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JOHN W. RAWLINGS SCHOOL OF DIVINITY

The Effect of Theological Education on the Spiritual Formation of the Women in a Local Church

A Thesis Project Report Submitted to
the Faculty of the Liberty University School of Divinity
in Candidacy for the Degree of
Doctor of Ministry

by

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THE DOCTOR OF MINISTRY THESIS PROJECT REPORT ABSTRACT

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This thesis project seeks to utilize seven weeks of theological training and spiritual discipline practices to facilitate the spiritual formation of the adult female members of Christ the Foundation Church (CFC). The aim is to develop Christians that are hearers and doers of God's Word. Consequently, equipping them for the Kingdom task assigned to every follower of Christ, recorded in Matthew 28:18-20. Qualitative research with a sample size of 10 participants was conducted. A pretest/post-test questionnaire was used to assess spiritual growth. Bloom's educational model taxonomy was employed for intervention evaluation. Exposure to sound theology, spiritual formation practices, and the empowerment of the Holy Spirit propels the participants toward Christlikeness. The importance of this thesis project can only be understood in light of the Church's mission. The Church of Christ is mandated to disciple and equip the believers to participate in spreading the Gospel of God's Kingdom. This equipping involves the development of believers with sound biblical/theological knowledge and with a heart that gravitates toward being Christlike.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Given the importance of Christ's assignment to His Church to evangelize the world recorded in Matthew 28:18-20, spiritual formation into the likeness of Christ should be the primary goal of the local congregations. However, many are distracted by issues that are not prominent in the New Testament; as a result, this task is often neglected. Consequently, creating groups of people that seldom get along with other people, both within and outside the church. Often their most close relationships are webs of mutual harm, coldness, and resentment. These individuals devise ways of being Christian without Christlikeness.¹ This is the problem identified at Christ the Foundation Church (CFC).² Many adult women members interact with one another in an ungodly manner. As a result, there is apparent antagonism. The researcher believes that such attitude toward one another signifies a clear gap in their spiritual formation because one of the commandments that Christ issued to all His followers is to love one another. Since obedience to this command is not apparent in the interactions of the CFC female members, the researcher sees the need to address the issue through an intervention.

The proposed intervention consists of a seven-week theological training and spiritual disciplines exercise. Bloom's Taxonomy of the educational model will be used to assess the intervention. Alongside teaching and spiritual disciplines practice, the participants will maintain a journal to track their progress. In addition, they will complete pretest/post-test questionnaires.

¹ Dallas Willard, *Renovation of the Heart: Putting on the Character of Christ*, 20th Anniversary Ed. (Colorado Spring, CO: NavPress, 2021), 247, 251.

² Christ the Foundation Church is a pseudonym for the church this researcher uses for the project. The researcher made this discussion to protect the image of the church.

Furthermore, the researcher will keep a reflective journal. The researcher believes that if the intervention is administered appropriately and with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the participants will experience transformation.

Ministry Context

Christ the Foundation Church (CFC) was founded in 1996 in Nigeria, West Africa, by the senior pastor, who subsequently established the church's Headquarters in the country's Eastern region. Later, he moved to the United States to further his formal education and establish a church. The church in Nigeria is under the leadership of its pastors and elders. He travels to Nigeria for church affairs occasionally, and when necessary, he holds a virtual meeting with the pastors and elders to discuss church matters. The senior pastor is the key decision-maker.

The United States church branch is in Queens County, New York City. Queens County is one of the five counties of New York City with diverse ethnicity. According to the latest United States Census Bureau data, Queens County's population is two million, four hundred and five thousand, four hundred and sixty-four (2,405,464). This figure comprises 24.9% White, 20.7% Black or African American, 1.3% American Indian and Alaska Native, 26.9% Asian, .2% Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander, and 28.2% Hispanic or Latino. In line with this diversity, there are various religious beliefs.³

³ "U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts: Queens County, New York." *QuickFacts Queens County, New York*. Last modified 2020. Accessed March 16, 2022.

<https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/queenscountynyork/PST045221>.

The church membership is open to all ethnic groups and is voluntary. Therefore, any member could discontinue membership if they decide to do so. The total membership is approximately seventy-one members, encompassing varied ethnicity. About fifty-two percent (37) of members are women between 19 to 85 years old. At the same time, about sixteen percent (11) are men between 24 to 59 years old. The remaining are teenagers and children. More than half of the members live within the county, and the rest travel from outside. Also, about seventy-two percent of members work in diverse entities.

Regular weekly church service is on Saturdays. The service commences with prayers; afterward, the songs of praise with musical instruments follow. At this point, members join in singing songs and clapping in tune with the musical instruments. The process lasts for about forty-five minutes. Upon completion, the church will sing a hymnal song in preparation for reading the first and second lessons from the designated passages of the Bible. Afterward, the senior pastor or another pastor preaches the sermon. On average, the sermon lasts for an hour and a half. The Holy Communion follows this, and all Christian believers present, whether a member of the church or not, are welcome to participate. Next is the giving of offerings and tithes. Again, the process commences with songs while members place their offerings or tithes in the offering basket. Next, the officiating pastor prays for the members and the offerings and tithes when completed. Finally, individual testimony takes place before the weekly announcement and closing prayer. Members that wish to share the stories of what God did for them are allowed to do so. As soon as this process ends, the church secretary makes the weekly announcement. Then the officiating pastor says the benediction and the service ends.

