thoughts and behaviors are naturally guided by entrenched habits and worldly tendencies. Turning from an old life to a new life requires tangible training to bring faith into behavior. It is through consistent and deliberate practice of spiritual disciplines that we can turn our life away from the patterns of the world. This ongoing process of training and transformation enables us to align our entire being with the will of God, allowing His truth and love to permeate every aspect of our lives, thus bridging our faith with our behavior.

Caution Against Pride in Misusing Spiritual Discipline

When utilized appropriately, spiritual discipline serves as a vital link between our faith and our behavior as demonstrated above. However, there is a potential downside: if spiritual discipline is employed solely to demonstrate one's piety or to inflate one's ego, it could instead impede our spiritual growth. In this section, we will explain the cautions provided by Whitney and Mulholland. Whitney emphasizes the importance of not treating spiritual discipline as an end, but rather as a means to attain godliness. Mulholland offers practical guidelines for engaging in spiritual disciplines. Straying from these guidelines poses the risk of misusing the disciplines and disrupting our connection with God. Their writings serve as a reminder that while practicing spiritual disciplines can profoundly enhance our spiritual journey, there is also a risk involved if they are misapplied.

Whitney, a professor of spiritual formation at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, is a prominent figure in advocating for the essential role of spiritual discipline in cultivating a godly life. As one of the first few to hold such a viewpoint within the Southern Baptist Convention seminaries, Whitney's significant contribution to the realm

of spiritual disciplines is evident in his influential work, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*.

In this book, Whitney underscores the crucial nature of discipline in the pursuit of spiritual maturity, affirming that godliness comes through discipline.¹⁹⁰ Godliness, defined as both drawing nearer to and becoming more like Christ, encompasses both inward transformation and outward expression. Whitney cautioned us that spiritual disciplines should never be pursued for their own sake; their true purpose lies in fostering godliness within us. Without this central focus, our engagement with spiritual disciplines lacks depth and authenticity, rendering it superficial and ineffectual in developing genuine spiritual growth. Indeed, such misguided practice can unwittingly lead us down a perilous path, akin to the behaviors of the Pharisees who prided themselves on their outward displays of piety while neglecting the true essence of spirituality.

In this light, we must guard against the allure of superficial piety. For if we allow ourselves to be deceived by the illusion of spiritual superiority, we risk forfeiting the opportunity for authentic growth. Whitney's admonition prompts us to remain steadfast in our pursuit of spiritual discipline that is rooted in the cultivation of godliness and unwavering along the path of genuine spiritual fulfillment.

Likewise, Mulholland cautions that spiritual formation aims not to enhance our individual selves but to facilitate a transformation into the image of God. In his *book Invitation to Journey – a Road Map for Spiritual Formation*, Mulholland distills several key attributes of spiritual discipline: it is transformed by the Holy Spirit; it conforms to the image of Christ; and it is done for the benefit of others.¹⁹¹ Without these key attributes,

¹⁹⁰ Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, (Colorado Spring, CO: NavPress. Kindle Edition), 39

¹⁹¹ 梅浩林著，李國建譯，*靈性塑造之旅*，（香港：宗教教育中心，2018）24

engaging in spiritual disciplines carries the inherent risk of fostering pride in our achievements and leading us to distance ourselves from the communal life of the church. This unwanted consequence poses a significant barrier to our relationship with God. Therefore, it is imperative that when practicing spiritual discipline, we continually yield to the guidance of the Holy Spirit, fix our eyes on, and focus on the goal of servanthood.

Mulholland emphasizes that as one of the key attributes of spiritual discipline, embodying the image of Christ is both an ultimate objective and a guiding principle.¹⁹² Christ's character, marked by humility, gentleness, and patience, starkly contrasts with the world's values of pride, aggression, and competition. This contrast presents a profound challenge for Christians striving to align with God while navigating worldly pursuits. This is a caution for anyone who practices spiritual disciplines: avoid self-serving tendencies and surrender to God's lordship.

It is worth noting another unique attribute of practicing spiritual disciplines noted above: doing it for the benefit of others. Unlike other disciplines we do in life, which improve ourselves and glorify ourselves, practicing spiritual disciplines is mainly for the benefits of others. In other words, a true spiritually disciplined person is more like Jesus, who lays down his life and gives himself for the benefit of all humanity. To reach this goal, actively participating in fellowship and practicing corporal disciplines are essential. Our interactions with others serve as a profound indicator of our connection with God, underscoring the communal essence of spiritual development.

Although spiritual disciplines function as a guiding principle that directs individuals towards God, facilitating profound and transformative encounters in their spiritual journey, the inherent frailties of human nature have engendered the potential for

¹⁹² Ibid. 31

these very disciplines to inadvertently foster arrogance and obstruct our closeness to God. It is imperative, then, for every practitioner of spiritual disciplines to exercise caution and engage in regular self-examination of motivations and intentions. By conscientiously scrutinizing the driving forces behind their spiritual practices, individuals can safeguard against the subtle allure of self-righteousness and ensure that their pursuit remains firmly grounded in humility and sincere devotion to God.

In summary, spiritual discipline allows us to intentionally adopt new behaviors and redirect our lives to accommodate the teachings of Jesus, and indeed to bridge our faith with the intended new behaviors. Yet merely attempting to adhere to these behaviors by sheer will and intellect usually falls short, as our ingrained habits often lead us right back to old behaviors. Therefore, we must diligently train ourselves in spiritual disciplines. Practicing these disciplines require time, commitment, and perseverance. Just as intimacy in human relationships demands desire and actions from both parties, spiritual disciplines necessitate our earnest engagement alongside God's divine involvement. Through His Son, God has revealed His kingdom and salvation, inviting us to participate in His work through spiritual discipline. As in the example of Christ, spiritual disciplines enable us to bridge our faith to godly behavior.

Practical Studies of Spiritual Formation

In the preceding three sections, we have discussed the importance of spiritual discipline, addressed common misconceptions surrounding it, and explored its role as a bridge between faith and behavior. These insights underscore the necessity of spiritual discipline and offer theological guidance for its practice. In this section, we will delve into scholarly research within the field of spiritual discipline to examine how engaging in various spiritual practices benefits the spiritual growth of church congregations, influences people's behaviors, and transforms their characters.

As the concept of spiritual discipline remains relatively novel to many Protestant Christians, an increasing number of studies are being undertaken to assess its effectiveness and impact on Christian spiritual growth. By investigating the correlation between engagement in spiritual disciplines and observable changes in believers' lives, researchers aim to demonstrate the true transformative power of these practices. Furthermore, these research endeavors offer practical implications for the integration of spiritual disciplines into church activities and individuals' daily lives, highlighting the connections between faith and behavior and enhancing our understanding of the transformative potential inherent in spiritual discipline practices.

Studies of Integrating Spiritual Discipline in Church Activities

Three distinct studies serve as examples that have been undertaken to assess the prevailing spiritual state and the response to the introduction of new spiritual disciplines among congregants. The first study, by Willesy, studied the effect of introducing the practice of spiritual disciplines to a local Seventh-day Adventist church congregation through church retreat. The second project, led by Mapstone, involved conducting a workshop for a group of twenty individuals within a local multi-denominational church. The third study, by Elias, focuses on assessing the efficacy of spiritual discipline in enhancing the development of youth leaders within the church through mentorship. The objective of these studies was to equip participants with the skills to regularly engage in spiritual disciplines, enabling them to lead the congregation in more profound spiritual growth. These investigations aim to provide insights into the spiritual dynamics within these congregations and shed light on the reception and effectiveness of spiritual practices.

Willsey, a student in the Doctor of Ministry program at Andrew University, embarked on a research project aimed at introducing four spiritual disciplines to his

church community in 1991.¹⁹³ Recognizing the desire for a meaningful connection with God among his congregation, Willsey took the initiative to introduce four fundamental disciplines: prayer, devotional reading of Scripture, meditation, and journaling. These were presented and practiced during the church retreat, with outlines provided for successful implementation. To assess the necessity and effectiveness of the model, survey and evaluation tools were conducted.

The project revealed several findings from the participants: a genuine longing for spirituality; a dissatisfaction with their current spiritual practices, which consisted only of Bible study, prayer and worship; and a readiness for guidance in deepening their relationship with God.¹⁹⁴ Despite the familiarity with informational practices in his church, the introduction of these four devotional practices mentioned above proved to be transformative, offering avenues for experiencing God's presence.

Furthermore, Willsey observed that the regularity of discipline plays a crucial role in nurturing the relationship with God and maintaining its growth.¹⁹⁵ While the term "discipline" may evoke a mechanical connotation, it accurately reflects the intentional and consistent effort required, particularly in a relationship with an unseen God. According to the survey results, despite its disciplined nature, engaging in these practices led to profound enjoyment and even exhilaration, underscoring the rich and rewarding nature of spiritual growth that followed.

¹⁹³ Steve Willsey, "A Model for Introducing the Spiritual Disciplines to the Members of the Capital Memorial Seventh-day Adventist Church" (D.Min dissertation Andrew University 1991) 200

¹⁹⁴ Ibid. 203

¹⁹⁵ Steve Willsey, "A Model for Introducing the Spiritual Disciplines to the Members of the Capital Memorial Seventh-day Adventist Church" (D.Min dissertation Andrew University 1991), 207

Likewise, Mapstone, a participant in the Doctor of Ministry program at Northeast Seminary, in 2019 initiated a project where she guided a small group of 20 individuals from her church in studying and practicing spiritual disciplines.¹⁹⁶ Her objective was to empower the members of this small group to shift the congregation's attention away from inward-focused church activities and toward the task of community outreach as a means to kingdom building. The study utilized two key texts as guiding resources: Foster's *Celebration of Discipline* and Bennett's *Practices of Love*. Foster's book served to introduce the practice of spiritual disciplines, while Bennett's work brought a dimension of outward outreach. Together, these two books enabled participants to engage in spiritual disciplines both individually and as a collective endeavor.

Mapstone found that many congregants were previously unaware of or unaccustomed to spiritual formation practices, and lacked the encouragement or training in deepening their faith through these practices. Through her project, the congregation drew closer to God, continued their journey of personal and communal transformation, and became more attuned to God's activity in their daily lives as faithful stewards, specifically in their outreach activities.

Moreover, her study found the small group setting provided a safe space for the participants to confront their reservations about vulnerability before God and with one another.¹⁹⁷ The small and uncriticized environment fostered confession and removed barriers hindering spiritual surrender. As with any training of difficult skills, the participants dreaded the initial hard work but enjoyed the result of their persistence. Indeed, despite the countercultural nature of disciplined spiritual living, Mapstone found that participants experienced the blessings of the training group and concluded that their

¹⁹⁶ Cynthia C. Mapstone, "Fostering Discipleship and Spiritual Formation Practices in a Small Multi-Denominational Church" (D.Min dissertation, Northeast Seminary, 2019), 123

¹⁹⁷ Cynthia C. Mapstone, "Fostering Discipleship and Spiritual Formation Practices in a Small Multi-Denominational Church" (D.Min dissertation, Northeast Seminary, 2019), 131

transformation would not have occurred without this intentional training and equipping.¹⁹⁸

In 2020, Nathaniel E. Elias, a student in Doctor of Ministry program in Andrew University, conducted research on utilizing spiritual mentorship to enhance spiritual maturity among youth leaders in his Seventh-day Adventist church. His church's youth ministry had predominantly focused on recreational activities, lacking a strong spiritual emphasis. In response to this need, Elias was asked to provide mentorship for the leaders in his youth and young adult ministry.¹⁹⁹ The 10-month mentorship program was designed to help six youth leaders to develop habitual practices of spiritual disciplines. The trainees were asked to use “The Discipleship Wheel” to identify their strongest and weakest elements of their spiritual growth, then use “Recommended Actions for Spiritual Growth Guide” to choose two spiritual disciplines to practice regularly. Regular meetings were conducted aimed at equipping the leaders through their spiritual disciplines to nurture their development. The Spiritual Growth Assessment surveys were conducted before and after the mentorship training.

The results revealed that all six leaders in the mentorship program improved significantly on the Spiritual Growth Assessment survey at the conclusion.²⁰⁰ The mentees who dedicated time to practicing spiritual disciplines reported personal growth in their relationship with God. Based on the surveys, the study concluded that mentoring youth adult leaders in spiritual disciplines effectively equipped them with the knowledge and skills to cultivate personal relationship with God. Furthermore, the church observed

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.143

¹⁹⁹ Nathaniel E. Elias, “DEVELOPING SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES IN YOUTH AND YOUNG ADULT LEADERS THROUGH MENTORING AT THE PEACHTREE CITY SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH” (D.Min Dissertation, Andrew University, 2020) 100

²⁰⁰ Nathaniel E. Elias, “DEVELOPING SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES IN YOUTH AND YOUNG ADULT LEADERS THROUGH MENTORING AT THE PEACHTREE CITY SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH” (D.Min Dissertation, Andrew University, 2020) , 107

that the mentorship program to the leadership also enhanced the spiritual engagement of the entire ministry.

These three studies affirm the necessity and desire for integrating spiritual discipline within churches, in line with the results in this dissertation to be discussed later. The findings demonstrate that spiritual discipline was effective in nurturing spiritual growth among the participants and deepened their fellowship with God. Although most were not initially familiar with the methods of spiritual disciplines, the participants all benefitted from their introduction and practice. The results encourage churches to prioritize training in spiritual disciplines to aid the spiritual advancement of the entire congregation.

Studies of Transformed Characters through Practicing of Spiritual Discipline

Two research endeavors were undertaken to assess the effectiveness of practicing spiritual disciplines in shaping individuals' characters. The first study, by Bailey, studied women leaders serving as deans in Christian colleges and universities. Given the pivotal role of character formation among leadership particularly within educational institutions of faith, the study sought to explore the direct impact of practicing spiritual disciplines on enhancing leadership qualities among these women. The second study, by DeLucia, focused on college resident hall leaders, whose roles are characterized by stress and demanding responsibilities that necessitate patience and resilience. Recognizing the challenges inherent in their positions, the research aimed to investigate the role of practicing spiritual disciplines as a tool in managing stress, strengthening resolve, and navigating the myriad challenges in their management roles.

Bailey, who is a student of Doctor of Educational Leadership, Administration, and Policy program at Pepperdine University, conducted in 2017 a phenomenological study of how practicing biblical spiritual disciplines influence character and leadership

utilizing a qualitative research design.²⁰¹ The researcher interviewed eight Christian women leaders who serve as Deans or Associate Deans in institutions that are full members of the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities. Participants were asked eleven semi-structured interview questions centered on how spiritual disciplines influence their characters and leadership practices.

The study uncovered that eight of the twelve spiritual disciplines presented in the book *Celebration of Disciplines* were practiced on a daily or weekly basis by these leaders. Among these disciplines, prayer, study, meditation, and service were found to be the top four spiritual disciplines most influential for transforming their characters and improving leadership ability.

In the responses to the interview questions, the participants emphasized the importance of the guidance of the Holy Spirit in their practices and referred to biblical examples of leadership characters from which they drew inspiration.²⁰² The participants depicted the consistent engagement in spiritual disciplines not as adherence to spiritual rules, but rather as a pathway to receive guidance from the Holy Spirit. For instance, they viewed studying the Bible as a method to comprehend the character of God and discern His intentions. Meditation was seen as a practice to achieve inner stillness and listen attentively to the voice of God, while prayer was regarded as a direct means of engaging in dialogue and fostering a relationship with God.

²⁰¹ Kristin M. Bailey, "A phenomenological study of how biblical spiritual disciplines influence women's character and leadership practices in Christian faith-based institutions in higher education in North America" (Doctor of Educational Leadership, Administration, and Policy dissertation, Pepperdine University, 2017) 104

²⁰² Kristin M. Bailey, "A phenomenological study of how biblical spiritual disciplines influence women's character and leadership practices in Christian faith-based institutions in higher education in North America" (Doctor of Educational Leadership, Administration, and Policy dissertation, Pepperdine University, 2017) , 106

This study clarified the exact influence of spiritual disciplines on these individuals in various aspects of their lives including their professional lives. Genuine communion with God inherently brings about transformation, gradually shaping our interactions with our environment and the awareness of ourselves. The research showed that engaging in spiritual disciplines is a powerful method to harmonize our beliefs with our deeds. The transformative shifts in the characters of these leader serve as confirmations of our identity as "new creatures" formed in Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Another phenomenological study was carried out by DeLucia, a graduate student in the High Education and Student Development department at Taylor University, a Christian college. This research focused on college residence hall directors, investigating the effects of spiritual disciplines on their overall well-being.²⁰³ This qualitative study utilized exploratory focus group interviews to discern underlying themes. Participants described the positive effects of practicing spiritual disciplines on their overall sense of self and their relationship with God. Despite the inherent stress of their profession, individuals found solace and clarity through spiritual practices, enabling them to better understand God's calling for them.

This study confirms that engaging in spiritual disciplines can instill a sense of serenity amidst our busy, stress-filled lives, providing opportunities for individuals to commune with God.²⁰⁴ These practices necessitated clearly-defined breaks from their work, establishing a rhythm and consistency reminiscent of the monastic life of devotion and labor. By integrating spiritual disciplines into the daily routines, these leaders

²⁰³ Caylan DeLucia, "Seeking Balance: How the Practice of Spiritual Disciplines Impacts the Health of Residence Hall Directors" (Master of Arts in Higher Education and Student Development thesis, Taylor University, 2019) 19

²⁰⁴ Ibid. 32

proactively gained strategies for stress management and resilience in confronting challenges.

These two studies offer compelling evidence that engaging in spiritual disciplines contributes significantly to the holistic well-being of individuals, especially for those in leadership positions. By nurturing spiritual growth and fostering a deep sense of connection with God, practicing spiritual disciplines positively impact every aspect of a person's life. It echoes what Paul said, "For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come." (1 Timothy 4:8)

In summary, these empirical research findings align with other recent literature, demonstrating the efficacy of practicing spiritual disciplines in fostering spiritual growth both within and beyond the church setting. Congregations trained in spiritual disciplines experienced strengthened faith and deepened relationships with God. Moreover, integrating spiritual disciplines into daily life facilitated personal transformation, enabling individuals to overcome stress to strengthen personal and professional characters. Thus, these studies confirm the effectiveness of spiritual disciplines in bridging faith and behavior.

Summary

Today's Christians confront challenges similar to those found in previous generations but intensified in our modern era. Constantly vying for our attention and promoting self-centeredness, the deluge of information available to us today only leads us to rely less on God. While advancements in technology and medicine undoubtedly contribute to enhancing our physical existence, they often fall short in addressing the deeper yearnings of our souls and do not fill our inner voids. Beneath the surface of our material comforts lies a profound longing, an innate desire to connect with something

greater than ourselves. This longing, inherent within our very being, compels us to seek out the divine and contemplate how we can align our lives with the power and promises of God.

In the midst of these challenges, spiritual discipline emerges as a sacred pathway, offering us a means to tap into the profound depths of God's presence and power. It is through the practice of spiritual disciplines such as prayer, meditation, scripture study, and worship that we find ourselves drawn into the rich tapestry of divine encounter.

Spiritual formation disciplines serve as vital and effective tools to integrate our faith into our daily lives. Engaging in spiritual disciplines is not about earning salvation but rather appreciating God's grace in our lives. Unlike legalism, discipline, when recognized as a means rather than an end, serves to align our hearts with our actions. Numerous experienced pastors and theologians emphasize the necessity of discipline for all Christians. To embody the image of Christ, mere human willpower and biblical knowledge are insufficient; rigorous spiritual discipline training is essential. Modern research confirms the effectiveness and benefits of spiritual disciplines. Although discipline requires effort, the joy and transformation it brings to our lives make every endeavor worthwhile.

In a world often consumed by the pursuit of fleeting pleasures and temporal gains, spiritual discipline guides us towards a deeper understanding of our purpose and identity in God. It is through the disciplined pursuit of spiritual growth that we are able to navigate the complexities of life with grace and resilience, anchored in the unwavering truth of God's promises (Hebrews 6:18-19). As we commit ourselves to the practice of spiritual discipline, we open ourselves up where grace and salvation offers, where the power of God's love and presence knows no bounds.

Chapter 5

Methodology and Rationale

In preceding chapters, an exploration of the literature highlighted that spiritual discipline is rooted in biblical principles and has been part of Christian practice since the inception of Christianity. Due to the inherent sinful nature of humanity, this meaningful tradition shifted over time from genuine internal transformation to mere outward ritual, and it gradually fell out of favor, especially after the Reformation.²⁰⁵ As a result of the absence of spiritual discipline, Christian faith has increasingly become a mere intellectual concept devoid of tangible experience. Such a faith lacks the strength to withstand the challenges in life for Christians. This is precisely why there is a resurgence of interest in spiritual discipline within the Protestant churches.²⁰⁶

This project emerged from a quest to comprehend the present spiritual state of Chinese congregations in North America and their views and engagement with spiritual disciplines. Based on these findings, the project aims to provide observations and suggestions for future endeavor to introduce appropriate spiritual disciplines to Chinese American churches. Despite the abundance of resources accessible to Christians for comprehending and implementing spiritual disciplines, it has become apparent that many Christians remain unaware and undervalue the significance of these disciplines beyond superficial practices such as attending church worship, prayer meeting, and Bible study

²⁰⁵ Philip Sheldrake, *A Brief History of Spirituality*, (Oxford UK: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 109.

²⁰⁶ George Marchinkowski and Pieter G.R. De Villiers, "The rediscovery of spiritual practices within Protestantism", *Stellenbosch Theological Journal* Vol 6, No 1, (Jun, 2020): 431

classes.²⁰⁷ The lack of empirical research and accessible literature focusing on the examination and enhancement of the spirituality of Chinese American Christians underscores the relevance of this study.

The ongoing project functions as a preliminary exploration and experiment aiming at introducing a variety of spiritual disciplines to the Chinese congregation. Within the confines of limited research, the author seeks to grasp the current situation of sampled Chinese Christians, understand their attitudes toward spiritual discipline, gauge their current level of involvement, and assess the extent of the churches' efforts in supporting spiritual formation. The experiments conducted in the local church LVCCC allow the author to identify the acceptance and possibility to teach spiritual disciplines in Chinese American churches. The conclusion drawn is not presented as authoritative but rather as an endeavor to encourage Chinese Christians to embrace spiritual disciplines with the potential to reshape their spiritual lives.

This chapter delineates the research process undertaken in this project. It commences with a synopsis, followed by a statement of the problem, a purpose statement, research questions, hypotheses, and an overview of the research design and methodology. Subsequently, the researcher delves into considerations regarding the population under study, explains the approach to data analysis, and outlines the limits of generalization.