The church does not charge fees to carry out its business operation. Instead, it derives revenues from the various offerings and tithes from members and non-members who visit the church. Also, each member makes a monthly voluntary pledge at the beginning of the year for some designated church expenses. In addition, the church has a prayer line, and individuals within and outside the state who appears for prayers send offerings and donations to the church. Apart from the offerings, tithes, and pledges, members and non-members make donations to the church when the occasion necessitates it. The annual budget is prepared based on the previous year's revenues and expenses. The church holds a yearly meeting at the end of each year, and all members are qualified to participate. The church addresses its affairs at the meeting. In addition, some church matters are decided through voting. Although every member can participate in the discussion, voting is for adult members. In other words, members, including children and teenagers are free to voice their diverse opinions on issues under discussion. However, voting on some of the issues is reserved for adult members.

Other weekly church activities include Bible study and special prayer night. The Bible study session is held on Wednesdays at 7:30 pm and ends at 9 pm. The theme comes from any part of the Old or the New Testament, and a designated pastor leads the session for the week. Furthermore, the special prayer night is on Mondays at 7 pm and closes at 8 pm. Members, their families, or friends with special needs come to receive prayers on that day. One or two elders of the church and a pastor conduct the prayer. After the session, anyone who wants to speak to the senior pastor stays behind and talks to him privately. Besides these weekly activities, the church collects offerings for the poor every two months. The church distributes the monies collected to

some homeless people and beggars. This ritual started after the church's encounter with a homeless individual.

At one of its weekly services, a homeless person walked into the church in the middle of the service with tears and asked desperately for financial help. Then, the senior pastor paused everything and asked the members to donate what they could afford for the homeless man. The members donated generously, and everything collected was handed over to the homeless man. The church decided to make a unique collection intermittently from that day. Hence, the two months interval. Also, some members volunteer at food pantries in the community. This assistance involves sorting and bagging various food items.

The church has women, men, youth, and children fellowships. Each fellowship holds a monthly meeting to discuss diverse issues. The women's fellowship group meets first Sunday of every month at 7 pm. The group deliberates on the needs and challenges confronting women in their Christian journey. Ideas are exchanged based on the individual experience of the attendees. The group uses scriptural passages to encourage one another or support an opinion. However, the purpose of the group is not Bible study. Instead, the main goal is to create an environment that allows women to support one another spiritually through prayers and meaningful discussions. The gathering is open to all women, members, and non-members. As a result, members invite their friends or family members. Sometimes, other women from other small community churches participate. Other add-on issues the group tackles include the upkeep of the church and other matters as they arise. Indeed, the group's structure is not as formal and robust as in large churches because it exists in a small church. The group has a chairperson, vice-chairperson,

treasurer, and secretary. It has its bank account under the church's name. The group generates its revenue through donations from members and non-members.

Like the women's fellowship, the men's fellowship holds a monthly meeting every second Saturday at 3 pm. The meeting duration is untimed; however, it does not exceed an hour and forty-five minutes. All the church's fellowship meetings commence with opening and closing prayers. Although the number of men in the church is significantly lower than that of women, its fellowship shares similar goals with the women's group. The men's fellowship allows men to freely deliberate on the struggles of striving to live Christ-centered lives. Its participation is solely for single and married men, which comprises members and non-members. The Bible passages are incorporated into the discussion for clarification, encouragement, and empowerment when necessary. In addition, the group conducts intercessory prayer for those group members that request it. In other words, during the discussion, one or more group members may ask the group to assist them in prayer for their challenges. The group provides time before dismissal to jointly pray for them to honor the request. The men's fellowship group is a forum where Christian men interact, support, and connect to develop in Christ's image.

In line with the church's other monthly fellowship gathering, the children and the youth fellowship meet every fourth Sunday. First, the children's session starts at 5:30 pm and ends at 6:30 pm. Then, the youth session begins at 7 pm and ends at 8:30 pm. The children's fellowship comprises children between the ages of 4 to 11. At the same time, the youth fellowship encompasses teenagers between the ages of 12 to 18. A designated adult member and one teenager from the youth group lead the children's session. The leader has the responsibility to plan the content of the session. The group aims to expose the children to Christ's love for them.

The task is accomplished by studying Scripture passages appropriate for their age and accompanied by a simplified explanation. After the description, the leader encourages the children to share what they learned or ask questions. Next, the leader gives them the assignment to memorize some verses from the Scripture passages studied. Parents are encouraged to assist their children in the task and reinforce what they learned. In the next session, children recite their assigned passages. In addition, the session leader teaches children how to interact thoughtfully with one another. Finally, the leader includes some fun-oriented activities to make the session enjoyable.

Regarding the youth fellowship, the group selects its leader. However, one of the pastors participates in every session. The pastor is there to assist and steer them rightly. The aim is to provide a forum for the youth to voice their diverse concerns or challenges inherent in the Christian faith development. In addition, the gathering emphasizes the importance of youth's involvement in church affairs and community activities. Therefore, the church intentionally gets them involved in weekly activities to develop and nurture these attributes. For example, some join the choir; some read the first or second lesson from the Scripture during the church service. While some usher during the church's regular services or special events. They also participate in community evangelism and the distribution of Bible tracks.

The researcher is one of the pastors at CFC and is actively involved in the church's weekly activities. The researcher also attends women's fellowship and youth fellowship when assigned. Given the researcher's close involvement with CFC, she observes firsthand areas that warrant improvement for the church's flourishing. CFC is involved in diverse activities that are supposed to make the church thrive and produce members that are mature followers of Christ.

The evidence of maturity in Christ is through “godly character and ethical lifestyle.”⁴ Thus, in Ephesians 5:1-2, Paul instructs the believers, as God’s children, to be imitators of God and mimic Christ's sacrificial love. God wants believers to grow in Christ’s image by becoming like Him. Furthermore, in 2 Corinthians 5:21, Paul declares, “For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.” Indeed, the believers will become the righteousness of God only when they unite with Christ. Since they are in Christ, they are identified with God’s character, as He identified with the sin of the believers. The believers replicate the image of Christ.⁵

The transformation process to Christlikeness occurs at the points where believers are not yet formed into that image. In that case, the Holy Spirit may utilize some channels to probe areas still not formed.⁶ As indicated, CFC is engaged in various activities to pursue its mission. However, transformational issues should be addressed for the church to thrive in its assigned task. Hence, becoming the likeness of Christ should be paramount in its entire endeavor.

Problem Presented

The problem is that there is antagonism among many adult female members of the CFC. This issue manifests in an uncaring manner these women interact with one another. They speak ill of one another and try to form cliques. They hear the Word of God every service day, and members are good at memorizing and reciting Scripture verses. These attributes are commendable. However, the behavior of many adult female members does not reflect Christ’s

⁴ Diane J. Chandler, *Christian Spiritual Formation: An Integrated Approach for Personal and Relational Wholeness* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 25.

⁵ Morna D. Hooker, “On Becoming the Righteousness of God: Another Look at 2 Cor 5:21,” *Novum Testamentum* 50, (2008): 370.

⁶ Ruth Haley Barton and M. Robert Mulholland Jr., *Invitation to a Journey: A Road Map for Spiritual Formation*. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2016), 45.

commandment to all believers to love one another. This disconnect begs the following questions. First, is this problem the result of cultural differences? Second, is the problem an indication of spiritual immaturity? Given the makeup of CFC, the two are probable causes.

Nonetheless, the second is the most plausible cause. If one should conclude that the problem among some of these women is due to cultural differences, then that still exposes the deficiency in their spiritual maturity. In other words, a spiritually transformed individual would not foresee cultural differences as reasons for antagonism because all true believers are one in Christ. To underscore the importance of oneness in Jesus Christ, Paul declares in Galatians 3:27-28 that those baptized into Christ have put on Christ. Hence, no division between Jew and Gentile, slave and free, nor between male and female because they are one in Christ. Being one in Christ indicates that “Members of the church are not one thing, they are one person, having been taken into the corpus of the One New Man.”⁷ The significance of this assertion should not be ignored, particularly in the current era when people have seen the destructive power of prejudice, whether in the form of ethnic identity, social status, or gender; believers should delight in this gospel which supports no spiritual preferences, and learn to conduct themselves in a manner that demonstrates that truth before a chaotic world.⁸ Hence, the necessity of Christian spiritual maturity.

Spiritual maturity or the level of an individual’s maturity manifests in their character. Indeed, Christian character in a believer’s life is a crucial part of Christian living and ministry.

⁷ Louis J. Martyn, “Baptism into the Christ Who is Neither Jew nor Gentile (3:26-29). Galatians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary,” *Theology & Religion Online* (1997): 373-383. <https://dx.doi.org/10.5040/978030026191.0010.CHO14>.

⁸ Moses Silva, “Galatians,” *New Bible Commentary*, eds. G. J. Wenham, J. A. Motyer, D. A. Carson and R. T. France (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2010), 1215.

The Lord Jesus's character is the measurement tool for a believer's character. Underscoring the importance of mimicking Christ's character, Paul declares,

Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his interests but also for the interests of others. Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, ...and coming in the likeness of men (Philippians 2:3-7, New King James Version).

Paul cautions the believers about the pursuit of personal glory, which is the driving force for selfish ambition. In addition, he highlights the importance of true humility in dealing with one another. Indeed, he presents Christ as the ultimate example of selfless humility. Notwithstanding that Christ possessed all the rights, privileges, and honors of deity, which He was wholly entitled to and could never be taken from, His attitude was not to cling to them or His position, but willingly He gave them up for a season.⁹ The overarching issue here is unity among the believers. Those that enjoy love and fellowship with Jesus Christ should dwell in harmony with one another.¹⁰

Highlighting the characteristics of spiritual immaturity in the community of faith, Paul asserts, "...I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. I fed you with milk and not with solid food, for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able, for you are still carnal. For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men?" (1 Corinthians 3:1-3, NKJV)? Indeed, Paul asserts that believers have the Spirit of God, but that does mean that every

⁹ John MacArthur, *The MacArthur Bible Commentary* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2005), 1715-1716.

¹⁰ Gerald Peterman. "Philippians." In *The Moody Bible Commentary*, eds. Michael Rydelnik and Michael Vanlaningham (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2014), 1860.

believer behaves spiritually. That is, acting in a manner that displays the maturity expected from those with the Spirit of God. Paul’s audience lived sinfully and contrary to what was expected of them. As a result, he addressed them as undeveloped and immature believers, simply infants. He had anticipated that by the time he was addressing them, they would have been adequately ready to be taught the more profound truth of God’s Word, which he characterized as solid food. However, their spiritual immaturity prompted Paul to continue to feed them milk, the type of teaching appropriate for new believers.¹¹ Milk does not refer to certain doctrines but to the more easily digestible truths of doctrine given to those new to the Christian faith. The difference is not the sort of truth but the level of depth. Hence, spiritual immaturity prevents one from receiving the richest truths.¹²

Continuing on the importance of spiritual growth in the community of faith, Paul mentions several spiritual gifts given to the believers for the ministry work and edification of the church until they “come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the fullness of Christ, . . . , speaking the truth in love may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ—from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, . . . , causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love” (Ephesians 4:11-16, NKJV). The ministry Paul refers to here is every form of spiritual service, and all believers should be involved. Hence, the gifts are given to all Christians for the service of the Lord, thereby building up the body of Christ. The work of this ministry is not limited to a select few; as believers participate in active service, they grow up in all things into

¹¹ Everett F. Harrison and Donald A. Hagner, “Romans” in *Romans – Galatians*, vol. 11, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Tremper Longman, III and David Garland (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), 282.