Research Design Synopsis

The Problem

Based on my personal experiences and observations of church ministries in general, the author has noticed that many Chinese Christians and Chinese American

²⁰⁷ George Marchinkowski and Pieter G.R. De Villiers, "The rediscovery of spiritual practices within Protestantism", *Stellenbosch Theological Journal* Vol 6, No 1, (Jun, 2020): 434

churches tend to overlook the significance of spiritual discipline. This situation contributes to Christians not being able to live out their faith, because mere adherence to outward rituals or a theoretical understanding of faith is insufficient for a transformative life, while Spiritual discipline acts as a bridge, connecting our faith to our everyday existence.

When individuals possess only a superficial understanding of Christian teachings without engaging deeply with their faith, it hinders their ability to live according to the biblical teachings. Furthermore, if the spiritual foundation within congregations remains at a surface level, it may struggle to foster a vibrant and committed community. This concern is underscored by the 2022 Pew Research report, which indicates a notable decline in Christianity among Asian Americans and a rise in those identifying as religiously unaffiliated.²⁰⁸

Based on the author's own experience and the above studies, the two purposes of this research are to explore the feasibility to introduce spiritual discipline to the Chinese congregation in LVCCC, and to assess the spiritual condition of Chinese Christians in a bigger and wider research population. The author hopes to provide some preliminary information to assist Chinese Christians in transitioning from a shallow faith to a deeper relationship with Jesus.

Hypothesis Statement

In light of the researcher's ministry experience and personal spiritual journey, it is evident that several spiritual disciplines that serve as essential practices to bridge the gap between Christian faith and behavior are unfamiliar but necessary for Chinese

²⁰⁸ BESHEER MOHAMED AND MICHAEL ROTOLO, "Religion Among Asian Americans", *Pew Research Center*, (Accessed in Feb. 19, 2024).
<https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2023/10/11/religion-among-asian-americans/>

Christians in the United States, and that they can be introduced and cultivated through sermons and small group training within church settings as experimented in the LVCCC.

Research Questions and Hypotheses Research Questions

The following research questions and hypotheses pertain specifically to the research projects outlined in the “Research Procedure” section. They do not include aspects related to the literature review.

Research Questions:

QR1. What characterizes the spirituality of Chinese Christians in America?

QR 2. Which spiritual disciplines are Chinese Christians actively engaging in?

QR 3. What are the sentiments of Chinese Christians regarding spiritual disciplines?

QR 4. How do Chinese American churches currently contribute to the spiritual formation of their congregation?

QR 5. What responses can be anticipated if spiritual disciplines were to be introduced in churches?

QR 6. What advantages could be gained if churches offered practical training in spiritual disciplines?

Research Hypotheses:

RH1. The spirituality of Chinese Christians requires attention.

RH 2. Apart from church worship, prayer meeting, and Bible study, other spiritual disciplines are infrequently practiced by Chinese Christians.

RH 3. There is a desire and welcome for spiritual disciplines among the believers in Chinese American churches.

RH 4. Chinese American churches inadequately provide training in spiritual formation.

RH 5. The congregation acknowledges welcome and accept the teaching of spiritual disciplines.

RH 6. The participants harvest various benefits derived from the training in spiritual disciplines.

Research Population

The survey population adhered to the following criteria:

Project Part I: the three research surveys conducted in LVCCC.

1. The pre- and post- sermons themed on spiritual disciplines surveys are conducted within the congregation of LVCCC who participate in regular Sunday worship services.

2. The post training of Lectio Devina is conducted among 12 participants from LVCCC.

Project Part II: the national wide survey conducted in multiple churches and their members.

3. The church primarily comprised of first-generation Chinese immigrants.
4. The church had a physical location in the United States.
5. The church or individuals expressed a willingness to participate in the research.

Research Procedures

This study aims to understand the spiritual conditions of Chinese Christians in America, and to explore the possibility of introducing spiritual disciplines to them. The

objective is to discern the present spiritual needs of Chinese Christians and, through a deliberate focus on a small group engaged in learning and experiencing spiritual disciplines, identify the possibility and need to cultivate a community of transformed disciples, who may subsequently inspire broader congregational growth in faith and influence. Additionally, the study seeks to observe the value and reactions of introducing spiritual disciplines to conservative Chinese congregations using this small group as a test case in LVCCC. Thus, the research project is structured into two parts.

Part I, Introducing Spiritual Formation at LVCCC

This part of the study involves test runs for introducing spiritual disciplines at LVCCC. As LVCCC is a local independent small church without a pastor for many years, and many members are unfamiliar with the concept of spiritual disciplines. Before the project started, the LVCCC Spirituality Survey was conducted. The survey was done via Google Form, the link was sent to the church WeChat groups, and paper form of survey was provided at the church. The results of survey were used as the direction to design the ways to introduce spiritual formation to the congregation.

The choice to initiate the introduction of spiritual disciplines through sermons is based on the varying levels of understanding among congregants. Sunday preaching serves as an effective means to reach most church members, providing a non-threatening avenue to prepare believers for the acceptance of this novel subject. Among Chinese Christians, Sunday sermons hold significant importance as a time to learn about God, making them an opportune moment to introduce "new" knowledge. In addition, in the LVCCC Spirituality Survey conducted in LVCCC before the sermon series, listening sermons also received the highest score (43%) as the most important way for them to grow spiritually. Therefore, preaching seems the best way to start introducing spiritual discipline in LVCCC.

A. Delivering a Spiritual Formation-Themed Sermon Series at LVCCC

The sixteen sermons are categorized into three groups: Importance of Spirituality, Spiritual Formation, and Spiritual Discipline. All sermons were presented in Chinese and were delivered between 9/4/22 - 5/27/23, providing the congregation with the understanding of the importance, necessity, and methods of spiritual formation and disciplines.

The subseries on the Importance of Spirituality consists of five sermons. The objective of these sermons is to convey that the essence of the gospel centers around a new life, not physically but spiritually. Christian growth involves the expression of this new life, originating from above and characterized differently than the old fleshly life. The process of sanctification does not entail living the old life with new behaviors; instead, it entails living the new life, which should naturally manifest new behaviors.

The subseries on Spiritual Formation comprises five sermons. These sermons emphasize the necessity of spiritual formation, highlighting that our spirits are shaped either by God or by the world. Without intentional alignment with God's words, Christians may inadvertently conform to secular influences. Spiritual formation doesn't occur automatically through mere attendance at church activities. Believers need to scrutinize their decision-making in daily life and employ spiritual disciplines to train themselves to make decisions based on faith rather than habitual patterns.

The subseries on Spiritual Discipline includes six sermons. These sermons aim to teach methods for practicing spiritual disciplines. Drawing inspiration from Richard Foster's "Celebration of Disciplines," the sermons introduce three internal disciplines—solitude, meditation, and fasting; two external disciplines—submission and self-control; and one corporate discipline—worship. These sermons delve into the importance, function, and methods associated with each discipline.

The LVCCC pre and post sermons surveys were presented using Google Forms, and the links were shared on LVCCC WeChat networks. The paper surveys were made available at the church for a duration of two weeks. The post-sermon survey sought to assess what the congregation had learned about spiritual formation and to uncover their attitudes toward spiritual disciplines. It is important to note that this experiment is not intended to measure the effectiveness of the sermons but rather to observe the congregation's reactions to the introduction of spiritual from the sermons.

Given that the majority of LVCCC members are Chinese speakers, all sermons were delivered in Chinese, accompanied by Chinese PowerPoint presentations. Recordings of the sermons were made available on the church website for reference. The sermon titles and themes are provided below, and detailed outlines can be found in Appendix A. The contents of sermons are mainly consulted from the commentaries in the author's Logos software platinum version, including but not limited as following: Warren Wiersbe BE Series NT Commentaries Collection (生命更新解經系列), Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching OT/NT Commentaries Collection (解經講道注釋叢書), Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Bible - NT and OT(馬太亨利完整聖經註釋), Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (丁道爾舊約聖經註釋), Lexham Research Commentary (萊克姆研究註釋叢書), A Kernel of Wheat Christian Ministries(麥種聖經注釋)。

Sermon Titles and Summaries 靈命塑造系列講道

一，靈魂蘇醒系列：靈魂的需要

靈魂甦醒（1）-- 認識生命的糧，詩篇 23，約翰福音 6：25-59（9/4/22）

This sermon revolves around the miraculous feeding of five thousand people, during which Jesus declares Himself as the bread from heaven, providing life to humanity. He cautions against solely pursuing nourishment for the physical body and emphasizes the importance of seeking sustenance for the spirit. Jesus's purpose extends beyond

resolving life's immediate challenges; instead, He comes to impart eternal hope to our souls.

靈魂甦醒（2）不要賠了靈魂，路加福音 12：16-21 (9/11/23)

In this sermon, drawing inspiration from the tale of the rich fool, Jesus imparts a crucial lesson – highlighting the paramount value of the human soul. Frequently, we, as individuals, concentrate solely on gratifying our physical needs, neglecting the essential requirements of our soul. Jesus underscores the peril of dedicating our entire lives to the concerns of the flesh, as it places our invaluable soul at risk. Such a mistake can lead to dire consequences with eternal implications.

靈魂甦醒（3）- 靈魂的真實，路加福音 16：19-31 (9/24/22)

In this sermon, we delve into the narrative of the rich man and Lazarus, where Jesus vividly portrays their contrasting experiences in life and in death. Despite Lazarus being materially poor, his name is acknowledged, and he is welcomed into eternity after death. Conversely, the affluent but unnamed rich man, despite his potential fame among people, faces rejection from heaven after death. This story serves as a powerful reminder that the cessation of physical life is not the ultimate conclusion; rather, it serves as a doorway to the next stage where the soul persists in its existence.

靈魂甦醒（4）- 靈魂的成長，路加福音 8：4-18 (10/8/22)

In this sermon, we explore the parable of sowing seeds, where Jesus illuminates the difficulties inherent in nurturing new life. While salvation is attained through faith alone, the progression of spiritual life is not automatic. The gospel, beyond securing our entry into heaven, is designed to bring about a transformative impact on our lives, yielding fruits for God. It emphasizes the need for Christians to actively collaborate with the Holy Spirit, engaging in the ongoing cultivation of our spiritual maturity.

靈魂甦醒（5）一個覺醒的靈魂，路加福音 19：1-10 (10/15/22)

This sermon explores the profound transformation that occurs when a soul genuinely encounters Jesus. Illustrated through the narrative of Zacchaeus, a chief tax collector who undergoes a remarkable change, we witness how encountering Jesus leads to a shift from a self-centered existence to becoming a generous and loving individual. When God awakens our souls, earthly wealth loses its allure, as we recognize the superior blessings that God can bestow. An awakened soul finds fulfillment only in God, realizing that earthly pursuits fall short of satisfying the deep longing within.

二，靈命塑造系列：靈魂的成長

靈命塑造（1）離開膚淺的信仰，希伯來書 6：1 (1/8/23)

In this sermon, we delve into the notion that following Jesus extends beyond a mere decision; it is a lifelong journey. The Bible underscores the imperative of progressing from the infancy of spiritual life to attaining maturity. The driving force behind this growth emanates from the love of God and our reciprocal love towards Him. The Holy Spirit serves as the empowering force for this journey, providing the necessary strength for Christians to advance in their spiritual maturity. With such divine support, Christians are devoid of excuses for not pursuing growth in their faith.

靈命塑造（2）得享安息，馬太福音 11：28-30 (1/15/23)

In this sermon, we explore the idea that the directive to cultivate our spiritual life is not a burdensome imposition from God upon believers. On the contrary, Jesus assures us that the yoke He offers is lighter than the burdens we previously carried. He beckons us to come to Him, take His yoke, and learn His ways, promising that our lives would become significantly easier. Spiritual formation, therefore, entails a process of turning

away from our old way of life and embracing the new way exemplified by Jesus. It is a transformative journey marked by the relief and guidance found in following Christ.

靈命塑造（3）認識複雜的“我” 羅馬書 7：14-25 (1/29/23)

This sermon addresses the challenging nature of spiritual formation, emphasizing that it is not an easy task. While we often believe that understanding the reason behind right actions will lead us to doing them, the reality is that comprehension alone does not always translate into right conduct. Drawing from Dallas Willard's theory of human nature, which identifies four dimensions—will, mind, body, and social relationships—we recognize that the soul serves as the overarching element that organizes the entire person.²⁰⁹ Spiritual formation necessitates a comprehensive change in all these dimensions. It is a mistake to solely focus on the mind, accumulating knowledge without achieving the holistic spiritual transformation that encompasses the entirety of our being.

靈命塑造（4）戰勝罪的阻礙，羅馬書 Romans 8：1 - 4 (2/4/23)

In this sermon, we explore a significant impediment to spiritual formation—the entrenched habit of sinful living. Despite the truth that we are set free from sin when we accept Jesus as our Savior, the immediate transformation of our behaviors remains a challenge. Many continue to live as if bound by the chains of sin. The process of spiritual formation involves the continuous reminder to ourselves that we now reside in the kingdom of God and have been endowed with the power of the Holy Spirit to embrace a new life. It is a continual journey of aligning our behaviors with the freedom and transformative power found in our relationship with Christ.

靈命塑造（5）天路歷程，羅馬書 8：18-37 (2/25/23)

²⁰⁹ Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives*, (NY: HarperOne, 1999), 25

In this sermon, we delve into the four distinctive characteristics of spiritual formation. Firstly, it is emphasized as a lifelong process, acknowledging that growth in one's spiritual journey is continual and unfolds over time. Secondly, the lead role in this transformative process is attributed to the Holy Spirit, positioning believers as followers in this divine journey. Thirdly, the ultimate objective is not the attainment of perfection, but rather the reflection of the image of Christ in our lives. Lastly, spiritual formation is highlighted as a process that not only benefits the individual undergoing transformation but also extends to positively impact others as they, too, experience the ripple effects of this spiritual metamorphosis.²¹⁰

三，屬靈操練系列：靈魂的健身操

屬靈操練（1）默想的操練，詩篇 119：97 - 112 (3/11/23)

In this sermon, we explore the significance of meditation as a teaching from the Bible. Meditation is deemed essential as it serves to internalize the Scriptures, transforming written words into a vibrant and lived experience. The benefits of meditation are multifaceted, aiding in the adoption of a new way of thinking, delving into deeper levels of understanding, and providing insights into the unseen future. A crucial step in practicing meditation is the acquisition of the skill of being still, allowing the transformative power of God's Word to penetrate our hearts and minds.

屬靈操練（2）禱告的操練，詩篇 130 (3/25/23)

In this sermon, we delve into the significance of prayer as the paramount practice for Christians. It is depicted as the primary channel through which believers connect with God, seeking His guidance and assistance. The motivation behind prayer is portrayed not as an obligation but as a natural outflow of our relationship with God. As our self-awareness deepens, so does our recognition of our need for Him. Additionally, prayer is

²¹⁰ M. Robert Mulholland Jr. and Ruth Haley Barton, *Invitation to a Journey: A Road Map for Spiritual Formation*, Rev. Ed. IVP, 2016.

presented as an exercise for faith, where believers learn to embrace God's sovereignty and trust that His will surpasses our own. The practice of praying involves regular engagement, creating a space for believers to enjoy the profound experience of hearing God speak.

屬靈操練 (3) 禁食的操練，馬太福音 6：16-18 (4/15/23)

In this sermon, we explore the biblical teaching on fasting and its transformative impact on believers. Fasting is portrayed as a discipline that fosters humility and self-control, enabling individuals to discern their ultimate desires. The practice of fasting is recommended to be approached with a gradual increase in time periods, with a central focus on prayer during fasting. Following the lead of the Holy Spirit is emphasized as an integral aspect of this spiritual discipline. It is crucial to remember that fasting is not a means to earn God's favor or bring glory to ourselves; rather, its purpose is to draw believers closer to God in a profound and humble pursuit of spiritual connection.

屬靈操練 (4) -- 敬拜的操練，約翰福音 4：1-26 (4/29/23)

In this sermon, we delve into the significance of corporate worship as a vital spiritual practice. It is emphasized that both corporate and individual worship play essential roles in the believer's life, with corporate worship being rooted in the close relationship with God in daily living. To engage in worship effectively, believers are encouraged to be led by the Holy Spirit and to deepen their understanding of the truth of God. Worship is portrayed not merely as an emotional experience but as a holistic engagement of the whole person—heart, emotion, and body—coming before God. True worship, it is asserted, has the transformative power to shift the focus of our entire lives.

屬靈操練 (5) - 順服的操練，歌羅西書 3：12-25 (5/13/23)

In this sermon, we explore the significance of corporate obedience practice within the community of believers. Obedience is presented as a crucial characteristic for

Christians, emphasizing the notion that our ability to obey God is intricately linked to our obedience to fellow individuals within the community. The practice of obedience necessitates active participation in ministry, highlighting the importance of purposeful training to adhere to group decisions. The sermon underscores the idea that obedience within the believers' community not only strengthens the bonds among individuals but also lays a foundation for a deeper and more authentic obedience to God, who is often unseen but ever-present in our lives.

屬靈操練 (6) - 身體的角色，羅馬書 6：15-23 (5/27/23)

In concluding this series, this sermon serves as a summary of the various spiritual practices discussed. The overarching purpose of spiritual disciplines is highlighted: to align our bodies with our spirits. The body is acknowledged as a tool that can be directed towards either sinful or godly deeds. The sermon emphasizes that establishing good habits, through training, is essential for Christians. It is emphasized that as believers, it's not sufficient to agree with the teachings of the Bible merely intellectually; there is a need to use our bodies to actively live out our faith. While the internal change is recognized as the work of the Holy Spirit, the external change is presented as our responsibility. Christians are called to offer their bodies as living sacrifices, a tangible expression of devotion aimed at pleasing God.

B, Training a Small Group on Lectio Divina at LVCCC

In addition to the sermon series, a group training of Lectio Divina was done three months after the beginning of sermon series. Lectio Divina, meaning "Divine Reading" in Latin, is a spiritual practice that encompasses individual Bible study, meditation, and prayer.²¹¹ The appeal of experimenting with this practice has a couple reasons. First, in the Spirituality Survey conducted previously (about 3 months before this training), the

²¹¹ Mariano Magrassi OSB, *Praying the Bible: An Introduction to Lectio Divina*, 3rd Ed. Liturgical Press. 1998. 5

results show that 22% people believe that prayer is the second important way (right after listening sermons) for spiritual growth. Second, the survey shows that about 70% of people pray every day. Third, the Bible study is second common spiritual practice after prayer in the survey. Since Lectio Divina is the combination of the Bible reading and prayer, it should be easier for LVCCC congregation to accept. Furthermore, the contents of Lectio Divina are clear and structured approach, making it easily accessible for individuals, particularly those well-acquainted with the Bible.

While traditionally practiced individually, there is a growing trend of believers engaging in Group Lectio Divina. This group practice is seen as an extension of personal Lectio Divina, fostering a give-and-take dynamic where individuals contribute and receive, enriching each participant spiritually. As expressed by Magrassi, "Some give, some receive, and everyone comes away spiritually richer. This give-and-take depends on the amount of treasure acquired by each one in personal reading. But each one leaves the conference inspired by the contribution of the others" ²¹²

Lectio Divina is a way to read the Bible devotionally. Robert Mulholland, in his book "Shaped by the Word," outlines two primary approaches to reading Scripture: for information and for formation.²¹³ Both approaches hold significance in the life of a believer.

The informational reading provides believers the solid foundation of biblical truth. It can guide the believers when they practice meditation of the Scripture. Without this foundation, the meditation could become self-centered instead of God-centered.

²¹² Mariano Magrassi OSB, *Praying the Bible: An Introduction to Lectio Divina*, 3rd Ed. Liturgical Press. 1998. 122

²¹³ Robert Mulholland, *Shaped by the Word: The Power of Scripture in Spiritual Formation*, Rev. Ed. The Upper Room. 2001. 64

Therefore, the informational reading should precede the transformational read, to prepare the believers to be transformed by the Scripture.

Moholland asserts that meditating on Scripture through a devotional approach is of profound importance in the life of a believer. It operates within a formational style of reading, recognizing that God's purpose in giving Scripture goes beyond recording stories or providing theological meaning; it is a personal communication from God to us.²¹⁴ While careful study of Scripture to discern truth is acknowledged, the devotional use of Scripture does not overlook trustworthy interpretations. The emphasis is on listening to God speaking through His Word, allowing the Holy Spirit to repurpose recorded experiences for continued life transformation. The primary focus in this form of Scripture study is on application to the reader's own life, immersing oneself in the text as though actually present in the situations described.

Moreover, Scripture is recognized as one of the prime resources for encountering God and rebuilding the relationship broken by sin.²¹⁵ Its study provides an opportunity for the mind to be nourished with spiritual food, replacing self-centered thoughts and habits developed through sinful indulgence. When approached with openness to the Holy Spirit's guidance, Scripture becomes a miraculous and awesome transaction, completing the inspiration process and deeply impacting the believer's life.

²¹⁴ Mariano Magrassi OSB, *Praying the Bible: An Introduction to Lectio Divina*, 3rd Ed. Liturgical Press. 1998. 67

²¹⁵ 葉美珠, CESNA TD114 靈修傳統與實踐, handout offered in Spring 2023. Summarized from Robert Mulholland, *Shaped by the Word: The Power of Scripture in Spiritual Formation*, Rev. Ed. The Upper Room. 2001. 72

However, in the author's church, there is a prevalent emphasis on informational reading of scripture. The formational reading is unknown to most congregations. The distinction between the two approaches is succinctly summarized in the class notes.²¹⁶

Chart 5-1: the Comparison of Two Type of Scripture Reading

Informational Reading	Formational Reading
Try to finish reading the Bible chapters according to the schedule. 儘可能地按時讀完提供的材料	Contemplate those sentences that speak to you as long as you want. The goal is not just to finish this passage but to encounter God. 保持“停留的模式”在那些對你說話的字句上； 你的目標不是去讀完這段，而是遇見神
Linear reading - quickly scan the surface of the text. 線性式的閱讀-“迅速地掃過經文的表面”	Deep reading, maintain an open attitude toward the multiple and deeper meanings of the text. 深入的閱讀，對經文所含有的多重意義和 更深的層面保持開放之態度
Hope to understand the text and grasp it better. 希望理解經文並且更能掌握它	Allow the text to grasp you. 容許經文來掌握你
Investigate the text and look for places where it fit into our thought patterns. 掌控經文並尋找有無適合我們的思想方式之處	Want to be shaped by the text; Like "standing in front of the text, waiting for its discourse." 希望被經文來模造，我們是“站在經文前面，等候它的演說”
Read with an objective and analytical attitude. 以客觀和分析之態度作閱讀	Humbly and impartially accept God's word. 謙卑地，無偏見地來接受神的話
Hope to find solutions in the Scriptures. 希望在經文找到解決問題之法	Maintain an open attitude towards mysteries and what God wants to say. 對奧秘之事和神要說的話保持開放的態度

²¹⁶ Ibid.