¹² MacArthur, *The MacArthur Bible Commentary*, 1569.

Christ. Christ is the goal and source of their growth. The growth process of the entire body is from Him. As parts of the body, every member is designed specifically for their place and role and completely joined to every other member to produce a complete, living organism.¹³ The indispensability of all parts of the body is highlighted.

None of the parts can be deemed insignificant or inconsequential because they are inseparably connected through their connection to the head of the body, Jesus Christ. Every part is equipped to operate so the church accomplishes the Lord's purposes for setting it apart. If a part abdicates its responsibility and leaves it to others it destroys the entire effectiveness of the ministry of the body. Once a small percentage of the body works to do a large proportion of the ministry, it compromises Christ's plan and purpose for His body. Historically, the church has subtly encouraged the notion that the title minister is reserved for particular people. However, the New Testament declares that each member is a minister. Hence, the term should not be restricted to one specific set of ministers that are more suitably called pastors. Ideally, if each member is a minister, then each has a ministry. Thus, the body of Christ will only realize how great its potential ministry effectiveness can be when every member operates in their own areas of ministry.¹⁴ In other words, as each believer lovingly provides the body with what it needs to grow, it develops into the person God planned it to be. The person is Christ Himself.¹⁵

¹³ William MacDonald, *Believer's Bible Commentary*, ed. Art Farstad (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2016), 1972-1974.

¹⁴ David Horner, *A Practical Guide for Life and Ministry: Overcoming 7 Challenges Pastor Face* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2008), 88-95.

¹⁵ Frank Thielman, *Ephesians: Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010), 247.

Paul's reference to solid food and milk does not point to the new Christians expected to mature gradually through the power of the Holy Spirit. Instead, he is concerned about those believers who have been part of the church for a while but have not demonstrated recognizable spiritual maturity. Their spiritual immaturity manifests in their characteristics, whereby it breeds envy, jealousy, unforgiveness, hatred, quarreling, and other kinds of ungodliness. Given Paul's description of the church as a body, each member is a part of that body. One must be concerned about the damage that will happen if some parts of the body are not playing their function rightly. This is the dilemma of the female members of the CFC. Hence, this researcher believes such a problem deserves urgent attention for the church to thrive in its assigned tasks. The importance of hearing and living God's Word needs to be addressed. Indeed, only by hearing and responding to God's Word can one grow spiritually.¹⁶

CFC emphasizes the observance of moral principles and other good deeds in its preaching to indicate one's Christian belief. Fasting and prayers are standard practices of the church and its members. The church encourages members to give alms to the poor and homeless people and volunteer in community food pantries. Although these practices are noble and evidenced in the Scriptures, they have failed to mitigate the spiritual immaturity evident in the female members' unloving interactions. This attitude goes contrary to Christ's commandment to love one another (John 13:34-35, NKJV). This love commandment is not restricted to Christ's disciples only but includes every humankind that has been loved by God.¹⁷

¹⁶ Robert L. Saucy, *Minding the Heart: The Way to Spiritual Transformation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2013), 139.

¹⁷ William Chang, "The Love Commandment (John 13:34-35)," *The Asia Journal of Theology* 28, no 2 (Oct. 2014): 277.

Jesus's life describes the meaning of love, which He commands His followers to emulate by loving each other as He loved them. Love is proof of discipleship. It is distinguishing evidence demonstrating to others that one is an authentic Christ's disciple.¹⁸ Indeed, the command to love is foundational in all Christian activities. The importance of this command is amplified in 1 John 4:12-13. In this passage, John asserts that no one has seen God, but if believers love one another, God dwells in them, and His love has been made perfect in them. Through this, the believers will know they have been given God's Spirit. Indeed, no one can see God directly, and His presence manifests in the believers when they love because God is love. The Spirit's presence inspires Christ's followers to display godly love. As the believers permit the Spirit to influence their lives in that manner, they remain in God, which means they obey His commands.¹⁹ If individuals determine to love each other, God's love must be the source of their love.²⁰ In fact, by virtue of being made in the image and likeness of God who is love, a highly substantial attribute of human nature is that people are created to love, to crave love, and to be nourished by love both administered and received.²¹

Furthermore, the church of Christ has a designated assignment that all believers must fulfill. In Matthew 28:18-20, Christ commands the community of believers to carry the gospel's message to the entire universe. In keeping with this command, Christ promises to be with the

¹⁸ Robert H. Mounce, "John" in *Luke–Acts*, vol. 10, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Tremper Longman, III and David Garland (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007), 557.

¹⁹ Tom Thatcher, "1 John" in *Hebrews—Revelation*, vol. 13, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Tremper Longman, III and David Garland (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006), 481.

²⁰ Dirk G. Van der Merwe, "The Christian Spirituality of the Love of God: Conceptual and Experiential Perspectives Emanating from the Gospel of John," *Verbum et Ecclesia* 41, no 1 (2020): 1.