In this project, the researcher employed a modified form of Lectio Divina with six distinct movements: silence, reading, reflecting, responding, rest, and recording.²¹⁷ The silence before the traditional four movements of Lectio Divina aimed to foster openness to a divine encounter with God's Word. This intentional silence created an inner space, allowing believers to listen attentively to God, especially in the midst of hectic schedules on both weekdays and weekends.

The movement of recording was introduced at the end of the process to aid participants in memorizing the Word and incorporating it into their daily lives. Participants were provided with the selected Bible verses a week in advance, enabling them to practice at home, reflect on their experiences, and write down their reflections to share in the class.

For each Sunday, the following Lectio Divina procedure was followed:

- 1) Silence and pray for the Holy Spirit's Guidance

Let the things lingering in your heart emerge, surrender each one to God without intercession, until your heart becomes completely calm.

- 2) Read the assigned Bible verses

Read carefully and slowly, 2-3 times by the instructor. The trainees were asked to close their eyes and listen. No analyzing the scripture needed for the trainer and trainees.

- 3) Reflect on the words

Pay attention to sentences, thoughts, or images that particularly touch your inner self, and then stop reading and enter meditation. Focus on this sentence (two or three

²¹⁷ Guigo II, *The Ladder of Monks and Twelve Meditations*, trans with an introduction by Edmund Colledge, O.S.A. and James Walsh, S.J. (New York: Image Books, 1978), 82-83.

words) and reflect on such questions: why do these sentences touch you; how do they relate to your current situation?

4) Respond to God

Let your heart dwell in the scripture that moves you. Be honest before God, continually meditate on the words. Allow the Spirit to guide you into the struggles of your life or lead you into thanksgiving, supplication, praise, desire, repentance. Speak to the Lord from your heart, and listen to what the Lord says to you. Ask yourself how you would obey God or respond to God's invitation at this moment.

5) Rest on God's faithfulness

Be silent before God, let the Holy Spirit operate in your heart. Let go of the words and everything around you, and just enjoy communion with God in the spirit!

6) Record the inspiration

Write today's spiritual exercise in your prayer journal.

The training was done in LVCCC Sunday school class for consecutive twelve weeks, from 1/8/23 to 3/26/23. The participants were members of LVCCC. The small group was asked to complete the prior and post training questionnaires. Each class was 45 minutes. Each class had 30 minutes of practice and 15 minutes of discussion.

The Bible verses of each week's class are as following:

Week 1 – introduction of Lectio Divina and the book of Psalms

Week 2 – Psalm 1

Week 3 – Psalm 1

Week 4 – Psalm 2

Week 5 – Psalm 6

Week 6 – Psalm 12

Week 7 – Psalm 17

Week 8 – Psalm 22: 1-15

Week 9 – Psalm 22: 16-31

Week 10 – Psalm 30

Week 11 – Psalm 32

Week 12 – Summary of practice, fill the post training survey.

There are 12 people who finished the training and 11 completed the pre and post training surveys.

Part II, Conducting a General Spirituality Survey in Chinese Christians

In Part II of the study, a comprehensive spirituality survey was conducted. This spirituality survey was carefully crafted to assess the degree of spiritual development within members of Chinese American churches. The primary goal of the survey was to uncover insights into devotional attitudes and practices.

The survey included 49 questions that participants answered using the Likert scale. The questions were designed by studying many questionnaires written by other researchers. The survey comprised four distinct sections: self-evaluation of spiritual condition, engagement in spiritual discipline, the extent of church support for spiritual formation, and attitudes toward practicing spiritual discipline. All questions were written

in straight forward, practical and easy to answer styles by the author's best effort, according to the suggestions of Richard Davies.²¹⁸

The initial set of questions pertains to the self-evaluation of spirituality comprises 13 Likert scale items. To ensure participants respond based on their actual lived experiences rather than perceived expectations, all questions are framed in practical terms and linked to real-life scenarios. The primary objective of this section is to gauge the genuine nature of participants' relationships with God in their day-to-day existence. Recognizing that many Christians may be more acquainted with the knowledge of Christianity rather than its practical application, this section aims to provide the researcher with an accurate assessment of their true spiritual condition before delving into the introduction of spiritual disciplines. The survey questions seek to assist participants in gaining a deeper understanding of themselves by encouraging reflection on their daily activities.

The second set of questions is designed to uncover spiritual disciplines engaged in by the participants. These questions are based on the twelve disciplines outlined in the book "Celebration of Discipline" by Richard Foster. Some of the 12 disciplines are explored with more than one question for specificity, such as "writing spiritual journal" in addition to "meditation" and "tithing and offering" alongside "worship," among others. The goal of this section is to assess how many spiritual disciplines Chinese Christians are currently practicing and to identify which disciplines are more accepted by participants. This insight may aid church leaders in customizing the introduction of spiritual disciplines to the Chinese Christian community. This group comprises 16 questions on the Likert scale.

²¹⁸ Richard E. Davies, *Handbook for Doctor of Ministry Projects*, (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1984). 187

The third set of questions aims to determine the level of support for spiritual formation provided by the churches. Given the well-educated background of many Chinese American Christians, churches often emphasize intellectual study over spiritual practices as noted previously. Apart from worship and prayer meetings, many churches may not offer training in spiritual disciplines. This section, consisting of 10 questions on the Likert scale, seeks to further understand if participants feel the need for training in spiritual discipline.

The fourth set of questions delves into participants' attitudes toward spiritual disciplines. Many Christians may hold misconceptions, associating spiritual disciplines with Catholicism or as a conflict with faith in God. Despite a recent trend toward acceptance of spiritual disciplines in Protestant churches, some Christians may still hesitate to embrace them.²¹⁹ The purpose of this section, containing 10 questions on the Likert scale, is to understand the reaction of people when introducing spiritual practices. This result can help church leaders to overcome these hinderances when introducing spiritual disciplines.

The Spirituality Survey of Chinese Christians were extended to all participating Christians in Chinese American churches in United States over a three-week duration (1/7/24-1/28/24). The survey was administered using Google Forms, and the survey link was disseminated through participating church social networks or emailed by the church leaders to its members. In addition, the survey link was also shared among the author's friends and family circles. Chinese Christians whoever live in U.S. and attend Chinese church were welcomed to participate. The pastors/elders in following seven churches were participated the survey with their congregations, which are Las Vegas Living Word Chinese Church, Evangelical Church of Christ Las Vegas, Red River Chinese Christian Church, Chinese Gospel Church (in Michigan), Kalamzoo Chinese Christian Church,

²¹⁹ George Marchinkowski and Pieter G.R. De Villiers, "The rediscovery of spiritual practices within Protestantism", *Stellenbosch Theological Journal* Vol 6, No 1, (Jun, 2020): 432.

Peoria Chinese Christian Church and Wilmington Chinese Christian Church. The inclusion of a demographic section in the survey aims to facilitate data analysis based on different demographic groups. To ensure confidentiality, all data collection and reporting of results in this project was executed with a commitment to maintaining participant anonymity. Names and email addresses are not collected.

Data Analysis

The entirety of the data collection process was facilitated through Google Forms, and the subsequent analysis was conducted using the built-in software provided by the platform. The preliminary data garnered from this Google Forms served as the cornerstone for the subsequent steps in the research, involving the grouping, comparison, and formulation of initial conclusions.

It is imperative to note that the data utilized across both components of the research emanated from the responses to survey questions. The objective of data analysis is to discover Chinese Christian's opinions to spiritual formation by the Likert scale results of each question. The graphs were used to give the readers a direct image of results. The percentage numbers were used in discussion, because percentages help enhance the readability of numerical findings, and they can simplify the report.²²⁰

The methodological framework underpinning this research aligns with the principles of quantitative study. This field is dedicated to the quantitative depiction of fundamental features within a dataset, or the quantitative depiction itself, marking an essential step in unraveling the patterns and nuances embedded in the collected information.²²¹

²²⁰ Richard E. Davies, *Handbook for Doctor of Ministry Projects*, (Lanham, MD, University Press of America, 1984), 187

The data was organized, presented, and described using tables, graphs, and summary measures. They serve as a powerful tool to distill complex datasets into comprehensible insights. The data analysis adhered to general principles adapted from Crosswell's quantitative methods in his "Research Design" and Davies' "Handbook for Doctor of Ministry Projects". These principles played a crucial role in guiding the research process, offering a structured approach to answering the research questions and validating the initially formulated hypotheses. The author aimed to extract meaningful patterns and trends from the collected data, contributing to a nuanced understanding of the intricate dynamics surrounding spiritual disciplines and their reception within the Chinese American Christian community.

Limits of Generalization

This study was conducted within specific limitations, including:

1. Limited Applicability of Spirituality Survey: The Spirituality Survey, conducted in a select number of churches, are not directly applicable to the entire American Chinese churches as a whole. The insights gained from this survey are specific to the participating congregations, limiting the generalizability of the findings to a broader context.
2. Representation of LVCCC: The research was primarily centered around LVCCC, a small, local, independent church. Consequently, the results are not representative of the diverse landscape of Chinese American churches. The unique characteristics of LVCCC might not reflect those of other Chinese American congregations, thus affecting the generalizability of the study's outcomes.

²²¹ John W. Crosswell and J. David Crosswell, *Research Design*, 6th Ed. (Sage, 2023), 136.

3. Potential Participant Bias: Concern may be raised about participant bias, as individuals involved in the study might have shaped their survey responses based on perceived expectations or preferences of the researcher. This inherent bias must be considered when interpreting and evaluating the results, recognizing the potential influence on the study's outcomes.

4. Electronic Data Collection and Participant Familiarity: The use of electronic means, specifically Google Forms, for data collection within the participating congregations introduces the possibility of participant errors. Some individuals may be unfamiliar with the operation of Google Forms, potentially impacting the accuracy and reliability of the collected data. Additionally, results obtained through electronic means may not be directly comparable to traditional pen-and-paper responses, necessitating caution in the interpretation of findings.

Acknowledging these limitations is crucial for an appropriate understanding of the study's scope and applicability, ensuring that the findings are interpreted within the context of these constraints.

Summary

This project stems from a desire to introduce spiritual formation to Chinese Christians and to understand their current spiritual condition in their engagement with spiritual disciplines. Based on these findings, the project aims to provide observations and suggestions for future endeavor to introduce appropriate spiritual disciplines to Chinese American churches. The research process as detailed in this chapter covers essential elements such as a project overview, problem statement, purpose, research questions, hypotheses, and the chosen research design and methodology. The discussion extends to considerations including the target population, data analysis methods, and the limitations of generalization in the study. With the scope of research design, this comprehensive approach ensures a thorough exploration of the subject, laying the

groundwork for meaningful insights into the spiritual landscape of Chinese American congregations and the potential impact of spiritual disciplines.

Chapter 6

Results and Discussion

This research project consists of two significant phases. The initial phase occurred at LVCCC, where the author had served as the pastor for a span of seven years. Within this church community, three surveys which include LVCCC Spirituality Survey (before spiritual formation sermon series) conducted 8/15/22 - 8/29/22, LVCCC Post Sermon Evaluation Survey conducted 5/13/23 – 5/27/23, LVCCC Post Lectio Devina Training Evaluation Survey conducted on 3/26/23, were completed to assess the need and response to integrating spiritual formation into both Sunday sermons and group training. The results ensuing discussion are detailed in this chapter.

The subsequent phase of the project involved a larger scale survey entitled "The Spirituality Survey of Chinese Christians in the United States". The survey was conducted during 1/7/24-1/28/24, with a total of 49 questions covered across four distinct categories. This survey reached Chinese Christians attending Chinese Christian churches from coast to coast in the United States. The findings and subsequent discussion of this survey are also outlined in this chapter.

LVCCC Spirituality Survey Results

Prior to initiating the experiment of incorporating spiritual discipline at LVCCC, the author conducted the Spirituality Survey to evaluate the spiritual condition of the congregation. The objective was to facilitate a smoother introduction of spiritual formation. This survey, comprising 20 questions along with demographic information, was distributed through a Google Form. The link was shared via church WeChat groups over a two-week period (8/15/22 - 8/29/22), ensuring broad reach within the congregation. Additionally, paper copies of the survey were made available at the church during the same timeframe.

To ensure comprehensive data collection, responses from the completed paper forms were manually transferred into the Google Form. It is noteworthy that the average attendance of Sunday Worship at LVCCC is approximately 150 Chinese adults, and the survey collected responses from 57 participants. The key findings from this survey are outlined below:

Results of Participant Demographics:

The majority of respondents are female, constituting 86% of the participants.

A significant 74% of the respondents have identified as Christians for 10 years or more.

The participants hold diverse ministry positions within the church.

These findings indicate that the surveyed individuals predominantly consist of long-term, spiritually mature members of the congregation.

Results and Analysis About Opinions of Devotion:

These three questions are to explore how the congregation understands spiritual formation, which is closely related with our devotions and emotions.

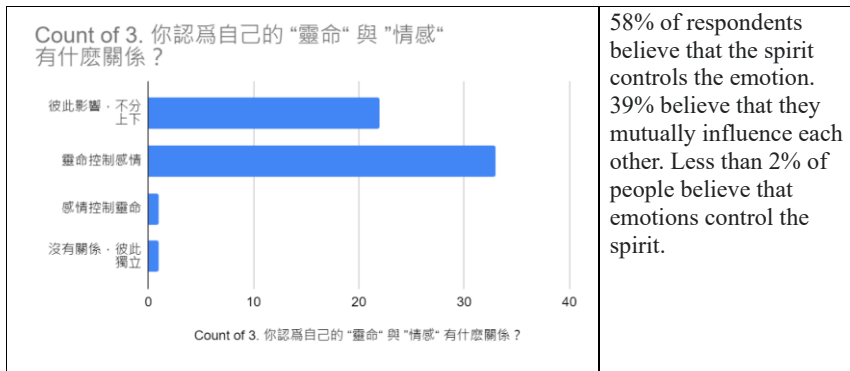
What does devotion mean to you?

What does spiritual formation mean to you?

What is the relationship between spirit and emotion?

Chart 6-1 LVCCC Spirituality Survey Results Part 1

Total Respondents	Explanation
<p>Count of 1. “靈修”對你是什麼意義？</p> <p>Count of 1. “靈修”對你是什麼意義？</p>	<p>63% of participants believe that devotions encompass activities such as Bible studying, prayer, or worship. 29% associate meditation and self-examination with devotion. Less than 10% consider devotion as other activities.</p>
<p>Count of 2. “靈命塑造”對你是什麼意義？</p> <p>Count of 2. “靈命塑造”對你是什麼意義？</p>	<p>61% of individuals believe that spiritual formation is a unique experience of the presence of God. 18% consider serving in church ministries as a form of spiritual formation. 14% consider the Bible study and prayer, 7% consider church activities as a part of spiritual formation.</p>



These findings suggest that the participants adhere to traditional evangelical devotional methods, emphasizing Bible study and prayer. This particular inclination is consistent in conservative churches like LVCCC. While traditional devotional practices are vital, the author suggests that a predominant focus on these aspects may contribute to overlooking the integration of faith with daily life. The mind-centric approach to devotion might result in believers being content with knowledge but neglecting the transformative aspect of faith.

The perception that many individuals hold regarding spiritual formation as a unique encounter with the presence of God more than specific actions, suggests that spiritual formation is often seen as a passive undertaking solely orchestrated by God. This reveals a likely deficiency in awareness within the congregation concerning the importance of spiritual discipline.

The question about the relationship between spirit and emotion aims to explore the congregation's understanding of the significant influence of human emotion on spiritual condition. Although generally emotions are considered an unreliable source by Chinese tradition for determining actions, they play a crucial role in motivating action. The majority (59%) believe that the spirit can control emotions, implying that knowing

the truth will automatically lead to appropriate feelings and actions. However, this belief is contrary to experiential reality, as described by Paul in the book of Romans, “For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do.” (Rom 7:15)

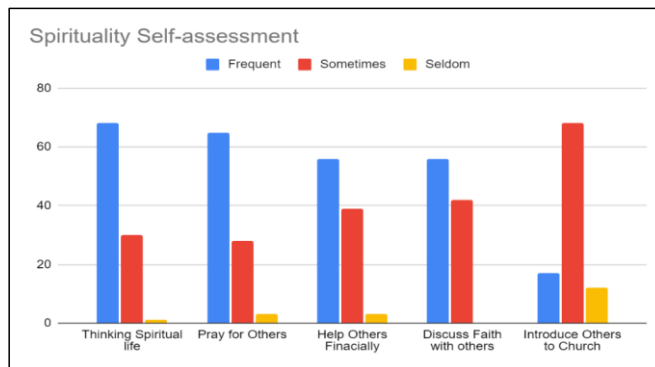
Just a third of those surveyed recognize spirit and emotion as equally potent and influential forces, hinting at a belief that while the truth may shape their lives, emotion does not fully submit to the truth. This phenomenon resonates deeply within Christian circles, echoing the words of the Apostle Paul, who observed the perennial conflict between fleshly desires and spiritual inclinations (Galatians 5:17). This viewpoint doesn't dismiss the significance of emotion in decision-making. Instead, it underscores the vital role emotions play. Understanding this underscores the importance of engaging in spiritual disciplines. A holistic approach to spiritual growth acknowledges the essential balance between nurturing both spirit and emotion.

Results and Analysis About Self-assessment of Spirituality

The survey includes five questions prompting participants to assess their own spirituality, gauging the frequency with which they live out their Christian faith. The responses are measured on a Likert scale: very frequent, frequent, sometimes, seldom, and never. Most respondents opted for choices in the middle range, while "never" received no selection, and "very frequent" received only a couple times. As a result, the summary chart only presents data from the middle three options, merging "very frequent" into "frequent" for clarity.

Chart 6-2 LVCCC Spirituality Survey Results Part 2

Result for Five Questions about Spirituality Self-assessment



The results indicate that the most common activities people enjoy engaging in are “thinking spiritual life” and prayer. These preferences support the positive characteristics of mature Christians who navigate both the earthly and heavenly realms. However, when respondents are queried about specific actions they undertake, the total numbers choosing “frequent” decrease while those for “sometimes” increase. This trend is particularly notable in the specific action of “introduce others to Church”. This finding resonates with responses from the earlier category, suggesting that individuals perceive themselves as more spiritual than their actions demonstrate. It also aligns with the author’s observations in the church, where there is an abundance of Bible teachers but a shortage of individuals serving in caring ministries.

In the realm of spirituality, it is a common perception to associate its application with mental activities such as studying the Bible and engaging in prayer. Indeed, these practices are integral to one's spiritual journey, serving as pillars of connection with God. However, it is crucial to broaden our perspective and recognize that spirituality exceeds the boundaries of mental pursuits. For example, “prayer for others” received a very high score. However, although not specifically addressed in the survey, less than one-tenth of LVCCC congregation attend the church weekly prayer meeting according to the author’s

observation. This suggests that individuals are willing to pray for themselves and others but are reluctant to make extra effort to attend church prayer meetings.

The essence of spirituality is profoundly intertwined with how we treat others. While studying scripture and engaging in prayer are undoubtedly spiritual actions, the tangible evidence of our spirituality lies in our interactions with fellow human beings. This perspective asserts that our experience of God significantly influences our behavior and relationships. If we truly experience God's love, compassion, and empathy, it naturally translates into our interactions with those around us.

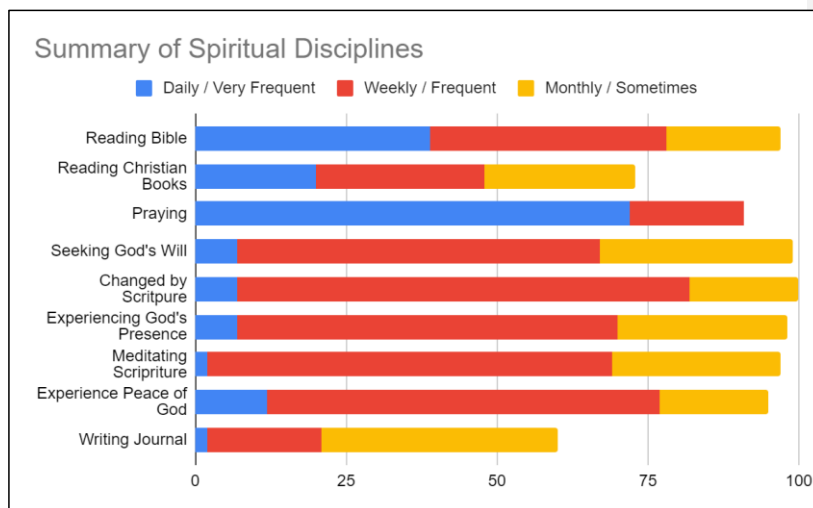
Therefore, the author advocates for a holistic assessment of spirituality—one that considers both mental and physical activities. The call is to embrace a comprehensive approach that acknowledges the inseparable connection between true beliefs and actions. Engaging in prayer and studying sacred texts are vital components, but they find their true significance in the transformative power they have on our behavior and actions.

Result and Analysis About Spiritual Discipline Engagement

These questions are intended to explore how the congregation practices and experiences their faith. Again, the responses are measured on a Likert scale: very frequent, frequent, sometimes, seldom, very rare and never. Most respondents opted for choices in the top three range (very frequent, frequent, sometimes), while "never" received no selection, "very rarely" and "seldom" received only a couple times. As a result, the summary chart only presents data from the majority answers of three options (very frequent, frequent, sometimes) for clarity.

Chart 6-3 – LVCCC Spirituality Survey Results Part 3

Result of Spiritual Discipline Engagement in Percentage



Analyzing the data presented in the chart regarding the frequency of various practices, it becomes evident that prayer emerges as the most prevalent discipline, closely trailed by reading the Bible, followed by reading Christian literature, occupying the third position. Noteworthy is the fact that while prayer and Bible reading also garner the highest cumulative scores, reading Christian literature registers the second-lowest total score, indicating that only a small subset of participants who engage in Bible study and prayer delve into other Christian texts. This phenomenon resonates with the Protestant doctrine of "sola Scriptura." Although the Bible serves as the paramount source of Christian truth, an individual's personal comprehension of Scripture may not always be the most accurate or comprehensive. Without drawing from the writings of other Christian scholars, we risk missing opportunities to delve deeper and gain a more holistic understanding of Scripture.

"Seeking God's will," "experiencing God's presence," and "meditating on Scripture" exhibit a pattern of scoring low in the "very frequent" category but high in the "frequent" category. Across all three inquiries, only approximately 7% of participants

reported engaging in these practices "very frequently," while around 60% marked them as "frequent," and approximately 30% selected "sometimes." This suggests that the participants practice these activities not as daily necessities but rather as religious practices they undertake when convenient or deemed necessary. Given that most participants lack formal training in these spiritual disciplines, their perception of these activities leans more towards trying to please God rather than intentional efforts to draw closer to God. This observation aligns with the author's ministry experience and discussions with participants.

Remarkably, the outcomes for "changed by Scripture" and "experience peace of God" stand out with notably high scores. Typically, these are considered the fruits of prolonged engagement in spiritual disciplines. Two potential explanations emerge: firstly, even though participants may only be engaging in limited spiritual disciplines, there's still evidence of transformation by the Holy Spirit when they partake in activities like studying scripture, prayer, and worship. However, a deeper and more comprehensive transformation requires the consistent practice of multiple spiritual disciplines, including solitude, meditation, fasting, and contemplation, among others. These disciplines serve to cultivate our receptivity to the guidance and empowerment of the Holy Spirit, enabling a more profound submission to His will.

Secondly, these results indicate that individuals may find satisfaction in their perceived changes. Many Christians may become proud of their elevated moral standards and deepened knowledge of God. From this contentment with their spirituality, there is probably a diminished motivation to actively seek further transformation. This aligns with the author's observations in LVCCC, where some retired mature Christians express a desire to step back from active church ministries.

The data reveals that writing in a journal received the lowest scores, with only 2% of respondents marking "very frequent," 19% selecting "frequent," and 39% indicating "sometimes." Notably, 35% of respondents reported "seldom" or "very rare" engagement, with 3% even stating "never," a trend not observed in other questions. This finding suggests a preference for simpler practices like prayer and meditation over more demanding disciplines such as journal writing, which may require more time and effort. Furthermore, this specific question holds significant importance in the overall assessment, as unlike other inquiries lacking clear standards, journaling has a precise measurement for participant engagement. Since many participants lack a strong understanding of spiritual disciplines, their responses to this question might more accurately reflect their true level of involvement, which is likely much lower than the survey suggests.

In summary, the results illustrate that the majority of participants (90% and above) have been exposed to various spiritual disciplines, particularly engaging in Bible study and prayer. Many participants express a desire to seek God's will, meditate on His words, report being transformed by Scripture, and frequently experience His presence and peace. However, these practices are not consistently integrated into their daily routines. Conversely, activities like reading Christian books and journal writing received lower scores, indicating fewer individuals engaging in these more time-intensive pursuits.

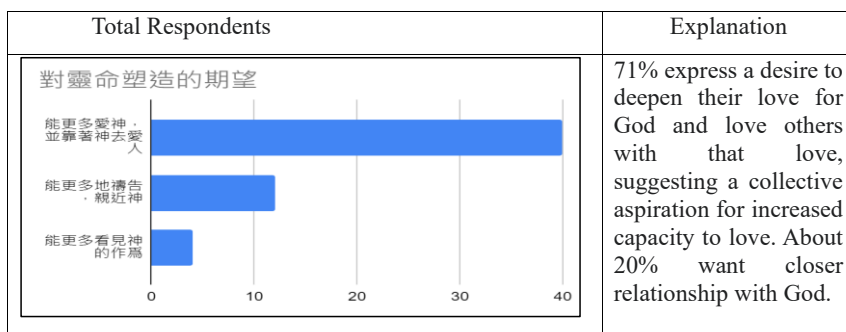
These findings suggest that while participants are actively seeking God, there is a need for further training to establish these spiritual activities as disciplined practices rather than sporadic undertakings. Moreover, when introducing spiritual disciplines, it is vital to emphasize that the benefits far outweigh the effort involved. The rewards, such as experiencing a life filled with joy and peace, justify the investment in discipline.

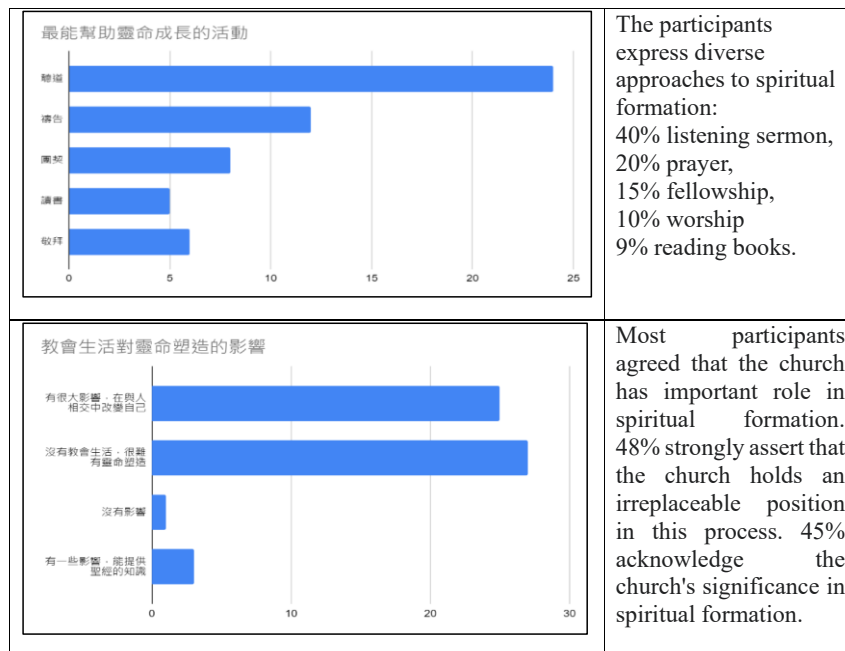
Result and Analysis About Expectation of Spiritual Formation

The purpose of the final three inquiries is to unveil participants' anticipations regarding spiritual formation. The findings reveal that a majority desire to deepen their love for God and others. This implies that relying solely on intellectual faith may not equip believers adequately for selfless love. They seek assistance to foster genuine faith with power for practical living. Given that most participants recognize the pivotal role of church life in spiritual formation, these results strongly advocate for embracing spiritual disciplines.

Chart 6-4 LVCCC Spirituality Survey Results Part 4

Result of Expectations for Spiritual Disciplines





Views on how to achieve spiritual formation vary, but the top two answers are sermons and prayer. Consequently, in the effort to introduce spiritual disciplines to LVCCC, the author has decided to utilize sermons to impart knowledge about spiritual formation. Furthermore, fellowship groups will be leveraged to cultivate prayer-related spiritual disciplines, such as Lectio Divina. This strategic approach aims to integrate both teaching and practical training within the faith community to enhance the spiritual formation experience for the congregation.

Summary

The survey outcomes highlight distinct trends among participants. Firstly, a majority adheres to traditional devotional practices, prioritizing activities such as Bible reading, prayer, and worship. Secondly, a prevailing belief is that spiritual formation involves a supernatural encounter with God's presence, coupled with the perspective that

our spirit has control over emotion. These results indicate that the congregation of LVCCC has very limited knowledge about spiritual formation as presented in previous Chapters, which can involve many different disciplines and is a lifelong training process.

In terms of interests and activities, participants express a heightened interest in meditation, praying, and discussing spiritual matters. Conversely, there is a lesser enthusiasm for activities involving outreach, such as bringing people to the church. Examining the types of spiritual disciplines, the level of engagement varies, with more participants disciplined in prayer and Bible study. Seeking God's will, meditation on Scripture, and experiencing God's presence are practiced less, and spiritual journaling emerges as the least common discipline.

A notable finding is that most participants express satisfaction with their spiritual condition, attributing it to having attained personal transformations and experiences of godly peace. Furthermore, expectations for spiritual formation revolve around a desire for improvement in loving God and others, particularly within the church setting. Participants identify that listening to sermons and engaging in prayer are the most effective approaches to enhance spiritual formation.

In response to these findings, the author confirmed the necessity of introducing spiritual formation to the congregation. The most receptive way is to preach a themed sermon series, emphasizing both knowledge and practice. It will consist of teaching on the purpose of salvation as a transformative life experience and practical methods for implementing spiritual disciplines, which seem unfamiliar to the congregation. Furthermore, small group training sessions will be conducted, with a focus on *Lectio Divina*—a combination of Scripture study and prayer.

LVCCC Post Sermons Evaluation Survey

Following the completion of the Spirituality Survey, a series of sermons on spiritual formation are delivered on Sundays. Based on the Spirituality Survey's results, these sermons focus on three main topics: firstly, emphasizing that spiritual formation is the purpose of salvation, and that it is a lifelong process; secondly, highlighting that spiritual formation involves the entire person, both mind and emotion; and thirdly, emphasizing that spiritual formation requires various spiritual disciplines. After the conclusion of the nine-month sermon series, the author conducted the Post Sermons Survey (5/13/23 – 5/27/23), and 45 responses are received and presented as follows.

Results and Analysis

Chart 6-5 The Results of LVCCC Post Sermons Evaluation Survey Part 1

Results of Questions About Benefits in Percentage

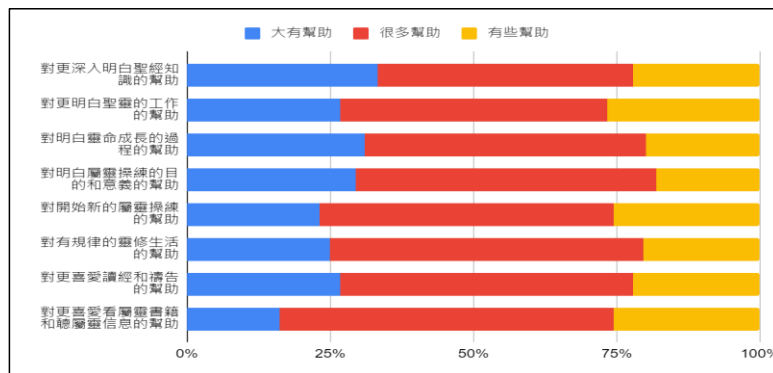


Chart 6-5 displays the results of the first eight questions regarding how the sermon series has impacted the spiritual life of LVCCC's congregation. All answers fell into the first three Likert scale categories, with no one choosing 'Little help' or 'No help'. Combining the responses of "very helpful" and "helpful", it is observed that more than three-quarters of participants find the sermon series beneficial in providing clarity from

Scripture on the process, meaning, and purpose of spiritual formation. The sermons also contribute to fostering a regular devotional life, motivating individuals to study the Bible and engage in prayer. Generally, the sermon series serves as a motivational factor for the congregation to continue their existing practices. Additionally, participants report gaining knowledge about spiritual formation. However, aspects such as initiating new spiritual disciplines and reading Christian books receive lower approval ratings as participants perceive these areas to be less influenced by the sermons. The theme of the Holy Spirit, while not central, is scattered throughout the series and receives a relatively lower approval rate.

The purpose of these questions in Chart 6-5 is to understand the congregation's perception of the helpfulness from the messages on spiritual formation delivered in sermons. The high success rates in enhancing understanding of Scripture, the process, purpose, and meaning of spiritual formation suggest that the intended goal has been at least in part accomplished. However, the lower scores on "starting new spiritual disciplines" and "reading Christian books" indicate that sermons may not effectively bring about behavioral changes. Instead, they seem to assist individuals in refining existing practices, such as engaging in regular Bible study and prayer. To assist the congregation in beginning to practice new spiritual disciplines, it appears necessary to conduct workshops focused on specific spiritual disciplines.

Chart 6-6 The Results of LVCCC Post Sermons Evaluation Survey Part 2

Results of Questions About Benefits in Percentage

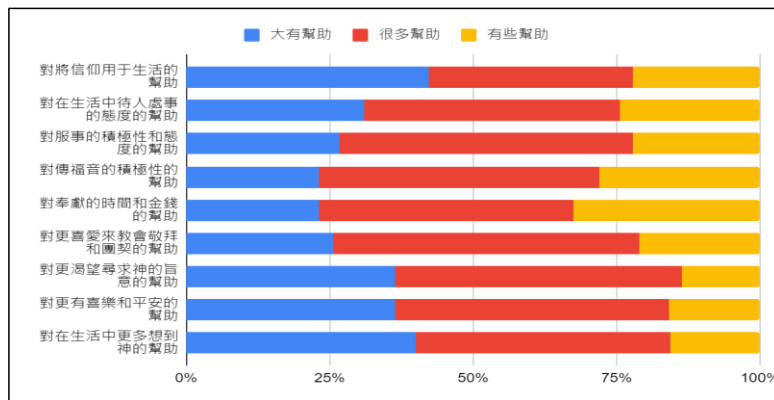


Chart 6-6 illustrates the results of the second group of questions from the same survey, focusing on how the sermons have influenced participants' behaviors in relationship with others. More than three-quarters of respondents believe the sermons are helpful in applying the Bible, motivating them for service, participating in corporate worship and fellowship, seeking God's will, experiencing God's presence, joy, and peace. However, the approval rate drops to less than 75% for aspects such as sharing the gospel, as well as offering time and money to others. Once again, the sermons are perceived as more effective in imparting knowledge about the application of faith rather than the actions themselves.

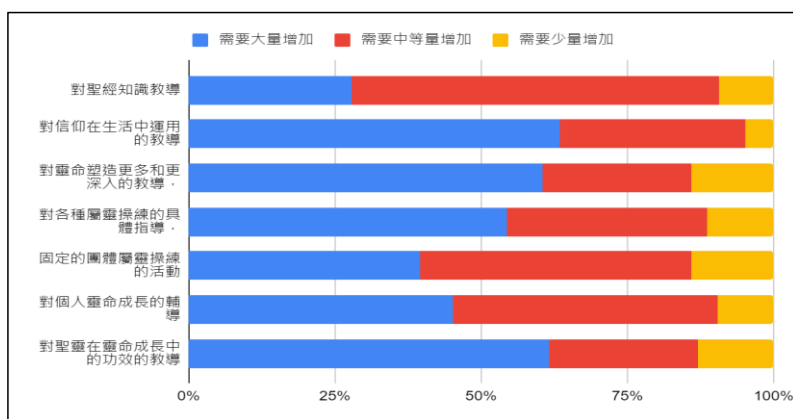
At times, Christians may harbor misconceptions about their own spirituality. To evaluate the impact of the sermon series more concretely, the author utilized some tangible questions. Hence, it's not surprising that "sharing the Gospel" and "offering time and money" received the lowest scores. In contrast, "seeking God's will," "experiencing joy and peace," and "being aware of God's presence" gained very high scores. This once again underscores the desire of individuals to please God, even though translating this desire into action proves lacking. The underlying reason for this lack of action is most

likely the absence of spiritual disciplines. Such disciplines are needed to serve as the training process to bridge the gap between desire and action.

Chart 6-7 is the result of the third group of questions of this survey, containing the questions about how the church should help the congregation to grow spiritually.

Chart 6-7 The Results of LVCCC Post Sermons Evaluation Survey Part 3

Results of Questions About Expectations in Percentage



In the chart above, it's evident that over 75% of participants believe the church should increase teaching across all listed topics. The top four topics, which garnered high total scores, include “teaching of Bible knowledge”, “teaching of application of faith in life”, “teaching of various spiritual disciplines”, and “counseling for individual spiritual growth” (spiritual direction).

Comparing the scores for "require the most enhancement," once again, "application of faith in life" received the highest score, followed by "teaching on the role of the Holy Spirit in spiritual formation" and "teaching about the principles of spiritual

formation." Lower approval rates in this category were observed in three inquiries related to spiritual disciplines: "regular practice of spiritual disciplines in fellowship," "workshops for spiritual disciplines," and "individual spiritual direction." This outcome suggests that while the congregation is open to acquiring knowledge about practicing spiritual disciplines, they may be less enthusiastic about actively participating in these activities.

Remarkably, the highest total score is attributed to "application of faith in life," surpassing even "teaching of Bible knowledge." Despite the participants' inclination towards Bible study, as evidenced in previous results, this finding indicates an acknowledgment of the need for assistance in applying their Bible knowledge in daily life. The congregation appears to accept the idea that living a godly life cannot be achieved solely through the accumulation of Bible knowledge; practical training is also necessary, akin to cultivating any other beneficial habits. However, the lowest total score for "individual spiritual direction" might be due to a lack of knowledge about this discipline and widespread hesitation to commit to practicing spiritual disciplines on a personal basis.

Summary

The results from the Post Sermon Series Response Survey indicate that the congregation enthusiastically embraces the teachings on spiritual formation. The sermons exhibit greater effectiveness in imparting knowledge about spiritual formation, including its purpose, meaning, and benefits. However, they appear to be less effective in facilitating changes in devotional behaviors. The sermons serve as a motivating force, encouraging individuals to persist in activities such as studying the Bible, praying, worshipping, serving others, seeking God's will, and embracing joy and peace from above. In contrast, they seem to be less influential in instigating new spiritual disciplines, encouraging offerings of time and money, and promoting the sharing of the gospel.

Consequently, the findings suggest the necessity of complementing sermon-based teachings with practical training in spiritual disciplines.

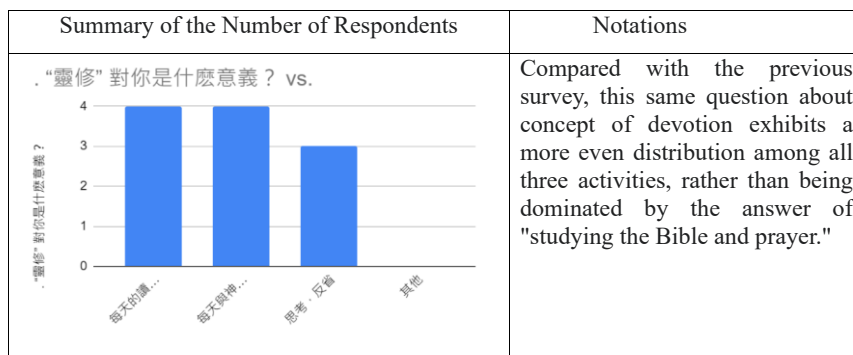
LVCCC Post Lectio Divina Training Evaluation Survey

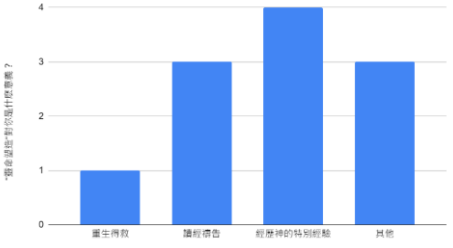
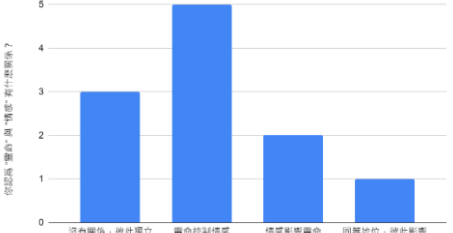
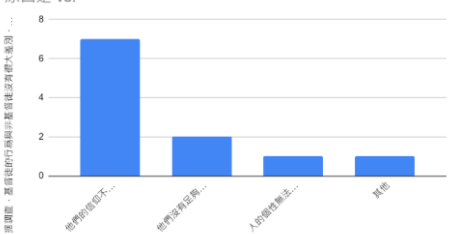
Three months after initiating the spiritual formation sermon series, a group training for Lectio Divina commenced. The class, comprised of 12 long-term church members, engaged in reading an assigned psalm during the week and practicing Lectio Divina together during each Sunday school class. They shared their reflections within the group. The detailed procedure for this process was discussed in Chapter 5. A Post Training Survey, consisting of 10 questions, was conducted in paper form at the last training class on 3/26/23, with 11 participants providing their feedback. The results are presented in the next two charts, each containing the outcomes of 5 questions. The first set aims to discover any improvement in understanding spiritual disciplines within the group, while the second focuses on the responses to this training.

Results and Analysis

Chart 6-8 The Result of Post Training Survey -1

Summary of the Number of Respondents for Each Question



<p>“靈命塑造”對你是什麼意義？ vs.</p>  <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Category</th> <th>Count</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>靈生得救</td> <td>1</td> </tr> <tr> <td>讀經禱告</td> <td>3</td> </tr> <tr> <td>經歷神的特別經驗</td> <td>4</td> </tr> <tr> <td>其他</td> <td>3</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Category	Count	靈生得救	1	讀經禱告	3	經歷神的特別經驗	4	其他	3	<p>Compared to the previous survey, a lower percentage believes that spiritual formation is “a special experience of God’s presence”, while a higher percentage believes that spiritual formation is a process cultivated through studying the Bible and prayer. About one quarter participants chose “others” and wrote Lectio Divina.</p>
Category	Count										
靈生得救	1										
讀經禱告	3										
經歷神的特別經驗	4										
其他	3										
<p>你認為“靈命”與“情感”有什麼關係？ vs.</p>  <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Category</th> <th>Count</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>沒有關係，彼此獨立</td> <td>3</td> </tr> <tr> <td>靈命控制情感</td> <td>5</td> </tr> <tr> <td>情感影響靈命</td> <td>2</td> </tr> <tr> <td>同等地位，彼此影響</td> <td>1</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Category	Count	沒有關係，彼此獨立	3	靈命控制情感	5	情感影響靈命	2	同等地位，彼此影響	1	<p>Compared to the previous result, a much lower rate, only 10% versus 39% previously, chose the answer "spirit and emotion equally influence each other." A much higher rate, 27% versus 2% previously, chose "independent." Still, only a few people chose "emotion influences spirit."</p>
Category	Count										
沒有關係，彼此獨立	3										
靈命控制情感	5										
情感影響靈命	2										
同等地位，彼此影響	1										
<p>什麼是學習“聖言心禱”的最大阻礙？ vs.</p>  <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Category</th> <th>Count</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>沒有時間</td> <td>7</td> </tr> <tr> <td>缺乏傳統</td> <td>1</td> </tr> <tr> <td>不習慣這個方法</td> <td>2</td> </tr> <tr> <td>其他</td> <td>1</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Category	Count	沒有時間	7	缺乏傳統	1	不習慣這個方法	2	其他	1	<p>The most significant barrier to practicing spiritual discipline is a lack of time, suggesting that spiritual discipline may not be the top priority for individuals.</p>
Category	Count										
沒有時間	7										
缺乏傳統	1										
不習慣這個方法	2										
其他	1										
<p>據調查，基督徒的行為與非基督徒沒有很大差別，你認為可能的原因是 vs.</p>  <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Category</th> <th>Count</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>他們的信仰不...</td> <td>7</td> </tr> <tr> <td>他們沒有足夠...</td> <td>2</td> </tr> <tr> <td>人的價值無...</td> <td>1</td> </tr> <tr> <td>其他</td> <td>1</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Category	Count	他們的信仰不...	7	他們沒有足夠...	2	人的價值無...	1	其他	1	<p>The majority believe that the reason for being unable to live out a godly life is lacking true faith. Only less than 2% of people believe that the reason could be a lack of a good relationship with God, which can be cultivated through spiritual disciplines such as studying the Bible and prayer.</p>
Category	Count										
他們的信仰不...	7										
他們沒有足夠...	2										
人的價值無...	1										
其他	1										

The first three questions in the above chart are the same as those asked in the LVCCC Spirituality Survey three months prior. Over this period, five sermons about spiritual formation were delivered, and the results show some improvement in understanding spiritual formation. Firstly, devotion is now recognized as extending beyond "studying the Bible and prayer"; a higher percentage consider that "spending time with God" and "meditation" also belong to devotion. Secondly, there is an increased understanding that spiritual formation is a process requiring human effort to draw near to God, not just an experience of God's presence. Thirdly, a greater number now grasp that emotions wield their own power independently and aren't wholly subject to our spiritual control. As creatures driven by emotion, we often heed the inclinations of our hearts over those of our spirit, thus significantly impacting our spirituality. Because this group consists of long-term mature Christians, a significant number believe that either "spirit controls emotion" or "spirit and emotion are independent." This suggests that among these participants, there is a greater focus on the spirit, with a tendency to overlook the influence of emotion on the spirit. Many Christians, especially mature believers, believe that the spirit belongs to God and emotion belongs to the flesh. Therefore, they do not want their emotions to influence their spirits. In fact, the holistic approach for spiritual formation should include transforming our emotions from love for the world and ourselves to loving God with all that we have and loving others as ourselves. While the sermons did help the participants realize the power of emotions, they did not alter their perception that emotions should be controlled by the spirit.