²¹ William R. Cox Jr. and Robert A. Peck, "Christian Education as Discipleship Formation," *Christian Education Journal* 15, no 2 (2018): 252.

believers as they obey it consistently. This command extends beyond evangelism; simply making converts and leaving them to their own devices is insufficient. They must be taught Christ's commandments as recorded in the New Testament. Becoming like the Master is the core of discipleship, which can be attained through systematic teaching and submission to the Word.²² Given this crucial responsibility, spiritual formation in Christlikeness should be the exclusive primary aim of the local congregations. However, many are distracted by issues not articulated in the New Testament as vital to the church's calling. Thereby neglecting to produce disciples equipped to join in Christ's revolutionary assignment. Thus, the development of believers that have difficulties having a good relationship with other people within and outside the community of faith. Consistently, their closest associations are webs of mutual harm, coldness, and resentment. They have invented means of being Christian without Christlikeness.²³

Without Christlikeness, it will be impossible for any believer or church to effectively carry out that command. Hence, the need for such formation, which can only be learned from Christ. In Matthew 11:29, He invites all who hear His Word to come and learn from Him. Indeed, Christian living primarily comprises learning from Jesus Christ how to be conformed to His likeness.²⁴ This image of Christ is vital at CFC to effectively respond to His Great Commission. Undoubtedly, spiritual maturity is crucial for effective discipleship. Therefore, the question for this research project is, can theological training in conjunction with the practice of spiritual discipline contribute to the spiritual maturity of CFC adult women members?

²² MacDonald, *Believer's Bible Commentary*, 1239-1240.

²³ Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*, 247-248, 251.

²⁴ Steven L. Porter, "Will/Heart/Spirit: Discipleship that Forms the Christian Character," *Christian Education Journal* 16, no. 1 (2019): 79.

Purpose Statement

This DMIN action research project aims to conduct seven weeks of theological training sessions with spiritual discipline exercises designed to facilitate the spiritual maturity of the adult women of CFC. Each session will last for an hour and a half. Also, the participants will keep journal entries of their progress as the activities proceed. The researcher will also maintain a reflective journal to guard against conscious and unconscious personal biases due to religious affiliation with the participants. Furthermore, the participants will complete a pretest/post-test questionnaire to assess spiritual growth. Finally, the researcher will employ Bloom's educational model taxonomy to evaluate the intervention.

A spiritually formed individual desires to do God's will and relate to others in a Christlike manner.²⁵ Thus, the church is responsible for teaching and developing Christians that replicate Christ's character. This task is crucial for faithful discipleship and obedience to God's commandments.²⁶ Although CFC members are good at memorizing and reciting Scripture verses, currently, the church has no teaching ministry that will expose members to sound theology, apologetics, and formation practices. Such exposure, coupled with the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, will enable CFC members to move from the position of knowledge to the part of doing. Indeed, the necessity of knowing and living the truth of the word could never be overemphasized. James 1:22 underscored this importance when the author urges his audience to be doers of the word, not only hearers. Similarly, Paul affirms in Romans 2:13 that "not the

²⁵ N.T. Wright, *After You Believe: Why Christian Character Matters* (New York: HarperCollins, 2010), 30.

²⁶ Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*, 257-259.

hearers of the law are just in the sight of God, but the doers of the law will be justified.” The message in these passages is clear. Anyone who hears God’s word and fails to incorporate it into their lifestyle lacks genuine responsiveness. God’s word should transform behavior and not only stimulate the minds of the listeners.²⁷ It is insufficient to receive the “implanted” word without obeying it. The Scripture must be translated into action. “To profess great love for God’s word or even to pose as a Bible student is a form of self-deception unless our increasing knowledge of the word is producing increasing likeness to the Lord Jesus.”²⁸

Pursuing the truth of God’s Word through participation in theological training and genuine engagement in spiritual discipline exercises, through the enabling of the Holy Spirit, will stimulate spiritual maturity in the participants. The gospel possesses power when taught rightly and appropriately applied. The intent is to prayerfully focus on reaching the hearts of participants. The heart is crucial in the quest for spiritual formation. In Jeremiah 29:13, God reveals to His people that they will find Him when they seek Him with their entire hearts. This revelation entails a diligent continuous search for God with sincerity and uprightness.²⁹ The heart matters in one's dealings with God. Hence, if the Holy Spirit transforms the participants’ hearts through the Word of God, it will set a new path in the CFC. The church would recognize the benefits of the intervention and may consider its implementation in the church.

Basic Assumptions

²⁷ George H. Guthrie, “James” in *Hebrews—Revelation*, vol. 13, *The Expositors Bible Commentary*, ed. Tremper Longman, III and David Garland (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006), 226-227.

²⁸ MacDonald, *Believer’s Bible Commentary*, 2307.

²⁹ Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on The Whole Bible with Practical Remarks and Observations Unabridged*, 7th ed. (OSNOVA, 2010), Jeremiah 29, Kindle.

Four assumptions are made for this DMIN thesis project. 1. The Bible is inerrant and is the source of knowing the truth of God. 2. The Word of God is a living Word with transformative power. 3. The researcher assumes that the sample selected for the research project is representative of the population. 4. The researcher assumes that the participants will respond truthfully to the questions in the assessment instrument and provide honest journal entries about their progress.

Definitions

This DMIN thesis project contains key terms the researcher deems necessary to define for clarity. Some of these terms appear interchangeably. For instance, spiritual formation, spiritual maturity, and transformation feature interchangeably. Therefore, the following are some key terms to be defined: Spiritual formation, spiritual disciplines, theological education, sanctification, godliness, and biblical inerrancy.