In the same light, the final question aimed to explore people's beliefs regarding the reason for our inability to live out our faith. The majority attribute this issue to a deficiency in genuine faith in God, while only a small minority suggest that the shortfall stems from a lack of intimacy with God, demonstrated by limited engagement with transformative activities like Bible study and prayer. This result suggests that many still adhere to the belief that our knowledge of the truth alone determines our actions, indicating a potentially challenging shift in perspective.

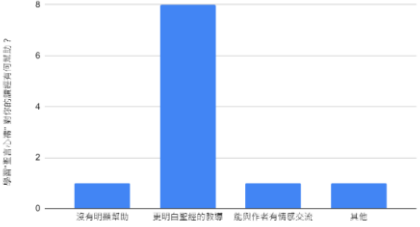
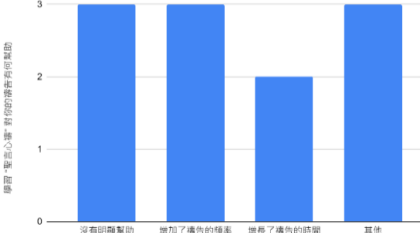
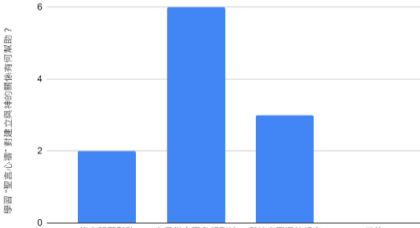
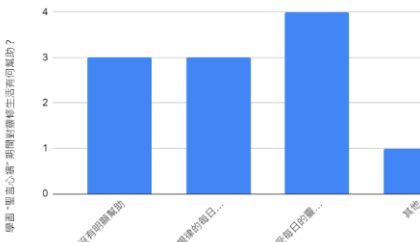
While spending time with God through studying His word and prayer is undoubtedly essential for building an intimate relationship, the method is also crucial. Merely emphasizing gaining knowledge about the Bible may lead to knowing a lot about God without being transformed by that knowledge. Therefore, to put our faith into practice, we not only need biblical knowledge but also need to engage in practicing spiritual disciplines to transform knowledge into action.

In terms of obstacles to practice in the fifth question, a majority cites "lacking time." It is not immediately apparent why this choice was most frequently selected, considering that a significant number of members in this class are retirees. Likely, the actual challenge may not be a shortage of time but rather a lack of recognition of its importance. This outcome underscores the significance of slowly and thoroughly imparting the information about spiritual discipline before the training, as without understanding its necessity, individuals may not fully grasp the importance of engaging in spiritual discipline.

Chart 6-9 The Result of Post Training Survey -2

Results of the Questions About Benefits of Training

Number of Total Respondents	Explanations										
<p>對“聖言心禱”靈修方法的熟悉程度</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Category</th> <th>Number of Respondents</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>從未接觸</td> <td>4</td> </tr> <tr> <td>學習過幾次</td> <td>7</td> </tr> <tr> <td>經常使用</td> <td>0</td> </tr> <tr> <td>其他</td> <td>0</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Category	Number of Respondents	從未接觸	4	學習過幾次	7	經常使用	0	其他	0	<p>The majority of trainees exhibit a limited understanding of Lectio Divina before this training, and no one has used it as a regular devotion method. Considering Lectio Divina is relatively common practice, this result indicates that this group is unfamiliar with spiritual disciplines.</p>
Category	Number of Respondents										
從未接觸	4										
學習過幾次	7										
經常使用	0										
其他	0										

<p>學習“聖言心禱”對你的讀經有何幫助？ vs.</p>  <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>幫助類別</th> <th>次數</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>沒有明顯幫助</td> <td>1</td> </tr> <tr> <td>更加明白聖經的教導</td> <td>8</td> </tr> <tr> <td>能夠作者有情感交流</td> <td>1</td> </tr> <tr> <td>其他</td> <td>1</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	幫助類別	次數	沒有明顯幫助	1	更加明白聖經的教導	8	能夠作者有情感交流	1	其他	1	<p>Eight out of eleven trainees choose “a deeper understanding of Scripture”, Only one person chose "emotionally connecting with the author," another chose "helping prayer," and one indicated it was of "no help."</p>
幫助類別	次數										
沒有明顯幫助	1										
更加明白聖經的教導	8										
能夠作者有情感交流	1										
其他	1										
<p>學習“聖言心禱”對你的禱告有何幫助？ vs.</p>  <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>幫助類別</th> <th>次數</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>沒有明顯幫助</td> <td>3</td> </tr> <tr> <td>增加了禱告的頻率</td> <td>3</td> </tr> <tr> <td>增長了禱告的時間</td> <td>2</td> </tr> <tr> <td>其他</td> <td>3</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	幫助類別	次數	沒有明顯幫助	3	增加了禱告的頻率	3	增長了禱告的時間	2	其他	3	<p>When the inquiry centers on the influence of Lectio Divina on prayers, the findings reveal a diverse range of responses. This variety of responses underscores the nuanced and individualized nature of the impact of Lectio Divina on prayer practices.</p>
幫助類別	次數										
沒有明顯幫助	3										
增加了禱告的頻率	3										
增長了禱告的時間	2										
其他	3										
<p>學習“聖言心禱”對建立與神的關係有何幫助？ vs.</p>  <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>幫助類別</th> <th>次數</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>沒有明顯幫助</td> <td>2</td> </tr> <tr> <td>在日常中更多想到神</td> <td>6</td> </tr> <tr> <td>與神有更深的相交</td> <td>3</td> </tr> <tr> <td>其他</td> <td>0</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	幫助類別	次數	沒有明顯幫助	2	在日常中更多想到神	6	與神有更深的相交	3	其他	0	<p>Six out of eleven people indicate that the practice helps them become more aware of God's presence in their daily lives. Approximately 25% (3) of individuals reported a deepening of their relationship with God.</p>
幫助類別	次數										
沒有明顯幫助	2										
在日常中更多想到神	6										
與神有更深的相交	3										
其他	0										
<p>學習“聖言心禱”期間對靈修生活有何幫助？ vs.</p>  <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>幫助類別</th> <th>次數</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>沒有明顯幫助</td> <td>3</td> </tr> <tr> <td>更有規律的禱告...</td> <td>3</td> </tr> <tr> <td>更享受每日的靈...</td> <td>4</td> </tr> <tr> <td>其他</td> <td>1</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	幫助類別	次數	沒有明顯幫助	3	更有規律的禱告...	3	更享受每日的靈...	4	其他	1	<p>In relation to the enhancement of devotional life, over half of the trainees express that the practice contributes to an increase in either enjoyment or regularity of their devotion.</p>
幫助類別	次數										
沒有明顯幫助	3										
更有規律的禱告...	3										
更享受每日的靈...	4										
其他	1										

The findings presented in the above chart underscore several significant aspects of the training. Firstly, despite the majority of group members being mature Christians, they have little knowledge of Lectio Divina before the training, a traditional spiritual practice that is relatively common to Christians as a whole.

Secondly, engaging in Lectio Divina proves beneficial in fostering a deeper understanding of Scripture. Since there is no exegesis of the Scripture in this practice at all, the deep understanding should ideally come from an emotional connection with the author of the Psalms. However, only one person chose the answer related to an "emotional connection with the author." To understand this result, the author discussed the questions with the participants, who expressed that they avoided selecting the answer involving emotion because they considered emotions to be an unreliable source for understanding Scripture. Despite agreeing that a deeper understanding comes from connecting emotionally with the author during meditation on Scripture, participants seemed hesitant due to a fear of engaging with Scripture emotionally. This once again indicates that the participants are accustomed to an informational study of the Bible and are not familiar with a transformational study approach, which may lead to a reluctance to connect with Scripture emotionally.

Thirdly, the outcomes of the practice show various benefits for individuals, such as increasing prayer time and frequency, deepening their relationship with God, and improving the regularity and enjoyment of their devotions. However, some people do not experience benefits in these areas, highlighting the importance of choosing a spiritual practice that aligns with one's specific needs. Nevertheless, it's clear that the practice is widely accepted and truly enhances the quality of devotional life, serving as a foundational element in fostering a close and meaningful relationship with God.

Summary

The Post Lectio Divina Training Evaluation Survey was conducted three months after the commencement of the spiritual formation theme sermon series. The survey findings align with those of the Post Sermon Serie Survey, indicating that people have acquired knowledge about spiritual formations. This underscores the effectiveness of sermons as a means of delivering information. The response to the 12-week training in Lectio Divina reveals that practical training has a more significant impact on changing people's behaviors, particularly in areas such as prayer life and awareness of God's presence. These behavioral changes play a crucial role in establishing a genuine relationship with God. Given the relatively short duration of the training, it is challenging to fully witness the complete benefits of spiritual discipline. However, within this limited timeframe, trainees have already begun to experience and appreciate some of its advantages.

Spirituality Survey of Chinese Christians in North America

This survey, conducted after the research project at LVCCC, aims to investigate whether the situation observed in LVCCC is representative of other Chinese Christians in America. Since the LVCCC project emerged from the author's personal experience and observations in the ministry of LVCCC, this survey was intended to expand this research project to a wider range. The author seeks to uncover insights into the general spiritual condition, the engagement with spiritual discipline, the level of support for spiritual formation within the church, and the overall attitude towards spiritual formation in other Chinese Christian congregations. Through the survey's 49 questions categorized on the Likert scale, the author aspires to provide valuable data that can assist other Chinese churches in incorporating spiritual formation into their teachings. The survey, hosted on Google Form, from 1/15/24 – 2/29/24, saw participation from individuals who received the link through pastors, friends, and family members, resulting in a total of 169 responses. The subsequent sections present the detailed results in each of the four categories.

Result of Participant Demographics:

- Two-thirds (70%) of participants identify as female, while one-third identify as male.

- Over half (65%) fall within the age range of 46-65 years, 11% aged 75 and above, 12% aged 66-75, and 12% aged 26-45.

- In terms of education, 36% have a college degree, 32% hold a master's degree, and 23% have obtained a doctorate. Less than 10% are high school graduates and below.

- The majority of participants (56%) have been Christians for 21 years and above, followed by 27% with 11-20 years of Christian experience, and 16% with 6-10 years. Only less than 5% have been Christians for 5 years or shorter.

- Regarding church attendance, almost 50% have been attending a Chinese church for over 21 years, 26% for 11-20 years, and 14% for 6-10 years. Only 10% attend Chinese church less than 5 years.

- Place of origin, 33% of participants are from Taiwan, 55% from mainland China, and 12% from other regions.

- In terms of ministry involvement, 20% do not have a fixed ministry, 21% serve in adult ministry, another 16% hold leadership roles within the church, 18% are involved in caring, food, and logistics, 14% serve in music ministry, and 10% are engaged in youth and children's ministry.

Overall, the survey captures a predominantly mature, well-educated, and actively involved group with a significant history of Christian commitment. These demographics offer valuable context for interpreting the survey results and understanding the diverse perspectives of the participants involved in the study.

Results and Analysis of Self-assessment of Spirituality

Chart 6-10 Results of Self-assessment of Spirituality in Percentage

Spirituality	Always 5	Often 4	Some times 3	Seldom 2	Never 1	Total Score*
1. I experience the love of God.	31	56	1	1	1	415
2. I feel God's presence in life	4	53	22	2	0	402
3. I hunger for God's words	2	52	25	2	0	397
4. I seek God's will when I make decisions, whether big or small	6	48	35	2	0	381
5. I am upset over my sins and wished I didn't do it.	6	50	19	4	1	392
6. I forgive others when someone wronged me.	19	45	34	2	1	382
7. I strive to be more like Jesus in his character, for instance, humble, gentle or patience.	25	56	18	1	1	406
8. I allow God to control my finance when I plan my spending.	17	49	28	4	2	375
9. I thank God for difficulties in life because I believe God uses them to shape me.	24	58	16	3	0	406
10. I think about God's purpose in my life throughout my everyday activities.	19	57	23	1	0	394
11. I experience the power of the Holy Spirit when I am tempted.	14	49	34	3	1	375
12. I look for opportunities to share the gospel.	12	32	47	8	1	346
13. Our family prays together.	10	26	36	17	11	307
14. I uphold Christian values at work.	16	56	25	3	0	385

* The total score is calculated by multiplying the number of people who chose each answer by its assigned number (1 - 5) and then summing these values.

According to Spiritual Growth Assessment Process of Lifeway, when assessing spiritual maturity, four key areas should be taken into account: abiding in Christ, living

in the Word, praying in faith, and witnessing in life.²²² By categorizing the 14 questions into these four areas, we obtain the following results.

Chart 6-11 Average Score of Self-assessment of Spirituality in Four Categories

Area	Questions	Average Scores*
Abide in Christ	1, 2, 5,	403
Live in the word	3, 10, 11	389
Pray in faith	4, 9	394
Witness in life	6, 7, 8, 12, 13,14	367

* The average score is calculated by dividing the sum of the total scores of all questions in this category by the number of questions.

The highest score is in the "abide in Christ" category, indicating that most participants actively seek and experience God in their daily lives and are sensitive to sin. The second-highest score is in "pray in faith," indicating that participants value the communication with God in making decisions and facing challenges. "Live in the word" ranks third, suggesting a hunger for God's words, contemplation of God's will in the Scripture, and reliance on the Holy Spirit in daily life. The lowest score is in "witness in life", encompassing forgiveness, finances, characteristics, moral standards, spiritual leadership in family and spreading the gospel.

The pattern of above results shows that the participants do well in their mind abiding with Christ and believing the Biblical teaching. They regularly follow the devotion tradition by studying the scripture and praying. However, the practical works of "witness in life" received significantly lower score. In addition, public actions in forgiving others, holding Christian value at work, and striving to obtain the

²²² "Spiritual Growth Assessment Process", *Lifeway*, WWW.LifeWay.com/Discipleship, (Accessed Feb. 1, 2024)

characteristics of Christ all have higher score than private behaviors in sharing gospel, financial planning and praying with family. This finding implies that our concern for others' opinions may overshadow our focus on developing our character as we live out our faith. These findings align with the author's observations in church ministry. It's often noted that people tend to exhibit greater godliness in church settings than in their homes, and they prefer serving others publicly rather than privately. This tendency reflects the common phenomenon of human nature being corrupted. Only by intentionally engaging in spiritual disciplines can we consistently live a godly life from the depths of our hearts.

The question of “praying with family” received the lowest score in this whole section. This indicates that most participants are better witness of gospel in the public places than in private homes. However, the other prayer-related questions such as “thanking God in difficulties” receiving the highest score, and “seeking God's will” having an above-average score. The reason for this discrepancy may lie in the nature of individual versus communal prayer practices. Individual prayer can be conducted spontaneously and conveniently, whenever and wherever one finds a moment for solitude. On the other hand, praying with others requires planning, coordination, and a commitment to communal discipline. This observation aligns with findings from the LVCCC survey, where a high score for individual prayer was noted despite low attendance at church prayer meetings. These findings suggest that many believers recognize the importance of prayer but are hesitant to invest additional effort into it. Additionally, many Chinese parents prioritize their children's academic achievement over their spiritual growth, or they may avoid discussing faith with their children altogether. These factors could contribute to the low scores observed for “praying with family.”

Chart 6 -12 The Scores of Self- assessment Spirituality from High to Low Order

Questions	Total Score*
1. I experience the love of God.	415
9. I thank God for difficulties in life because I believe God uses them to shape me.	406

7. I strive to be more like Jesus in his character, for instance, humble, gentle or patience.	406
2. I feel God's presence in life	402
3. I hunger for God's words	397
10. I think about God's purpose in my life throughout my everyday activities.	394
5. I am upset over my sins and wished I didn't do it.	392
14. I uphold Christian values at work.	385
6. I forgive others when someone wronged me.	382
4. I seek God's will when I make decisions, whether big or small	381
8. I allow God to control my finance when I plan my spending.	375
11. I experience the power of the Holy Spirit when I am tempted.	375
12. I look for opportunities to share the gospel.	346
13. Our family prays together.	307

*The total score is calculated by multiplying the number of people who chose each answer by its assigned number (1 - 5) and then summing these values.

The above chart summarizes the total scores for each question, from the highest to the lowest. The top three activities with the highest scores are "experience the love of God," "thank God in difficulties," and "strive to become like Jesus." These statements align with biblical promises and commands, of which most Christians are well aware. However, knowing them does not equate to doing them. Without practicing spiritual discipline, this knowledge may not translate into action during trials.

The bottom three activities with the lowest scores are "pray with family," "share the gospel," and "experience the power of the Holy Spirit." These activities involve practicing spiritual disciplines rather than biblical knowledge. In addition, to "pray with family" which has been discussed above, the other two low-score activities also involve more discipline and effort than other activities. "Sharing the gospel" often requires investing time in reaching out to others and providing practical assistance when needed.

Similarly," experiencing the power of the Holy Spirit" during times of temptation usually comes as a result of consistent and persistent engagement in spiritual disciplines.

These scores suggest that the spirituality of Chinese Christians in America is more intellectually oriented. While their hearts and minds are devoted to God and others, their actions may fall short of their convictions. This reflects a prevailing issue for any Christian not actively practicing spiritual disciplines. As Dallas Willard notes, "as disciples, we are not trying to be different people, but we are training to be different people."²²³ To be part of the mission of God takes training. We cannot be part of the mission without spiritual disciplines or exercises that help us become more like Jesus.

The overall high scores in each category indicate that participants are content with their spiritual state. They indicate awareness of God's presence, a hunger for His word, and a commitment to applying His will in their daily lives. These findings suggest that, generally, participants are more mature Christians. However, it's essential to remember that spiritual maturity should not be gauged against the average of other Christians but against the standard set by Scripture and the example of Jesus Christ.

Results and Analysis of Spiritual Discipline Engagement:

The 15 questions in this section are derived from Richard Foster's book "Celebration of Discipline," where he outlines 12 disciplines categorized into three groups. Because Foster sometimes combines disciplines for discussion, each question in this present survey focuses on a single discipline to maintain simplicity, resulting in a total of 15 questions.

²²³ Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of The Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives*, (San Francisco, CA: HarperOne, 1999), 24

The 12 disciplines identified by Foster are as follows: the inward disciplines: Meditation, Prayer, Fasting, Study. The outward disciplines: Simplicity, Solitude, Submission, Service. The corporate disciplines: Confession, Worship, Guidance, Celebration.²²⁴ In this survey section, questions 1-5 pertained to the inward disciplines, questions 6-12 to the outward disciplines, and questions 13-16 to the corporate disciplines.

Chart 6 -13 Results of Spiritual Discipline Engagement in Percentage Table

Type	Spiritual disciplines	Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Yearly	Never
Inward Disciplines	1. I follow a routine in my devotion.	40	31	12	7	11
	2. I meditate on God's words.	37	44	13	5	1
	3. I pray at a fixed time and place.	56	26	8	2	8
	4. I fast for spiritual growth.	2	4	7	26	60
	5. I study the Bible privately.	28	46	14	9	4
Outward Disciplines	6. I practice simplicity in life for spiritual growth.	13	21	17	20	30
	7. I tithe and offer.	9	8	42	33	7
	8. I practice solitude to spend time with God.	26	27	24	13	10
	9. I write spiritual journals.	9	12	15	14	49
	10. I submit to the others in order to obey God	12	23	32	25	7
	12. I share gospel to others.	5	10	26	44	14
Corporate Disciplines	13. I confess (discuss my actions) to other believers.	3	7	21	49	21
	14. I attend corporate worship in person.	3	55	37	4	1
	15. I meet with pastor/mentor/friends for spiritual guidance.	1	6	28	46	20

²²⁴ Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*, (San Francisco, CA: HarperOne, 2007). 8

16. I join Christian celebration services such as holidays and baptism.	2	11	20	65	2
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The inward disciplines, which emphasize personal devotion and daily practice, show that approximately 40% of respondents engage in daily devotion, while about 30% practice devotion a few times a week. Similar patterns are observed for Bible study and meditation. Daily prayer receives a significantly higher score, while fasting registers dramatically low scores, with around 60% never practicing it and about 26% only doing it a few times a year. The explanation is that either people consider prayer far more important than fasting, or that prayer is much easier to do than fasting. It is possible that both explanations are at play. Many believers lack understanding of the importance of fasting, often because they have never been taught about it. This lack of training makes it even more challenging for them to practice fasting. Fasting is an effective practice for self-control and deepening prayer. Therefore, it should be taught in church and encouraged for people to practice according to their personal circumstances.

Because the participants show strong regular devotion habit, focusing on study, meditation, and prayer, which can be used as foundations to build other transformational spiritual disciplines. For example, the disciplines such as Lectio Divina, centering prayer and imagination prayer, which are activities combining the Bible study, meditation and prayer together, are good choices to introduce to the congregation initially.

The outward disciplines are actions that manifest as visible expressions of an inward change. These disciplines involve practicing self-denial in areas such as food, money, material possessions, and entertainment. Frequency of practice is not the primary focus in these results, as individuals may prefer different patterns to engage in these disciplines. The key is persistent practicing, so one can cultivate self-control through these practices. The majority of people engage in solitude, tithing, and submission, which are common and relatively easy to implement if practiced randomly. However, the

practices of simplicity and journaling are not widely adopted perhaps because these disciplines are unfamiliar to most evangelical Christians and are also more difficult to practice.

Since many people might not know the method and benefit to practice simplicity and journaling, it is recommended to teach the background information first, followed with one small step each time. Given that these practices are very helpful in organizing our spiritual life and physical life, the new practitioners will likely continue once they have tasted the benefits of it.

The corporate disciplines aim to foster growth within the faith community. Corporate worship and celebration are common disciplines among evangelical believers, and they gave high scores in the survey. Confession and spiritual direction were less common in evangelical churches and received lower scores. About 20% of participants reported that they have never engaged in confession and spiritual direction. Since these disciplines are essential for Christian growth, the churches should make them available to congregations.

Confession and spiritual guidance can take the form of spiritual direction, which necessitates the expertise of professionally trained spiritual directors, or it can be practiced as spiritual companionship, requiring only basic training from pastors. Through spiritual companionship, believers can be held accountable for their spiritual growth by fellow believers. This proves to be an effective method for encouraging consistent practice of other spiritual disciplines. To introduce this discipline, pastors may first teach the principles of spiritual companionship and then organize the congregation into pairs or small groups to serve as each other's spiritual partners. While spiritual companionship has a longstanding history in Catholic churches, it remains relatively new to many

evangelical churches and will undoubtedly require significant time for its introduction and adoption among Chinese Christians.

When comparing the average scores in the "never" column in Chart 6-13, corporate disciplines have the lowest score of 11, followed by inward disciplines with a score of 17, and outward disciplines with the highest score of 20. This trend indicates that more Chinese Christians are engaged in corporate disciplines, as evidenced by the lowest "never" score. In contrast, outward disciplines have the highest "never" score, suggesting that while Chinese Christians excel in communal practices, fewer of them are engaged in individual and outward expressions of discipline, such as journaling, simplicity, and sharing the gospel. These findings are consistent with the results of surveys conducted by LVCCC, which indicated that individuals tend to fare better in internal disciplines than in external ones. In essence, it implies that Chinese Christians demonstrate stronger commitment on a mental/intellectual level rather than in practical application, and they actively participate in communal activities.

In this section, it's observed that Chinese Christian participants are adept at self-reporting their engagement in traditional spiritual disciplines such as Bible study, Scripture meditation, prayer, and corporate worship. However, the extent to which participants understand the definitions of these disciplines, which directly influences their evaluation of their spiritual practices, remains uncertain. Nonetheless, it's evident that most sampled Chinese Christians are actively pursuing some form of spiritual discipline in their quest for God. Notably, the three disciplines with high "never" scores are fasting, journaling, and practicing simplicity in life. This suggests that these non-traditional disciplines are largely unfamiliar to most evangelical Christians, even among those who are more spiritually mature.

Results and Analysis of Evaluation for Church Support

Chart 6- 14 Results of Evaluation for Church Support

Summary of Each Question in Percentage

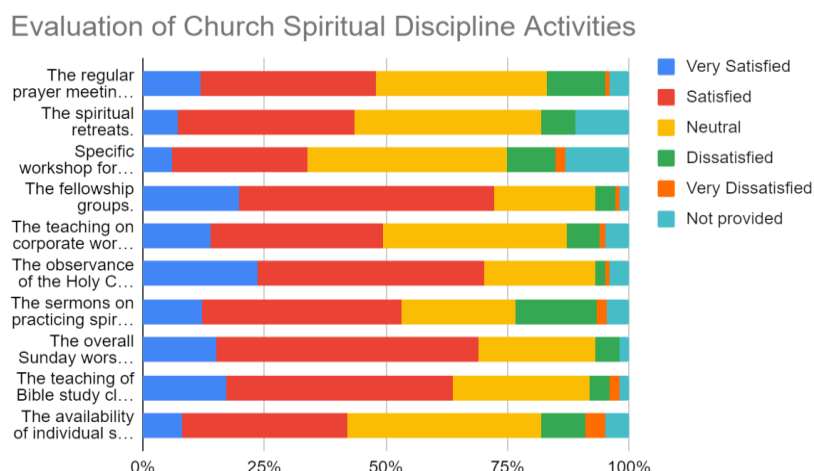
	Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Neutral	Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied	Not provided
The regular prayer meetings.	12	36	35	12	1	4
The spiritual retreats.	7	36	38	7	0	11
Specific workshop for meditation, solitude, fasting and prayer etc.	6	8	41	10	2	13
The fellowship groups.	20	3	21	4	1	2
The teaching on corporate worship and fellowship.	14	36	38	7	1	5
The observance of the Holy Communion.	24	7	23	2	1	4
The sermons on practicing spiritual disciplines.	13	4	25	18	2	5
The overall Sunday worship experience.	15	54	24	5	0	2
The teaching of Bible study classes.	17	46	28	4	2	2
The availability of individual spiritual guidance.	8	34	40	9	4	5

The most satisfying church activities, according to the survey, are group fellowship, Holy Communion, and Sunday worship service. These are considered traditional church activities and are seen as part of a Christian's routine. If using “overall Sunday worship service” score as the standard for comparison, all activities related to spiritual formation received lower scores in the survey. This includes spiritual retreats, workshops for spiritual discipline, teaching on corporate worship, practicing spiritual disciplines, and spiritual guidance. Some of these activities, such as spiritual retreat and

workshop for spiritual disciplines, are not offered at all in many churches. These results suggest that many Chinese Christians churches lack teaching and training in various spiritual disciplines that play important roles for spiritual maturity.

Chart 6-15 Results of Evaluation for Church Support

Summary of Percentages for Each Question



Spiritual retreats, for instance, provide an opportunity to separate the congregation from their busy schedules to focus on God for a designated period. Quiet time, foundational for other spiritual disciplines, allows space for God to work on individuals. Training workshops are important for initiating practices, ensuring that teachings translate into actions. Additionally, spiritual guidance is essential for individuals, helping one to build a personal relationship with God within the faith community. Given human nature and the tendencies to stray, having a spiritual director or personal trainer is beneficial to staying on the right path and continuing growth.

Surprisingly, only 48% of the respondents express satisfaction with the church prayer meeting, which presumably is a routine activity. From the author's observation, one reason for this dissatisfaction could be the format of the prayer meeting and the effort required to attend. In the LVCCC prayer meeting, for instance, the format typically begins with a couple of worship songs, followed by the presentation of prayer requests from the church and individuals. Participants then pray for these requests, making pleas to God for their fulfillment. The author suggests that this model, common in many Chinese churches, may resemble a business meeting more than a deep communion with God. While prayer is considered a command and duty for churches, the lifeless and mundane nature of prayer meetings may not attract many believers. Given the pivotal role that church prayer meetings play in fostering spiritual growth among congregants, it's imperative for church leaders to explore diverse formats tailored to the needs of the congregation. Introducing various prayer methods such as Lectio Divina, centering prayer, and others can enrich the prayer experience for participants. The objective of these prayer gatherings extends beyond merely petitioning for church events; it also aims to facilitate each member's encounter with God's presence amidst corporate prayer.

The low score for the "teaching of Bible study class" indicates a thirst for God's words. While many churches provide Bible study classes and Sunday schools, the survey suggests that mere providing knowledge of the Bible may not satisfy the true yearning. The desire to know God more deeply, akin to Moses' request to see God's face to face (Exe 33:12-23), reflects a longing that goes beyond intellectual understanding. Combining the teaching of the Bible with spiritual disciplines will be more effective to satisfy the need of thirsty souls.

Results and Analysis of attitudes to spiritual discipline

These questions aim to explore the participants' perspectives on spiritual discipline, helping us prepare an appropriate approach to introduce spiritual discipline to the congregation.

Chart 6 -16 Results of Attitudes to Spiritual Discipline

Summary of Each question in Percentage

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Regularly engaging spiritual disciplines is critical for spiritual growth	65	24	10	1	0
I need to tell God what I need even though He already knows	85	13	2	0	0
An understanding of the Bible is needed to be a good Christian.	91	8	2	0	0
Solitude and meditation are valuable for spiritual growth	71	23	6	0	0
Even though God knows my heart, I still need to demonstrate my faith through action.	78	18	4	0	0
the purpose of God is to give me joy and peace	25	28	18	20	10
Attending church worship and fellowship are optional because faith is a private matter.	2	5	4	17	72
I need help in developing an effective devotional life	20	34	34	7	5
I want to receive more training in spiritual disciplines.	27	39	32	2	0
I want to have genuine encounter with God.	62	25	12	1	1

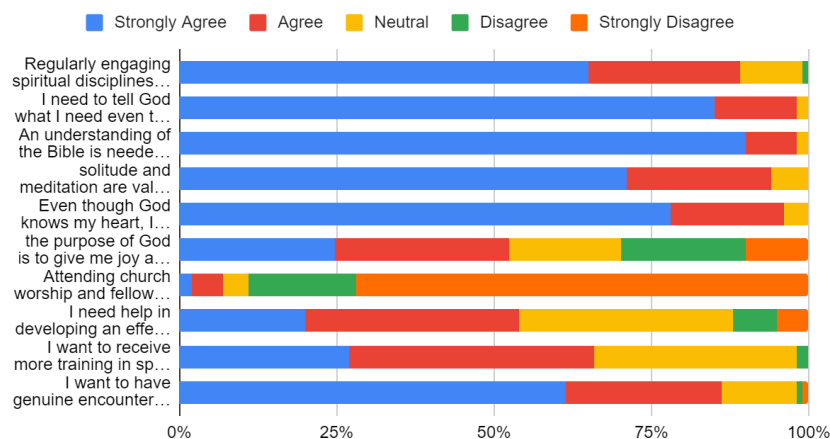
The survey results reveal an interesting pattern: more than 50% of respondents strongly agree, and over 90% agree on the importance and necessity of teaching spiritual

disciplines. When using “regular engagement in spiritual discipline” as the benchmark for comparison, communication with God and understanding the Bible received higher scores, while the importance of solitude, meditation, and demonstrating faith through action received average scores. However, the development of an effective devotion life and training for spiritual disciplines received lower scores.

Chart 6 -17 Results of Attitudes to Spiritual Discipline

Summary of Each Question in Percentage

Attitudes to Spiritual Disciplines



This pattern indicates that the participants understand the importance and need to build deeper relationship with God, and believe studying and prayer are the most proper ways. They did not wholeheartedly embrace the idea that faith should be demonstrated by action, even though agree solitude and meditation are valuable methods for spiritual growth. This is consistent with the author’s own observation, that many Chinese Christians believe that salvation by faith excludes all human efforts in sanctification. This misunderstanding could be the reason that they hesitated to accept meditation, solitude, and other spiritual disciplines. This information should be taken into consideration when

introducing spiritual discipline to ensure that the approach aligns with the varied levels of understanding and acceptance.

Overall, these findings resonate with the author's ministry experience. Many Christians demonstrate genuine faith and a strong intention to follow Jesus, yet they hesitate to fully commit to godly living due to various realities such as busy schedules, heavy workloads, family duties, and concerns about the challenges of the world. This hesitation echoes the words of Jesus, who described the human condition with the phrase, "the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak" (Matthew 26:41). It highlights a significant barrier to engaging in spiritual discipline, as observed in the LVCCC.

The disconnect between acknowledging the importance of practicing spiritual disciplines and the readiness to practice it underscores the challenges that believers face in translating their faith into daily actions. It suggests that despite a sincere desire for a genuine encounter with God, external factors and worldly concerns often hinder the implementation of spiritual discipline in practical life. It is thus a challenge for church leaders. Addressing these barriers, such as providing practical tools for incorporating spiritual practices into daily schedules, may help bridge the gap between intention and action in the spiritual journey.

Summary

In this chapter, the author presented detailed results from four surveys conducted in both parts of the research. The first part focused on surveys within LVCCC, including the LVCCC Spirituality Survey, LVCCC Post Sermon Series Survey, and LVCCC Post Training Survey. These surveys revealed that while there is a significant number of individuals with spiritual awareness, there is a gap between spiritual mindset and godly actions. Most participants expressed contentment with their spiritual condition but indicated a desire for greater abilities to love God and others. The church was identified as a crucial source for improving spirituality.

Responses to spiritual formation-themed sermons were generally positive, with over three-quarters of participants acknowledging that sermons helped them understand the meaning, purpose, and process of spiritual formation. However, the effectiveness of sermons seemed more in providing information than inducing behavioral change.

Group Lectio Divina training received positive responses, with improvements noted in understanding devotion, spiritual formation, and scriptural knowledge. Notably, the training contributed to changes in devotional behaviors, such as prayer life and awareness of God's presence. However, due to the short duration of the training (12 weeks), some benefits may not have been fully realized. Likewise, with the small sample size, only general observations can be deduced.

The larger scale spiritual survey, encompassing at least a dozen Chinese churches across America, with 179 participants, echoed findings from LVCCC. Participants expressed sound overall spirituality, engaging in traditional devotions like Bible study, prayer, attending worship services, and tithing. However, fewer practiced non-evangelical traditions such as fasting, simplicity, and maintaining a spiritual journal. The survey highlighted the need for spiritual discipline, and suggest that churches currently are not offering sufficient training in this area. Overall, the research confirms the gap between spiritual intention and practical implementation, calling for a more intentional focus on spiritual discipline within the church community.

Chapter 7

Conclusion and Suggestions

Overview of Study

As reported by Christianity Today, the prominence of Chinese American stands out significantly within the diverse tapestry of Asian Americans. The year 2015 witnessed their numerical dominance, constituting a noteworthy 24 percent of the entire Asian American population, totaling an impressive 4.9 million individuals; within this demographic, the religious landscape reveals with over 1 million identifying as Protestant and an additional 400,000 aligning themselves with the Catholic faith.²²⁵ The rich diversity is further exemplified by the existence of 1,679 Chinese Christian churches and organizations dispersed across the United States, spotlighting a vibrant and influential facet of the Asian American Christian community.²²⁶

Beyond the sheer statistical representation of Christians, a deeper concern emerges—one that underscores the critical need for believers to undergo genuine transformation. These transformed individuals are envisioned not merely as religious people but as disciples with the image of God, serving as both the salt and light of the world. This perspective transcends numerical analysis, emphasizing the profound societal impact that spiritually transformed individuals can exert.

The current research, rooted in quantitative methodologies, delves into the intricate spiritual terrain of Chinese Christians. Central to this exploration is an

²²⁵ DORCAS CHENG-TOZUN, "CHINESE AMERICAN CHRISTIANS ARE BECOMING MORE POLITICALLY ENGAGED—AND MORE DIVIDED," *CHRISTIAN TODAY* <https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2020/october/chinese-american-christian-voters-asian-divided-trump-biden.html> (ACCESSED JAN 28, 2024)

²²⁶ "Chinese Christian Churches and Organizations Directory," 中華基督教網路發展協會, via dichuang.com/2014/many-chinese-churches-usa (Accessed Jan 28, 2024)

investigation into the feasibility of introducing spiritual disciplines within Chinese Christian congregations. The primary objective is to comprehensively assess the spiritual well-being of Chinese Christians, offering church leaders nuanced insights into the imperative of spiritual discipline, so that they may be empowered to adopt appropriate methods to foster and augment spiritual growth within their congregations.

The research unfolds in two distinct parts, each contributing a unique perspective. Part one is an immersive field study, introducing and implementing spiritual formation initiatives within the author's home church, LVCCC. This practical engagement provides a firsthand understanding of the challenges and triumphs associated with introducing spiritual disciplines in a conservative evangelical church. Part two of the research broadens its scope, incorporating an electronic survey meticulously designed to capture the diverse needs and opinions prevalent within various Chinese churches' congregations. The overarching goal is to unveil the intricate tapestry of sentiments surrounding spiritual discipline within these diverse communities.

The outcomes derived from both segments of the research have been carefully presented and discussed in the preceding chapter. This chapter serves as a dedicated platform for the comprehensive discussion and evaluation of the six research questions and hypotheses which were presented in Chapter 5, ensuring a nuanced analysis that transcends the boundaries of mere numerical interpretation.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

In this section, the summarized results are utilized to address each research question and evaluate the proposed answers. The author endeavors to offer a precise examination of the research questions and answers by summarizing literature research results for the first three questions and aligning the survey results with the last six queries posed, ultimately concluding the project.

QR1. Are spiritual disciplines grounded in Scripture?

HR1. spiritual disciplines are biblical.

The study of the biblical foundation for spiritual disciplines within Protestant theology indicates that the OT Laws instruct Israel in holy living, while the NT offers Jesus and the Apostles as models of disciplined, godly lives. This study confirms that spiritual disciplines are biblically rooted, serving as vital means for spiritual growth and alignment with God's will.

QR 2. Do spiritual disciplines effectively enhance Christian spiritual growth?

HR 2. The spiritual disciplines are effective tool to enhance Christian growth.

The literal study involves an examination of relevant historical literature to highlight the enduring practice of spiritual disciplines across generations of Christians, from the desert fathers and monastic communities to the Pietist movement. The conclusion confirms the hypothesis that spiritual disciplines played a role in enabling numerous saints to encounter the power and presence of God.

QR 3. How essential are spiritual disciplines for today's Christians?

HR 3. Spiritual disciplines are absolutely essential for modern Christians.

The literal research includes analyzing findings that highlight how spiritual disciplines contribute to changed actions and transform Christian faith from mere knowledge into the power to live a godly life. The study confirms that this ancient tool of spiritual discipline continues to benefit modern Christians.

QR4. What characterizes the spirituality of Chinese Christians in America?

RH4. The spirituality of Chinese Christians tends to prioritize intellectual engagement over practical actions.

The survey findings reveal a consistent pattern across both LVCCC and other Chinese American churches, indicating a self-assessed positive spiritual condition among Chinese Christians. These individuals reported commendable habits such as regular Bible study, prayer, and attendance at worship services. Furthermore, they expressed an impressive tendency to contemplate spiritual matters, seek God's will in daily life and offer praise to God even amidst difficulties. However, noteworthy research finding emerges – their spirituality tends to lean more towards the cerebral realm than the practical.

In comparison to their dedication to studying the Bible and engaging in prayer, Chinese Christians are noticeably less frequent in activities such as sharing the gospel, help others financially or bringing friends to church. While the results underscore the high regard for prayer, it is striking that family prayer receives the lowest score within its category in the survey.

In light of these results, a conclusion drawn by the author is that the characteristics of Chinese Christians are inclined towards intellectual pursuits and privacy, emphasizing transformed minds but exhibiting fewer transformative behaviors. Undoubtedly, intellectual faith is acknowledged as genuine and necessary for all believers. However, the concern raised is that if individuals linger solely in this intellectual realm, they may fall short of achieving the transformed life – the ultimate purpose of Christian salvation.

The hypothesis surrounding this observation is affirmed – the spirituality of Chinese Christians warrants attention in bridging the gap between Christian mind and Christian behaviors. While transformed minds are crucial, there is a recognition that genuine Christian faith should manifest in tangible actions and behaviors. The call to action is clear: an intentional effort is needed to integrate intellectual understanding with practical expressions of faith, ultimately fulfilling the transformative potential inherent

in Christian salvation. Spiritual discipline can be one of the effective ways to fulfill this task.

QR 5. Which spiritual disciplines are Chinese Christians actively engaging in?

RH 5. Apart from church worship, prayer meeting, and Bible study, other spiritual disciplines are infrequently practiced by Chinese Christians.

The comprehensive surveys conducted in both research parts shed light on a prevalent trend among Chinese Christians, showcasing their consistent engagement in evangelical traditional spiritual disciplines, with a primary focus on Bible study and prayer. These practices reflect a commendable dedication to foundational aspects of the Christian faith. However, when delving into the findings of the variety of disciplines, a distinct pattern emerges – a minority of participants actively practice none Protestant traditional disciplines such as *Lectio Divina*, fasting, simplicity, solitude, submission, spiritual journaling, and so forth.

One notable factor contributing to this observation is the potential lack of knowledge regarding spiritual disciplines among participants. The author deliberately avoided using specialized terminology, opting instead for common language to describe these disciplines in the survey. Nevertheless, a significant number of participants may not fully grasp the distinctions between spiritual disciplines and random spiritual activities. This raises the possibility that the actual engagement with spiritual disciplines might be even lower than indicated by the survey results.

Affirming the hypothesis, the answer to this question underscores the need for the introduction of additional spiritual disciplines among Chinese Christians. While Bible study and prayer are foundational and essential, a broader spectrum of disciplines can enrich their spiritual journey. For example, by introducing Chinese Christians to a more diverse array of spiritual disciplines beyond the familiar evangelical practices, such as

the Lectio Divina, can further empower believers to translate their intellectual Bible study and prayer practices into building more personal and intimate relationship with the Lord, which will lead to transformative and impactful actions in their daily lives.

QR 6. What are the views of Chinese Christians regarding spiritual disciplines?

RH 6. There is a desire and welcome for spiritual disciplines within Chinese American churches.

The survey findings consistently highlight a profound yearning among respondents for a deeper relationship with God. Across the board, the majority of participants exhibit some efforts to communicate with God, seeking His presence and will, and engaging in traditional spiritual disciplines with which they are familiar. Furthermore, there is a widespread recognition of the pivotal role that participation in a faith community plays in the process of spiritual formation.

However, a nuanced observation emerges when exploring the motivation to establish a more regular devotional routine and initiate new spiritual disciplines. The survey indicates a relatively low inclination toward embracing new practices. The author suggests that this lack of motivation partially stems from a pervasive lack of knowledge about spiritual disciplines and an incomplete understanding of their holistic benefits. It becomes evident that many individuals may not fully comprehend the transformative potential and multifaceted advantages that engaging in spiritual disciplines can bring to their spiritual journey.

Addressing this hurdle, the author proposes that it can be overcome through intentional teaching and training initiatives. By providing education on spiritual disciplines, individuals can gain a more comprehensive understanding of their purpose and the transformative impact they can have on one's spiritual growth.

However, the power to motivate believers to build a closer relationship with God comes from the Holy Spirit. We need to pray for the desire to draw near to God, maintain a posture of openness, and wait for the Holy Spirit to inspire us to commit to spiritual disciplines. Without the Holy Spirit's empowerment, all disciplines will merely be external piety, which is ineffective for spiritual growth (Colossians 2:21-23, NIV). It is important to be patient with those who are hesitant to begin spiritual disciplines. Instead of criticism, we should pray for them and gently encourage them to immerse themselves in God's Word, trusting the Holy Spirit to renew their hearts and minds. Additionally, sharing our personal testimonies of practicing spiritual disciplines can serve as a powerful example, inspiring others to start their own journey of spiritual growth.