Spiritual formation. Before defining spiritual formation, it is vital to recognize that the term has different meanings to different people or groups, hence the difficulty of arriving at an accepted definition. Nonetheless, for this DMIN thesis project, the definitions presented here coincide with what the researcher intends to portray. The *Foundations of Spiritual Formation* defines Spiritual formation as “the holistic work of God in a believer’s life whereby systematic change renders the individual continually closer to the image and actions of Jesus Christ. And second, the change or transformation that occurs in the believer’s life happens best in the context of an authentic, Christian community and is oriented as service toward God and others.”³⁰ In the *Invitation to a Journey*, Spiritual formation is defined as “a process of being formed in the image

³⁰ Paul Petitt, *Foundations of Spiritual Formation: A Community Approach to Becoming Like Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2008), 19.

of Christ for the sake of others.”³¹ The author amplifies what the “sake of others” means by asserting, “There can be no wholeness in the image of Christ which is not incarnate in our relationships with others, both in the body of Christ and in the world.”³² Also, *Spiritual Formation in Theological Perspective*, defines Spiritual Formation as “our continuing response to the reality of God’s grace shaping us into the likeness of Jesus Christ, through the work of the Holy Spirit, in the community of faith, for the sake of the world.”³³ Furthermore, the author of the book *Christian Spiritual Formation* defines Spiritual formation as “the ongoing, interactive and grace-based process of being conformed to the image of Jesus through the indwelling Holy Spirit, within the community of faith, in order to bear fruit that glorifies the Father.”³⁴ In other words, human beings are created in God’s image to participate in a mutual love relationship with God and others, through which the Holy Spirit spiritually shapes them into the likeness of Christ. The more they submit themselves to God, the more they become like Christ.³⁵

Spiritual Disciplines: To emphasize the importance of spiritual disciplines in a Christian’s life, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* defines spiritual disciplines as “those practices found in Scripture that promote spiritual growth among believers in the gospel of Jesus Christ.”³⁶

³¹ Barton and Mulholland Jr., *Invitation to a Journey*, 16.

³² *Ibid.*, 21.

³³ Jeffrey P. Greenman, “Spiritual Formation in Theological Perspective,” *Life in the Spirit: Spiritual Formation in Theological Perspective*, (2010): 24.

³⁴ Chandler, *Christian Spiritual Formation*, 70.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2014), 4.

Theological Education: Citing from Ephesians 4:13-16, *Theology, Church, and Ministry* explains that “Theological education is an effort to equip ministers and church leaders for the building up of the church.”³⁷ He affirms that sound theological education fosters the maturity of the believers, strengthening the *heart, head, and hands* and culminating in the praise and exaltation of God.³⁸

Sanctification: Highlighting the part of redemptive work exhibited in sanctification, Wayne Grudem defines sanctification as “a progressive work of God and man that makes us more and more free from sin and like Christ in our actual lives.”³⁹ He explains that sanctification is a continuous process in one’s Christian life.⁴⁰ Also, in *Christian Theology*, sanctification is defined as the “continuing work of God in the life of believers, making them actually holy.” The author affirms that “sanctification is the Holy Spirit’s applying to the life of the believer the work done by Jesus Christ.”⁴¹

Godliness: To emphasize the significance of the practice of spiritual disciplines, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* defines godliness as “both closeness to Christ and conformity to Christ, a conformity that’s both inward and outward, a growing conformity to both the heart of Christ and the life of Christ.”⁴²

³⁷ David S. Dockery, *Theology, Church, and Ministry: A Handbook for Theological Education* (Nashville, TN: Academic, 2017), 19.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 746.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 747.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines*, 9.

Biblical inerrancy. According to *Systematic Theology*, “The inerrancy of Scripture means that Scripture in the original manuscripts does not affirm anything that is contrary to fact.”⁴³ In other words, “the Bible always tells the truth, and that it always tells the truth concerning everything it talks about.”⁴⁴ The author clarifies, “This definition does not mean that the Bible tells us every fact there is to know about any one subject, but it affirms that what it does say about any subject is true.”⁴⁵

Limitations

The research process contains issues beyond the researcher's control, hence the need to identify them. Indeed, participation in this DMIN project is voluntary. The participants are not obligated to do what they feel uncomfortable doing. Each participant is free to discontinue participation before the end of the sessions. They are at liberty to skip some questions. Also, participants may encounter family, work, or other emergencies that could prevent them from attending a session. These limitations are beyond the control of the researcher. Another limitation is the sampling method. The researcher will use a purposeful sampling method to select participants, which has the potential for sampling error.

Delimitations

The participants in the study are limited to adult women of CFC from ages 19 to 69. The selection will include students, single and married individuals, and church officers. These people

⁴³ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 91.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

must have been a member of CFC for at least two years. In addition, participation is limited to those who understand and write English.

Thesis Statement

Equipping Christians for the Kingdom task that Christ mandates in Matthew 28:18-20 is the local church's responsibility. This equipping involves exposure to sound doctrine and spiritual practices that through the operation of the Holy Spirit transform the believers into the likeness of Christ. Becoming Christlike entails, participation in the Kingdom assignment, the cultivation of Christ-centered love relationships within the community of faith, and other affairs that bring glory to God's name. Thus, spiritual formation is not an option for a believer, it is a lifestyle that must be developed and nurtured. Given this necessity, this researcher argues that if the adult female members of CFC genuinely participate in the proposed theological training and spiritual exercises, then, through the power of the Holy Spirit, they will experience spiritual formation.

CHAPTER 2: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

To complete a DMIN thesis project that contributes to the existing body of knowledge, it is essential to be acquainted with the studies and discussions in the academic arena. Therefore, a literature review involves the analysis of related themes that emerge and identifying gaps in the current theological/biblical study, including the practice of spiritual disciplines. Thus, during the study of the relevant works related to spiritual formation in a local church, the following applicable literature is utilized: the necessity of spiritual disciplines to spiritual formation, the link between Christian education and spiritual formation, the holistic nature of the spiritual

formation, the Holy Spirit's participation in the formation process, and the gradual process of spiritual formation.