Affirming the hypothesis, the answer to this question underscores that a considerable portion of Chinese Christians expresses a genuine desire to delve deeper into their understanding of spiritual disciplines. They not only want to acquire knowledge but also seek practical guidance to integrate these disciplines into their spiritual lives. This acknowledgment highlights a ripe opportunity for educators, pastors, and leaders to facilitate teaching and training programs, fostering a deeper appreciation for spiritual disciplines, and nurturing the motivation needed to embark on a transformative spiritual journey. As the majority of survey participants are mature Christians within their respective churches, it is important to note that the results may not fully represent the entire congregation. Anticipated challenges in introducing spiritual disciplines, particularly within more conservative, older-aged congregations, should be considered.

QR 7. How do Chinese American churches currently contribute to the spiritual formation of their congregation?

RH 7. Chinese American churches inadequately support spiritual formation.

The specific inquiry delves into the level of support provided by churches for spiritual formation. The outcomes point towards a prevailing weakness in this aspect, unveiling that many Chinese American churches fall short in offering essential support instruments such as training sessions, retreats dedicated to spiritual discipline, and individual spiritual direction.

The survey results reveal a distinct pattern of high satisfaction among respondents regarding certain aspects, notably "fellowship groups," "worship services," "Holy Communion," and "Bible study classes." This positive response suggests that Chinese American churches demonstrate strength in adhering to evangelical traditions, particularly those centered around communal worship and study. However, when evaluating other questions related to spiritual disciplines, such as teaching and training spiritual disciplines, personal spiritual direction, spiritual formation retreats and so forth, a notable decline in scores is observed.

In alignment with the hypothesis, the findings substantiate the need for improvement in the realm of supporting the spiritual formation of the congregation within Chinese American churches. This observation aligns seamlessly with earlier survey results, indicating a genuine desire among most Chinese Christians to deepen their understanding of spiritual disciplines and foster a closer relationship with God.

The logical conclusion drawn is that pastors and leaders should actively address this gap by providing congregants with the requisite knowledge and practical methods for engaging in spiritual disciplines. There exists a tangible opportunity for church leadership to initiate targeted programs, workshops, retreats, and educational sessions that equip the congregation with the tools necessary to embark on a more intentional and transformative spiritual journey. By bridging this gap and bolstering support structures for spiritual formation, Chinese American churches can effectively meet the expressed

needs and desires of their members, fostering a vibrant and flourishing spiritual community.

QR 8. What responses can be anticipated if spiritual disciplines were to be introduced in churches?

RH 8. The congregation values and recognizes the significance of teaching in spiritual disciplines.

This particular question found its place within the responses gathered from LVCCC Post Sermon Survey: a comprehensive assessment conducted after a series of 15 sermons centered on the theme of spiritual formation. The congregation's feedback manifests a highly positive reception to these sermons, reflecting an enhanced understanding of Scripture, the intricacies of the spiritual formation process, as well as its purpose and meaning.

Despite the fact that the overall score for the question concerning the initiation of new spiritual disciplines is lower than other items, a significant 70% of participants express a positive attitude towards embarking on this transformative journey. This notable response underscores the effectiveness of the sermons in instilling a sense of openness and enthusiasm among the congregation to explore and adopt new spiritual disciplines.

The author originally had concerns over the perception of spiritual disciplines being linked to Catholic tradition. However, the survey results allay these concerns by revealing that the congregation readily accepts spiritual disciplines as a form of Bible teaching rather than an imposition of Catholic tradition. This affirmation aligns seamlessly with the hypothesis answer for this question, confirming that a tradition evangelical congregation can indeed embrace spiritual disciplines when presented as being rooted in scriptural teachings.

However, some individuals in LVCCC still reject spiritual disciplines due to a misunderstanding of salvation by faith. They assert that as Protestants, we are saved by grace and not by works, which is mistakenly associated with Catholic doctrine. To them, any form of "discipline" is seen as an attempt to earn salvation and should be rejected. These individuals not only dismiss spiritual disciplines themselves but also encourage others to do the same, labeling such practices as heresy. Although they are few in number, they have caused tension and difficulties in the author's efforts to introduce spiritual disciplines in LVCCC.

The conclusion drawn from the survey outcomes is that the majority of congregation, equipped with a solid biblical foundation, perceives spiritual disciplines as an integral aspect of their spiritual growth rather than a departure from their evangelical tradition. This positive response reflects the success of the sermons in dispelling potential misconceptions and fostering an environment where the congregation is not only receptive but also eager to incorporate new spiritual disciplines into their faith journey.

QR 9. What advantages could be gained if churches offered practical training in spiritual disciplines?

RH 9. The participants harvest various benefits derived from training in spiritual disciplines.

The insights derived from the LVCCC Post Training Survey, focusing on the 12-week Lectio Divina training, offer a nuanced perspective on the participants' experiences and the impact of this spiritual discipline. Out of the 11 participants who shared their feedback, the majority expressed positive sentiments regarding the practice, highlighting its efficacy in enhancing their understanding of Scripture, fostering a deeper relationship with God, and increasing awareness of God's presence in their daily lives.

Notably, more than half of the participants reported experiencing tangible improvements in their prayer and devotion life as a result of the Lectio Divina training. However, it is essential to acknowledge that a fraction, approximately one-fourth of the participants (3 individuals), reported no perceived help in these specific areas. The author, recognizing the limited duration of the training—only spanning 12 weeks, suggests that the full benefits of the discipline might not have been fully realized within this timeframe. Furthermore, the benefits of spiritual disciplines are closely tied to individual spiritual maturity and personality. It is common to observe varied results among different individuals.

Despite this limitation, the overarching response collected from the survey is that the majority of participants have indeed tasted the goodness of engaging in the spiritual discipline of the Lectio Divina. This finding aligns with the hypothesis answer for the question, affirming that, even though the majority had not previously practiced Lectio Divina, they embraced this new approach to studying the Bible and derived discernible benefits from the experience.

The positive feedback underscores the potential of introducing new spiritual disciplines within a congregational setting. The fact that the participants, despite limited prior exposure, found value in the practice of Lectio Divina, indicates a receptivity to diverse spiritual disciplines among the congregation. This realization not only confirms the hypothesis but also opens the door for continued exploration and incorporation of other spiritual practices such as Lectio Divina, fasting, simplicity, solitude, submission, spiritual journaling, and so forth to enrich the spiritual journey of the community.

Application of The Results

The essence of this research project is to delve into the state of spiritual formation among Chinese Christians and assess the need and feasibility of incorporating non-

traditional spiritual disciplines within Chinese American churches. The findings presented earlier paint a vivid picture of the spiritual landscape, and based on these results, the author proposes a set of actions to foster a deeper connection with the faith of Chinese Christians.

Harmonize the Teaching of Knowledge and the Action of Faith

Recognizing that many Chinese Christians possess higher education degrees, the attraction of Christian knowledge is quite evident. However, it's crucial to distinguish between having knowledge of faith and genuinely living out that faith. Pastors play a pivotal role in prompting believers to introspect, ensuring that their faith is not just theoretical but manifested through good works.

When introducing spiritual disciplines, it is crucial to emphasize that engaging in these practices is not a means to earn God's approval. Rather, spiritual disciplines serve as a means of creating the space for God to work in one's life. By highlighting that spiritual disciplines are not a checklist to earn merit but a way to open ourselves to the transformative work of God, we cultivate a posture of humility and receptivity. It is important to avoid the mistake of hypocrites, who often misunderstand the purpose of spiritual practices, viewing them as a path to righteousness rather than a means of deepening their relationship with God. The true followers of Christ should approach these practices with a genuine desire for intimacy with God.

Promote Preaching on Spiritual Formation and Related Topics

The study reveals a neglect of spiritual discipline within evangelical churches. Many Chinese Christians are unfamiliar with spiritual formation and its significance. It is imperative to dispel the misconception that spiritual discipline is exclusive to Catholic traditions, for it is a spiritual heritage of both Catholic and Protestant Christians, which

was not only practiced by Jesus, the apostles, but also by early Christian fathers and mothers. It is essential to communicate that engaging in spiritual discipline aids believers in growing towards spiritual maturity is essential.

Providing sufficient background knowledge to congregations concerning spiritual disciplines proves crucial, given the prevalent confusion between legalism and the misconception of earning salvation, as outlined in Chapter 4. Nevertheless, we must not abandon spiritual disciplines due to these potential misinterpretations. Instead, it is incumbent upon us to delve deeper into understanding the principles behind these disciplines, rectify any misunderstandings, and emulate the examples set forth by Jesus and the apostles. Through such diligent pursuit, spiritual discipline can become a powerful tool wielded by the Holy Spirit to bring about transformative change within us.

Implement Training on Proper Spiritual Disciplines in Church

While many Chinese Christians maintain regular devotions and a desire for a closer relationship with God, there is a significant opportunity to encourage them to engage in a variety of spiritual disciplines. Often, their knowledge and devotional practices might be limited to basic one-way Bible study (God speaking to me) and prayer (I speaking to God). To counter this, church leaders should organize workshops on spiritual disciplines that focus on two-way communication and interaction with God.

The study suggests that merely providing information about spiritual disciplines may not be sufficient to inspire action. Therefore, practical methods such as group training, spiritual discipline-focused retreats, and individual spiritual direction should be employed to initiate believers into the practice.

Initiating a new spiritual discipline can be challenging due to the requirement for high self-discipline and determination. A recommended approach is to integrate it into regular fellowship gatherings, allowing for short sessions of practicing a discipline over a set period of time. This method prevents overwhelming difficulties and provides a taste of the benefits without demanding significant effort. As the discipline is accepted and learned, the practice time can gradually be extended.

Urge Believers to Persevere in Spiritual Disciplines

Spiritual discipline is not a quick fix for our life; rather, it mirrors the process of acquiring any skill – its benefits are realized through consistent practice over time. Recognizing that the initial stages of practice may feel challenging and mundane is crucial. It's important to persevere during these dry periods.

Pastors should employ various methods, such as individual counseling, spiritual retreats, and preaching, to encourage the congregation to persist in their practice. Moreover, emphasizing that spiritual growth is not a solitary endeavor, but a transformation facilitated by the Holy Spirit, is essential. Each discipline creates space and time for the Holy Spirit to work, and believers should be reminded that this journey is lifelong. Furthermore, relying fully on the strength of the Spirit, through constant prayer and interaction, helps us maintain our initial motivation for practicing and prevents the transformation from becoming merely outward ritual.

The congregation must be reminded that the practice of spiritual disciplines serves as a pathway toward embodying the image of Christ. Through these practices, we train our bodies to heed the guidance of the Holy Spirit and to live out our faith authentically. It's crucial to understand that these disciplines should not be used as benchmarks of piety or as a means to earn God's favor, as the Pharisees wrongly interpreted. Instead, spiritual disciplines ought to be undertaken out of love for God and

others, echoing the teaching of the Apostle Paul: “Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters” (Colossians 3:23). Without the right motivation and aim, these practices could impede rather than foster our spiritual growth.

In conclusion, these proposed actions aim to bridge the gap between knowledge and application, dispel delusions, provide practical training, and instill perseverance in the pursuit of spiritual disciplines among Chinese Christians in American churches.

Limitation of the Study

While this research project employs a quantitative approach, drawing conclusions solely from survey data to mitigate personal bias, it is imperative to acknowledge the following inherent limitations of this methodology:

Limited Understanding of Survey Questions Among Survey Participants

The participants in the survey exhibit a restricted knowledge of spiritual formation and are unfamiliar with non-traditional spiritual disciplines of evangelical Christians, potentially leading to a lack of complete comprehension of the survey questions and answers. This limitation raises concerns about the accuracy of self-assessment and reported engagement in spiritual disciplines. Moreover, the variability of the Likert scale interpretation among individuals and churches introduces an element of subjectivity, hindering the capacity of precise answers.

Biased Participant Profile

The survey participants predominantly comprise of individuals with heightened concerns about spiritual matters, primarily long-time Christians actively involved in

church ministries, including many holding leadership roles. Consequently, the outcomes might not present a comprehensive portrayal of the overall spiritual landscape within Chinese American churches. The emphasis on committed and involved individuals could skew the findings towards a more positive view of spiritual conditions.

Constraints in Field Study Samples and Duration

The field study, particularly in the LVCCC context, faces limitations in sample size and duration, notably in the Lectio Divina training class and the nine-month sermon series. There were only 12 people who attended the training class and only 11 of them finished all 12-week training. The survey in this 11 people group can hardly represent the whole congregation nor other Chinese American churches. For the sermon series, some participants may not have attended all nine months' sermons, potentially affecting the precision of the results. While the overall reliability of the results indicates a clear need for spiritual discipline and its positive impact on congregational spiritual growth, specific nuances may not be entirely accurate due to these constraints.

Author's Subjective Interpretation of Data

Being the pastor of LVCCC, a small independent Chinese American church, the author recognizes the inherent limitations in interpreting data based on my own personal experience and perspective. While serving in this role, the pastor's understanding and insights are inevitably shaped by my own unique experiences within the church community.

It's crucial to acknowledge that individual experiences vary, and the dynamics within a small, independent church setting may differ significantly from its broader contexts. The author's interpretation of data is inevitably filtered through the lens of my

own involvement, pastoral responsibilities, and interactions within the specific cultural and congregational context of LVCCC.

Despite these limitations, the primary intention of the author is to offer a preliminary exploration into the feasibility of introducing spiritual disciplines in Chinese American churches. The evident desire and need among Chinese Christians for spiritual development underscores the importance of churches allocating more resources and manpower to foster spiritual formation. Initiatives such as organizing spiritual retreats and providing spiritual direction can serve as valuable tools in assisting believers to cultivate deeper relationship with God. In recognizing these limitations, the research lays the groundwork for further qualitative exploration and underscores the importance of a nuanced and multifaceted approach to spiritual development in diverse church contexts.

Suggestions for Future Study

Finally, it is essential to consider how these findings can inform the ongoing conversation surrounding spiritual formation. Surveys conducted among Chinese Christian communities reveal patterns and preferences that can guide future studies in spiritual formation. One noteworthy observation is the strong desire for practical and accessible spiritual disciplines. Respondents expressed a need for building deeper and closer relationship with God. This highlights the importance of developing approaches to spiritual formation that are not only rooted in Christian tradition but also relevant to the contemporary context. Here are some suggestions for Future Study:

Integration of Ancient Practices with Modern Life

Future research can explore innovative ways to integrate traditional spiritual disciplines into the fast-paced and technology-driven lifestyles of today. This research indicates that many Chinese Christians want to be more like Jesus but are not willing to commit to the practices. It is important to develop accessible resources, such as online

platforms of training and group practice that guide individuals through ancient practices in a manner that aligns with their daily routines.

Impact of Cultural On Spiritual Formation

Recognizing the diverse cultural backgrounds within the Christian community, future studies should explore how spiritual formation is influenced by cultural contexts. As a Chinese American myself, I understand how much Chinese love the knowledge and respect the Bible but know a little about early Christian traditions. Understanding the intersection of culture and spirituality can foster a more inclusive and enriching approach to spiritual growth. Researchers may seek to diversify perspectives by actively engaging with the congregation, encouraging open dialogue, and incorporating feedback from various members. This approach can provide a more comprehensive understanding of Chinese American church's dynamics, challenges, and opportunities.

Influence of Church Community on Spiritual Formation

While personal practices are crucial, surveys emphasize the significance of community in the spiritual journey. Chinese American churches are not only a place for worship but also a place for Chinese immigrants to celebrate their holidays and exchange information. Future studies can delve into the dynamics of communal spiritual formation, exploring how relationships, shared experiences, and accountability contribute to the holistic growth of individuals within the Christian community.

Navigating Spiritual Challenges

Acknowledging the struggles and doubts that individuals face on their spiritual journey, future research can address the benefits of spiritual discipline for overcoming these challenges. This research discovered that many believers strive to have godly characters but have low motivation to commit their actions. Long-term research is needed to follow the believers with and without spiritual discipline, and to compare their ability

to develop Christ-like characters. The author believes that spiritual discipline is the key element to connect faith and life. Without discipline, Christian faith is only a good philosophy of life but has no power to change human sinful nature.

Studying Spiritual Direction

This study highlights that numerous Chinese Christians lack spiritual directors, and many churches fail to offer spiritual direction, a vital aspect of spiritual formation. Further investigation is necessary in this area for churches to consider recruiting professional spiritual directors to initiate this ministry. Given the resource constraints of smaller churches, spiritual companionship could serve as a viable alternative with similar benefits. The objective is to foster accountability among believers for their spiritual disciplines and ongoing growth.

The future of spiritual formation studies can be shaped in a way that resonates with the diverse needs of the Christian community. As a student in ministry, the endeavor to conduct this research is not only a scholarly pursuit but also a commitment to making the profound wisdom of spiritual formation accessible to all, fostering a deeper connection between faith and everyday life.

Summery

In conclusion, this dissertation has embarked on a comprehensive exploration of spiritual formation among Chinese Christians in the American context, with a specific focus on the necessity and feasibility of introducing spiritual disciplines in Chinese American churches. Employing a quantitative approach, the study draws conclusions based on survey results while acknowledging the inherent limitations of this methodology.

The research reveals a compelling narrative of a community with a genuine thirst for spiritual growth, as evidenced by the respondents' demonstrated interest in building deeper relationship with God, loving God and others more and developing more godly characters. However, it is crucial to interpret these findings within the context of the study's limitations, notably the participants' limited knowledge of spiritual formation, potential biases in survey responses, and the subjective nature of Likert scale interpretations.

Despite these constraints, the identified need and desire for spiritual development among Chinese Christians call for a thoughtful and intentional response from churches. The proposed actions, including balancing the knowledge and the action of faith, increasing teaching of spiritual formation, providing training on spiritual disciplines, and organizing spiritual companionship and so forth, can offer practical pathways for fostering spiritual growth.

As the author envisioned, this research project provides a preliminary study, prompting further exploration and consideration of spiritual formation strategies. The call to allocate additional resources and manpower for spiritual development initiatives. It is imperative for churches to recognize the nuanced nature of spiritual formation and tailor their approaches to meet the unique needs of the Chinese American Christian community.

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Appendix A

LVCCC 靈命塑造系列講道大綱

一，靈魂蘇醒系列：靈魂的需要

靈魂甦醒（1）-- 認識生命的糧，詩篇 23，約 6：25-59（9/4/22）

1. 關注自己的靈魂，約 6：14-15

基督不是為提供糧食，是喂養人的靈魂，約 6：26-27

恩典不能換取，只能按照要求接受。約 6：28-29

2. 認識生命的糧。約 6：32-33

神跡不是為滿足人的需要，是要人看見神。申 8：3

3. 接受生命的主。約 6：35，53-55

不是人想要的王，但是人需要的王。約 6：60-63。林前 10：1-7

靈魂甦醒（2）不要賠了靈魂。路 12：16-21 (9/11/23)

1. 靈魂有多少價值？馬 8：36

2. 無知的人 – 相信錢財的萬能，路 12：16，16：9

無知的人 – 不知生命的次序，路 12：19，太 6：32

無知的人 – 不關注靈魂的未來，路 12：20-21，12：4-5

3. 智慧的人 – 分辨需要和想要，提前 6：7-9

智慧的人 – 分辨虛假與真實，提前 6：17-19

智慧的人 – 讓基督成為我們的財富，路 12：13-15

靈魂甦醒（3）- 靈魂的真實。路 16：19-31 (9/24/22)

1. 神認識和不認識的靈魂，路 16：19-20

神與人的不同標準，路 16：15

2. 人一生造就的靈魂。路 16：23-24

聖經重複了六次的教導，太 10：39，16：25，可 8：35，路 17：33。約 12：25

3. 要面對審判的靈魂，路 16：22

神為人預備了生命的活水，路 16：29-31

如何得到永恆的生命？約 17：3

為永恆預備， 林后 4： 16-18

靈魂甦醒 (4) – 靈魂的成長. 路 8： 4-18 (10/8/22)

關注靈魂的責任. 路 12： 20， 16： 25， 腓 2： 12-13

撒種的比喻：路旁-- 阻擋靈魂得救的原因 – 不願開門

土淺-- 阻擋靈魂成聖的原因 – 不願改變

荊棘-- 阻擋靈魂成聖的原因 – 不願犧牲

好土-- 靈魂得以成聖的條件 – 獻出最好

2. 基督徒的責任 – 進入基督裏。路 8： 17-18

靈魂的成聖 -- 與基督的生命聯合. 詩篇 14： 1， 箴言 28： 26

靈魂的成聖 -- 與基督的生命聯合. 箴言 14： 16， 儼 12： 2

房子建在沙土上。太 7： 26-27

靈魂甦醒 (5) 一個覺醒的靈魂， 路 19： 1-10 (10/15/22)

1. 從虛偽到真實. 路 19： 4， 啓示 3： 17

2. 從遙望到擁抱. 路 19： 5， 15： 20

3. 從捆綁到自由， 路 19： 8， 弗 4： 17

4. 從沉睡到覺醒， 路 19： 9， 約 1： 12

覺醒的靈魂， 徒 22： 8-10. 賽 57： 15

靈命塑造系列：靈魂的成長

靈命塑造 (1) 離開膚淺的信仰， 希伯來書 6： 1 (1/8/23)

為何需要靈命塑造？

「今日教會廣闊三千里，深度卻只有一寸。」（斯托得）

「革命的年代是行動的年代，而我們的年代卻是宣傳的年代……但求營造出一種印象，大家便感到得著了，滿足了……很難想像今日年輕的一代會因信仰而拋下世界，每日活出自我否定的生活……今日的世代沒有激情，沒有價值，有的只是了無生命的意念、表述。」（祈克果）

讀經不思想，禱告不聆聽，服侍不捨己，愛神不盡心。

1. 如何離開基督道理的開端？愛慕是動力。彼前 2：2，申 6：5-9
2. 如何離開基督道理的開端？習練是方法。來 5：14，哥 3：12
3. 如何離開基督道理的開端？神是主導。來 6：3，6：4-8，13：20-21

靈命塑造（2）得享安息，馬 11：28-30 (1/15/23)