Literature Review

Lack of spiritual formation is a struggle that various local churches are encountering.⁴⁶ Such deficiency contributes to problems that manifest among adult women members of CFC. If not addressed, the issue will hinder the church from accomplishing its intended purpose. Hence, the pursuit of this action research project. The Word of God possesses a transformative power, and when adequately studied, taught, and lived, it will, through the involvement of the Holy Spirit, transform the hearts of the learners. Furthermore, throughout biblical times and church history, the practice of biblical spiritual disciplines has been known for godliness. The following sections will explore these issues.

The Necessity of Spiritual Disciplines to Spiritual Formation

One must understand the place of formation in the Christian ministry to grasp the importance of the spiritual disciplines in a believer's spiritual life. Indeed, spiritual formation is vital to the church because it is indispensable to Christ's assignment. In Matthew 28:19-20, Jesus commissioned all churches to be disciple-makers worldwide.⁴⁷ Therefore, one of the main activities of the Christian ministry is to make and grow Jesus' disciples. However, to be effective in discipleship, one must first become a disciple. A disciple of Christ is a person who lives like Him and is like Him. Being like Christ necessitates practicing the disciplines he engaged in and

⁴⁶ Ruth Haley Barton, Diane J Chandler, Siang-Yang Tan, Judith K. TenElshof and Jim Wilhoit, "Spiritual Formation in the Church," *Journal of Spiritual Formation & Soul Care* 7, no. 2 (Fall 2014): 298.

⁴⁷ Scott Aniol, "Practice Makes Perfect: Corporate Worship and the Formation of Spiritual Virtue," *Journal of Spiritual Formation & Soul Care* 10, no. 1 (Spring 2017): 93.

even more because He is God and human beings are not. Hence, they are disposed to many weaknesses and character flaws.⁴⁸ Transformation into the image of Christ is key to effective discipleship. “To have something to offer the world, believers must be different from the world.”⁴⁹

Understanding the meaning of the image of Christ is vital in the Christian’s spiritual life. Frequently, people perceive the image of Christ as something foreign to human beings that God wants to append to their life, something that had never existed in them. Nonetheless, Christ’s image is the fulfillment of the profound longing of the human heart for wholeness. Human beings strive to fill this intense yearning for completeness with insufficient substitutes.⁵⁰ Indeed, Christ’s image provides “cleansing, healing, restoration, renewal, transformation, and wholeness into the unclean, diseased, broken, imprisoned, dead incompleteness of our lives. It brings compassion in place of indifference, forgiveness in place of resentment, kindness in place of coldness, openness in place of protective defensiveness or manipulation, a life lived for God and not self.”⁵¹

The New Testament consistently stresses that God seeks to perform the following work in the believers to reshape them into the likeness of Christ: First, 2 Corinthians 3:18 states, “But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image...”; second, Ephesians 4:13 reads, “till we all come to the unity of the

⁴⁸ Beverly Vos, “The Spiritual Disciplines and Christian Ministry,” *Evangelical Review of Theology* 36, no. 2 (2012):101-102.

⁴⁹ Truls Akerlund, “To Live Lives Worthy of God: Leadership and Spiritual Formation in 1 Thessalonians 2: 1-12,” *Journal of Spiritual Formation & Soul Care* 9, no.1, (2016): 34.

⁵⁰ Barton and Mulholland Jr., *Invitation to a Journey*, 42.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

faith...to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ”; and third, Colossians 3:9-10 asserts, “..., since you have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him.”⁵² Furthermore, Paul makes a profound declaration in Ephesians 1:3-6 regarding the believers’ relationship to Christ’s image. There, the focus is that before the foundation of the world, God chose the believers to be holy and blameless before Him in love. The people of God were created to be holy in their existence and to be people of complete integrity in their dealings. To attain this wholeness of life, God enriches His people in Christ with abundant spiritual blessing in the Heavenly places. In all its uniqueness, the believers' life is encompassed in detail with all spiritual blessings of God’s order of completeness and life.⁵³ Furthermore, loving God, loving Jesus, and loving one another is the test for holiness in John’s Gospel.⁵⁴

The primary purpose of practicing spiritual disciplines is to be like Jesus. The practice of the disciplines can be done personally (for example Bible study, Prayer, Worship, Evangelism, Serving, Stewardship, Fasting, Silence, Solitude, Journaling, and learning) or interpersonally—Bible Study, Prayer, Worship, Evangelism, Serving, Fasting, and learning. Either way, both are taught in the Scripture as means of blessings for Christ’s followers and are necessary for growing in godliness. Personal spiritual disciplines are those practices that are done alone by an individual. On the other hand, interpersonal disciplines are practiced with other people. Although personal spiritual disciplines are stressed more regularly in most spiritual maturity literature, they

⁵² Barton and Mulholland Jr., *Invitation to a Journey*, 42-43.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 43.