太 11：28 凡勞苦擔重擔的人，可以到我這裡來，我就使你們得安息。29 我心裡柔和謙卑，你們當負我的軛，學我的樣式，這樣你們心裡就必得享安息。

用智慧去生活：耶 6：[16](#) 耶和華如此說：「你們當站在路上察看，訪問古道，哪是善道，便行在其間，這樣你們心裡必得安息。他們卻說：『我們不行在其間。』」

1. 如何得安息 – 來
2. 如何得安息 – 負
3. 如何得安息 – 學

靈命塑造（3）認識複雜的“我” 羅馬書 7：14-25 (1/29/23)

羅馬書 7：15 因為我所做的，我自己不明白；我所願意的，我並不做；我所恨惡的，我倒去做。

1. 認識複雜的“我” “我”的不同層面 – 彼此影響又相對獨立
2. 認識矛盾的“我”：罪讓人的各層面混亂，向追殺大衛的掃羅
3. 認識掙扎的“我”：三次不認主的彼得

靈命塑造（4）戰勝罪的阻礙，羅馬書 Romans 8：1 – 4 (2/4/23)

1. 認識隱藏的罪， 儼 8： 7-8
2. 相信福音的大能， 儼 8： 1-2， 7： 5-6
3. 讓基督幫助我們， 儼 8： 9， 啓 3： 20
4. 基督活在我裏面， 約 6： 53-56

靈命塑造（5）天路歷程，羅馬書 8： 18-37 (2/25/23)

1. 靈命塑造是一個過程。儼 8： 22-25
2. 靈命塑造是被神塑造。儼 8： 26-27， 創 12： 1-2， 馬 4： 3， 7： 22-23
3. 靈命塑造是有基督的形象。儼 8： 29-30， 哥 3： 9-10. 靈命塑造不是為有更完美的行為，是為有基督的生命
4. 靈命塑造是為他人的益處。儼 8： 38-39

三，屬靈操練系列：靈魂的健身操

屬靈操練（1）默想的操練，詩篇 119： 97 - 112 (3/11/23)

1. 聖經中的默想。書 1： 7-8， 腓 4： 8

默想是一種思想形式，思想已經啟示出來的奧秘。如果奧秘沒有啟示出來，我們思想就是枉然，根本不必去思想。可是如果神的啟示只是一件簡單的事實，我們卻一天到晚去默想，那也有些愚蠢。默想是在我們無法瞭解神奇妙的啟示時才需要的。在表面上似乎是矛盾、對立，實際上卻顯出神奧秘的地方，就需要默想。

傅士得 《屬靈操練禮贊》

2. 默想的功效。

默想將聖經活化（雅 1： 13-14），默想將聖經內化（約 1： 12-13），默想將聖經實化（詩 119： 15，箴 23： 26）

3. 默想的益處

看見隱藏的幫助（王 6： 15-17）默想幫助人學習新的思維方式（林前 1： 22-25，王 10： 6-9），得見將來的榮耀（啓 21： 3-5）

4. 默想的方法

- 安靜預備，太 5：8. 一旦我们开始尝试静默，马上就心知肚明，所能掌握的是如此的贫乏。当企图使自己平静安稳，却得到加倍的不安与躁动。有些类似在夜间，当我们试图入睡，一些在白天没有浮上心头的顾虑或欲望，便一股脑儿地开始困扰我们。。。。只要我们试图统整并希望能控制自己，就会经历被焦躁分心的全然击倒。。。。不过所花费的努力不会白费，即使我们默想的所有时间都用在努力使自己平静安稳，时间还是没有浪费，因为这份努力本身就是操練。。。。如果在刚开始所得到的，只是了解到自己多么缺乏内在的安静，我们还是有所收获，因为就某方面而言，我们已经窥见那默想的核心了。郭蒂尼 《Prayer in Practice》

完全降伏（Isa55：8-11），凝視寶座（詩 27：4）

屬靈操練（2）禱告，詩篇 130 (3/25/23)

1. 禱告的重要 – 與神連接的管道，約 15：7-8

禱告的重要 – 得到屬天的幫助，可 14：38，路 22：43，箴 16：25

禱告的重要 – 聖經的教導，弗 6：18-19

2. 學習禱告 – 親密的關係是動力，詩篇 42：1-2，約 7：37

學習禱告 – 明白自己的無助，詩篇 130

學習禱告 – 磨練自己的信心，130

3. 操練禱告 – 不是改變神，是神改變我，箴言 21：25，28：9

操練禱告 – 順服的行動，書 7：10-11

操練禱告 – 享受賜恩的主，儼 11：33-36，歌 4：2

操練禱告 – 言行一致，太 6：10

屬靈操練（3）禁食的操練，太 6：1-18 (4/15/23)

在每一個地方，在每一個時代，禁食幾乎都佔有重要的地位，因為它與宗教信仰的親密感有密切的關聯。禁食在我們這個時代已經銷聲匿跡，原因或許正是在此。對神的意識若消退，禁食也就消失了。（Edward Farrell）

1. 禁食是基督的教導，太 6：16-17，9：14-15

2. 禁食的定義：為著神和神旨意而不吃甚至不喝。申 8：11-19

我们曾领受了来自天上的最好的福气，我们这许多年来也蒙保守有和平与丰盛，我们在人数，财富与力量上的增长远超过其他国家。但是我们忘记了神，我们忘记了那保守我们在和平，生养，丰富与强壮之中的恩手，我们在自欺的心中，妄想这所有的福气都是因为我们自己某些不寻常的智慧與品德。我们陶醉于自己的成功。太自足，以致无法感受到需要救赎与保守的恩典，太骄傲，以致不向那造我们的神祷告。因此，这就需要在我们的所得罪的大能者之前谦卑，承认我们国家所犯的罪，并且乞求他的慈悲与饶恕。所以，应这样一个请求，并且全然同意参议院的观点，我，借着这项声明，指定并且分别 1863 年 4 月 30 号，星期四，作为全国自卑，禁食，与祷告的日子。(林肯)

3. 禁食的益處 – 幫助人向神謙卑.撒下 12: 22-23, 詩篇 51: 4-5

禁食益處 – 查驗自己真實的渴望. 太 4: 2

除非我们经常考验自己对神的爱慕，我们很容易自欺欺人，以为自己很爱神。我们需要的不只是在言语上表达我们对神的看重，更包括了牺牲性的行为。当我们做过多次微小的决定，选择与神的交往而不是食物时，就可以培养出我们与神交通并得到满足的习惯。唯有如此，我們才能做出那终极的牺牲，如亚伯拉罕爱神超过爱以撒。通过禁食让我们做选择的本能更警觉，更敏锐。它强迫我们常常扪心自问，我是否真的渴求神。(John Piper)

禁食的益處 – 禁食增强自律能力. 林前 9: 25-27, 加 5: 17

肉体抵挡这种每天的自律，先是从正面攻击，后来又把自己隐藏在圣灵的话语之下。我们宣称自由脱离所有法制的约束，独立于自我牺牲或克制之外，并且借此逃避那应当为福音而有的节制和境遇，我们也借此为自己的放纵，不规律的祷告，反省，或肢体生活而开脱。但是我们的所作所为与耶稣的教导之间的对比是那样明显，那么令人心痛。我们忘记了门徒意味着不与世界同流合污，我们也忘记了真实的喜乐和自由只能来自一个敬虔的生活。(潘霍華)

4. 操練禁食的方法

1. 預備心單單為了渴慕神、榮耀神。
2. 求聖靈帶領如何禁食及禁食多久。
3. 不要成為假冒為善的禁食或是律法主義。
4. 本來吃飯的時間用來禱告，禱告時記得省察自己的罪並悔改。
5. 隨時注意身體，循序漸進。

5. 禁食的核心是將自己完全獻給神。儼 14: 5-8

屬靈操練 (4) -- 敬拜的操練, 約 4: 1-26 (4/29/23)

1. 敬拜的重要, 約 4: 3-4

2. 敬拜的方法, 約 4: 21-24, 4: 13-14 王下 17: 33-34, 箴言 28: 9, 林后 3: 6

3. 敬拜的操練 – 真理的敬拜, 敬虔的生活. 約 9: 31.

我們要活在不斷聆聽的安靜中, 好讓神成為我們一言一行的本源。假若我們習慣依賴人的力量智慧去應付日常差事, 那麼我們在群體敬拜中也會依樣畫葫蘆。但如果向來有操練, 習慣平日在每個對話中, 每個生意交易中, 都聽取神的聲音, 在參與群體敬拜時, 對神的感應必定更加敏銳。(Foster)

敬拜的操練 – 心靈的敬拜, 彼此相顧。來 10: 24

神活躍的同在貫穿我們, 打破個別生命的藩籬, 消除隱秘與阻隔, 將我們的心靈, 融入神那超越個體生命的大能之中。神客觀的, 有益的同在, 將我們眾人包圍, 滋潤我們, 賜我們愉悅及難以言語的安慰, 在我們靈魂的深處把沉睡中的我們喚醒。(凱莉)

敬拜的操練 – 全人投入, 林前 14: 15

敬拜帶來的改變, 約 4: 39-41

屬靈操練 5 – 順服的操練, 歌 3: 12-25 (5/13/23)

1. 順服生命的主, 約 19: 25-27

放手為得到更大的祝福, 創 22: 16-18

2. 順服屬靈團體, 約 19: 27, 加 8: 21, 太 19: 29

父母兒女都是神的選民, 歌 3: 12-21

3. 操練順服 – 選擇順服, 弗 6: 5-9

操練捨己 路 9: 23-24

屬靈操練 (6) - 身體的角色，儼 6：15-23 (5/27/23)

1. 身體的行為與靈命的成長緊密相連 – 不可犯罪。儼 6：15-16，林前 6：19-20

身體與肉體不同，加 5：17

身體的行為需要訓練，儼 6：16. 參孫的故事

2. 身體是靈命塑造的實體 – 將身體獻給神。儼 6：19

種子成長的過程，弗 2：3-5. 太 13：8

3. 身體的屬靈操練是成聖的過程 – 做順命的奴僕。儼 6：17-18，箴言 25：28，16：32

操練自己，做得勝的基督徒，弗 5：1，啓 3：21

預備好自己做神貴重的器皿，珥 2：28-29

Appendix B

聖言心禱 (Lectio Divina) 的操練程序

1. 聖言心禱的內容

誦讀 (Lecito)：誦讀聆聽 -- 這是屬靈操練，培養個人的靈命，以心靈的耳朵來聆聽。

默想 (Meditatio)：反覆思想 -- 反覆思想神的話，使神的話進入我們心靈的深處。

對禱 (Oratio)：心對心 -- 從默想進入禱告，是與神對話，向祂傾吐我的一切。

默觀 (Contemplatio)：靈對靈 -- 默想是以神的話為主，默觀是神自己，超越語言。

2. 聖言心禱的操練

1. 預備：靜默和求聖靈引導

讓那些縈繞在你心中的事物浮現出來，一一交給神，不代求，直到你心完全平靜下來。
手心向下（卸下重擔），手心向上（領受恩典）

2. 誦讀 (Read)

小心和慢慢的讀，慢！慢！切勿分析經文。

3. 反思 (Reflect)

再讀一次，注意那些字句，思想，或圖像等特別觸動你的內心，則停止閱讀進入默想集中於這一句話（二，三個字）。

這些字句為何觸動你？和你現在的處境有何關係？

4. 回應 (Respond)

再讀一次，讓你的心安居在感動你的經文中，將自己坦誠於神面前，不斷的在心中

默想感動你的字句，隨神的靈引導進入你生命中掙扎之處，或進入感恩，祈求，讚美，渴

望，悔改。對禱：主在這時邀請你作什麼回應？你心中有何感受？對主說你的心的話，也聽聽主對你說？

這時你在如何來順服於神或回應神的邀請？？

5. 安息 (Rest)

順服: 靜默在神面前, 讓聖靈來運行在你心中。

放下字句及一切，單單享受與神在靈裡的相交！

6. 記錄 (Record) 將今天的靈修寫成禱告日記

Appendix C

LVCCC 靈命狀況調查問卷

此問卷調查是為了瞭解大家對靈魂和靈命塑造的認識程度，以便擬定今後講臺的內容。謝謝您的時間和反饋意見！

問題中的“靈魂”和“靈命塑造”的定義：

“靈魂” (soul) 就一個人的本質，區別自己與他人的特徵。靈魂的要求不像身體的要求這樣明顯，如果沒有刻意去感受，人可能完全忽略靈魂的存在。靈命塑造是幫助我們關心自己的靈魂的需要。

“靈命塑造” (Spiritual Formation) 就因著對聖經中的神的認識，生命（包括靈魂）有所改變。人如果不刻意用神的話塑造自己，人就會被世界影響而改變。

從不 一年幾次 一個月幾次 每周幾次
每天少於 15 分鐘 每天 約 15 至 30 分鐘 每天超過 30
分鐘
性別
受洗年數
教會中的服事 長執董事 詩班 團契同工 主日同工 其他

從不，非常罕見，很少，偶爾，經常，非常頻繁。

1. 您思想自己的內在生命的次數
2. 您和他人談論信仰的次數
3. 您邀請人和您一同來教會的次數
4. 您為他人的救恩和需要代禱的次數
5. 您為他人的需要奉獻財物或精力的次數
6. 您讀經的時間：
7. 您祈禱的時間：
8. 您閱讀屬靈書籍/雜誌/媒體：
9. 您是否常常在聖經中尋求神對您生命的旨意。
10. 您是否常常按照聖經真理改變我的思想和/或行為。
11. 您是否在生活中感受到神的同在，並通過禱告來回應。
12. 您是否經常反思聖經中讀到的段落。
13. 當您默想天上的事時，我感受到屬天的平安和安慰。
14. 您是否常常寫下自己的禱告或靈修的心得。

15. “靈修”對你是什麼意義？

A. 個人讀經禱告敬拜 B. 參加教會或網路聚會 C. 默想反省 D. 閱讀靈秀書籍

16. “靈命塑造”對你是什麼意義？

A. 讀經禱告 B. 參加教會活動 C. 感受到神同在的特別經驗 D. 參加教會服事

17. 你認為“靈命”與“情感”有什麼關係？

A. 沒有關係，彼此獨立 B. 彼此影響，不分上下 C. 靈命控制情感 D. 情感影響靈命

18. 您對靈命塑造的期望：更多看見神的作為，更多瞭解聖經的知識，能更多愛神，並靠著神去愛人，更多禱告親近神，

19. 您認為最能幫助您靈命成長的活動：敬拜，團契，禱告，聽道，讀書

20. 您認為教會生活對靈命塑造的影響

Appendix D

聖言心禱學習成果調查問卷

如果選擇多個選項，請表明優先次序：①，②，…

1. 對“聖言心禱”靈修方法的熟悉程度：

A. 從未接觸 B. 學習過 ____ 次 C. 經常使用 D. 其他

2. 學習“聖言心禱”對你的讀經有何幫助？

A. 沒有明顯幫助 B. 更明白聖經的教導 C. 能與作者有情感交流 D. 其他 _____

3. 學習“聖言心禱”對你的禱告有何幫助？

A. 沒有明顯幫助 B. 增加了禱告的頻率 C. 增長了禱告的時間 D. 其他 _____

4. 學習“聖言心禱”對建立與神的關係有何幫助？

A. 沒有明顯幫助 B. 在日常中更多想到神 C. 與神有更深的相交 D. 其他 _____

5. 學習“聖言心禱”期間對靈修生活有何幫助？

A. 沒有明顯幫助 B. 更有規律的每日靈修 C. 更享受每日的靈修時間 D. 其他 _____

6. 什麼是學習“聖言心禱”的最大阻礙？

A. 沒有時間 B. 缺乏帶領 C. 不習慣這個方法 D. 其他 _____

7. “靈修”對你是什麼意義？

A. 每天的讀經禱告 B. 每天與神相處的約會 C. 思考，反省 D. 其他 _____

8. “靈命塑造”對你是什麼意義？

A. 重生得救 B. 讀經禱告 C. 經歷神的特別經驗 D. 其他 _____

9. 你認為“靈命”與“情感”有什麼關係？

A. 沒有關係，彼此獨立 B. 靈命控制情感 C. 情感影響靈命 D. 同等地位，彼此影響

10. 據調查，基督徒的行為與非基督徒沒有很大差別，你認為可能的原因是：

A. 他們的信仰不真實 B. 他們沒有足夠的讀經禱告 C. 人的個性無法改變
D. 其他 _____

Appendix E

靈命成長主題講道后的調查問卷

從去年到今年的主日講臺，我們圍繞基督徒的靈命成長，分別講述了靈魂甦醒，靈命塑造和屬靈操練三個系列，和大家分享了靈魂的重要性，靈命需要的供應以及靈命需要的操練。希望大家對自己的屬靈生命的成長已經有了更多的瞭解。請大家回顧過自己的靈命成長的光景，回答以下問題。此問卷是無記名的形式，爲了幫助牧者研究如何在教會推動靈命塑造。

根據以上三個靈命成長的講道系列，按大家對自己屬靈生命的瞭解，給講臺的信息對自己靈命成長的具體幫助評估

很大幫助，一些幫助，中性，很少幫助，沒有幫助

1. 對更深明白聖經知識的幫助
2. 對更明白聖靈的工作的幫助
3. 對將信仰用于生活的幫助
4. 對明白靈命成長的內容的幫助
5. 對明白屬靈操練的目的和意義
6. 對計劃開始新的屬靈操練的幫助
7. 對生活中待人處事的態度的幫助
8. 對服事的積極性和態度的幫助
9. 對有規律的靈修生活的幫助
10. 對在每天的生活想到神的幫助
11. 對傳福音的積極性的幫助
12. 對奉獻的時間和金錢的幫助
13. 對來教會敬拜和團契的頻率的幫助
14. 對更喜愛讀經和禱告的幫助
15. 對看屬靈書籍和聽屬靈信息的幫助
16. 對尋求神的旨意的幫助
17. 對有喜樂和平安的幫助

請你回顧自己靈命的成長，有何需要是教會牧者應該努力提供的：

非常需要，一些需要，中性，很少需要，沒有需要

18. 對聖經知識教導
19. 對信仰在生活中運用的教導
20. 對靈命塑造更多的和更深入的教導，
21. 對屬靈操練的具體指導，
22. 固定的團體屬靈操練的活動
23. 對個人靈命成長的輔導
24. 對聖靈在靈命成長中的功效的教導

Appendix F

美國華人基督徒靈命狀況調查問卷

This survey is a partial completion of Linda Shen' Doctor of Ministry project through Chinese Evangelical Seminary of North America. It also will provide valuable information for your church leaders to plan future ministry. The survey is anonymous, demographic information is for data analysis only. The survey has fifty simple questions divided in five parts:

1. Demographic
2. Self-reflection of Spiritual State.

3. Engagement of Spiritual Disciplines

4. Assessment of Church's Support

5. Attitude Towards Spiritual Disciplines

Kindly respond to these inquiries based on actual situations and observations, rather than focusing on idealized recommendations. I appreciate your dedication to aiding the researcher and assisting churches in better serving their congregations.

Demographic

I, What is your gender?

M

F

II, What age group are you in?

A. 25 or Younger

B. 26 – 45

C. 46 – 65

D. 66 – 75

E. Over 75

IV, What highest education degree do you have?

A. Under high school

B. High school

C. College

D. Graduate school

V, How long have you been a Christian?

Under 2 years

2-5 years

6-10 years

10 years and above

VI, How long have you attended the current church?

Less 1 year

2-5 years

6-10 years

10 years and above

VII, What is your main ministry in the church?

Sunday worship assistant (greeter, IT, preparation...)

Worship team or choir member

Children ministry leader or helper

Adult fellowship leader or teacher

Pastor, elder, deacon or other leadership position

No specific ministry.

VIII, What is your ethnicity?

Chinese immigrants (move to American after 18 years old)

Chinese immigrants (move to American before 18 years old)

American born Chinese

Non-Chinese

Part I, Self-reflection of Spirituality

Please complete the follow statement with the one of the five qualifiers:

Never, Rarely, Sometimes, Often,
Always

1. I experience the love of God.
2. I feel God's presence in my daily activities.
3. I hunger for God's words throughout the day.
4. I seek God's will when I make decisions, whether big or small.

5. I am upset over my sins and wished I didn't do it.
6. I forgive others when someone wronged me.
7. I strive to be more like Jesus in his character, for instance, humble, gentle or patience.
8. I allow God to control my finance when I plan my spending.
9. I thank God for difficulties in life because I believe God uses them to shape me.
10. I think about God's purpose in my life throughout my everyday activities.
11. I experience the power of the Holy Spirit when I am tempted.
12. I look for opportunities to share the gospel.
13. Our family prays together.
14. I uphold Christian values at work.

Part II, Engagement of Spiritual Disciplines

Please indicate how often you practice any of these spiritual disciplines:

Never, yearly, monthly, weekly,
daily

1. I follow a routine in my devotion.
2. I meditate on God's words.
3. I pray at a fixed time and place.
4. I fast for spiritual growth.
5. I study the Bible privately.
6. I practice simplicity in life for spiritual growth.
7. I tithe and offer.
8. I practice solitude to spend time with God.
9. I write spiritual journals.
10. I submit to the others in order to obey God.
11. I help others because of the love of God.
12. I share gospel to others.
13. I confess (discuss my actions) to other believers.
14. I attend corporate worship in person.
15. I meet with pastor/mentor/friends for spiritual guidance.
16. I join Christian celebration services such as holidays and baptism.

Part III, Assessment of Church's Support in Spiritual Growth

Please indicate the level of satisfaction in each of the following activities that your church provides to promote your spiritual maturity. Rate your satisfaction regarding both the quality and quantity of these activities.

Very dissatisfied; Somewhat Dissatisfied; Neutral; Somewhat satisfied, Very satisfied

1. The regular prayer meetings.
2. The spiritual retreats.
3. Specific workshop for meditation, solitude, fasting and prayer etc.
4. The fellowship groups.
5. The teaching on corporate worship and fellowship.
6. The observance of the Holy Communion.
7. The sermons on practicing spiritual disciplines.
8. The overall Sunday worship experience.
9. The teaching of Bible study classes.
10. The availability of individual spiritual guidance.

IV, Attitude towards Spiritual Discipline

Please indicate your level of disagreement or agreement with the following statements:

Strongly disagree; somewhat disagree; neutral, somewhat agree; strongly agree.

1. Regularly engaging spiritual disciplines is critical for spiritual growth
2. I need to tell God what I need even though He already knows
3. An understanding of the Bible is needed to be a good Christian.
4. solitude and meditation are valuable for spiritual growth
5. Even though God knows my heart, I still need to demonstrate my faith through action.
6. the purpose of God is to give me joy and peace
7. Attending church worship and fellowship are optional because faith is a private matter.
8. I need help in developing an effective devotional life
9. I want to receive more training in spiritual disciplines.
10. I want to have genuine encounter with God.