⁵⁴ Dirk G. Van der Merwe, “Conceptualising Holiness in the Gospel of John (Part 1) The Mode and Objectives of Holiness,” *HTS Theological Studies* 73, no. 3 (2017): 7.

are not more important than interpersonal disciplines.⁵⁵ Each has a place. For instance, a believer should read and study the Scripture alone (personal disciplines); however, they should participate in hearing and learning God's Word in the church (interpersonal disciplines). Also, a believer should privately worship God and be involved in worshipping Him publicly with other Christians. Some disciplines are naturally practiced personally, such as journaling, solitude, and fasting, though Christians sometimes participate in congregational fasting. Other disciplines are solely congregational, such as fellowship, listening to the preaching of Scripture, and partaking in the Lord's Supper. All these practices require the presence of individuals.⁵⁶

Indeed, Christ himself was no stranger to the practice of these disciplines. He practiced personal and interpersonal disciplines on different occasions, recorded in Matthew 4:1, 14:23, Mark 1:35, and Luke 4:42, 4:16. Hence, imitating Christ's spirituality is essential to Christian spirituality. Prayer was a significant part of Jesus' everyday spirituality. His ability to overcome temptation, though not a spiritual discipline, comes from His prayer pattern and mastery of the Scripture. Jesus's knowledge of the Scripture resulted from His regular study and memorization of Israel's sacred Scripture, which He was taught at home and in the synagogue. In fact, Jesus exhibited this proficiency in the biblical text during His ministry, for He was consistently able to easily cite them to respond to the accusations from His adversaries.⁵⁷

Furthermore, Jesus habitually visited the synagogue (Luke 4:16, NKJV). He also regularly participated in the Temple worship in Jerusalem during the annual feasts. Such

⁵⁵ Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines*, 5.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ Leslie T Hardin, "The Quest for the Spiritual Jesus: Jesus and the Spiritual Disciplines," *Stone-Campbell Journal* 15, no. 2 (Fall 2012): 217, 220-223.

participation allowed Him to proclaim the Kingdom's message and challenge the Temple leaders. Wherever Jesus went, He preached the coming of God's Kingdom, which was the essence of His being. He went from the synagogue to the Temple, to the Upper Room, and amid crowds in open places, heralding the arrival of the Kingdom. In addition to evangelism, Jesus routinely had fellowship meals with diverse people. Contrary to the culture of Jesus' day, where seating arrangements at the table were made based on the guests' status, Jesus welcomed everyone to His table regardless of their importance.⁵⁸ These personal and interpersonal disciplines and more formed the regular activities in Christ's spirituality. Jesus was not alone in His spiritual practices, Paul the apostle also had regimens that allowed the Spirit of God to manifest in his life and ministry.

The most prominent parts of Paul's spirituality are his practice of prayer and evangelism. Given his background as a Pharisee (Acts 23:6, NKJV), he learned to pray from an early age. As an apostle of Jesus, the content of his prayers was primarily concerned with categories centered around and shaped by the gospel, whether for the maturity of his converts or for seeking direction on the next steps in his evangelistic ministry.⁵⁹ The proclamation of the gospel was central to Paul's spirituality. Also included in his spirituality are, commitment to scriptural authority, participation in corporate worship, disciple-making, practice of a holy lifestyle, and utilization of spiritual gifts.⁶⁰ Indeed, spiritual practices provide avenues for worshiping God, fostering communion, and growth in godliness.⁶¹

⁵⁸ Hardin, "The Quest for the Spiritual Jesus," 224-225.

⁵⁹ Leslie T. Hardin, "Is a Pauline Spirituality Still Viable?," *Journal of Spiritual Formation & Soul Care* 8, no. 2 (Fall 2015): 138.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 138-142.

The importance of balancing personal and interpersonal disciplines can hardly be overstated. Some people may gravitate toward individual disciplines, while others lean more toward interpersonal disciplines. One of the factors that influence those that favor personal disciplines more is the belief that they can be everything God wants them to be, independent of the local church, just by practicing individual disciplines religiously. On the other hand, those that embrace interpersonal disciplines more wrongly believe that they would attain sufficient spiritual growth if they were staunchly involved in their church affairs, with the notion that such involvement will make up for the deficiency in their personal devotional life. Indeed, leaning too far toward one's inclination will push them off balance and distort their quest for holiness. Although the believers are individuals, they are also part of the church.⁶² Spiritual formation is not essentially about mastering spiritual techniques or increasing one's determination to be ever more devout in their devotional practices. It is about the gracious gift of participation through faith in the life and mission of the triune God.⁶³ Thus, the Christian life centers on Christ.⁶⁴

Understanding the distinction between biblical and non-biblical spiritual disciplines is crucial to the practice of various disciplines. Biblical spiritual disciplines consist of those practices taught or modeled in the Scripture. Conversely, those practices not instructed or displayed in the Bible are non-biblical. This distinction sets the parameter for Christians to guard

⁶¹ Diane J. Chandler, "Whole-person Formation: An Integrative Approach to Christian Education," *Christian Education Journal* 12, no 2 (Fall 2015): 319.

⁶² Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines*, 5-6.

⁶³ Jeannine Michelle Graham, "Systematic Theology and Spiritual Formation: Recovering Obscured Unites," *Journal of Spiritual Formation & Soul Care* 7, no. 2 (2014): 187.

⁶⁴ John Coe, "Resisting the Temptation of Moral Formation: Opening to Spiritual Formation in the Cross and the Spirit," *Journal of Spiritual Formation & Soul Care* 1, no. 1 (2008): 57.

against other spiritual practices often mistaken for authentic biblical practices.⁶⁵ The spiritual disciplines promoted in the Scripture are sufficient for knowing and encountering God and transforming into the likeness of Christ. This assertion was made because the entire Scripture is God-inspired, beneficial for divine instruction, rebuke, restoration, and training in godliness, and that the servant of God may be complete and thoroughly equipped for godly living (2 Timothy 3:16-17, NKJV). Since the Scripture is divinely inspired, Christians must be whole and fortified for every good work, including the excellent work of going after godliness. Given this assertion, any practice an individual might claim to perform for spirituality that is not biblically supported is unnecessary. The Bible could have recorded it if it were warranted.⁶⁶

It is necessary to recognize that spiritual disciplines are not the end of the goal; instead, they are a means to reach the goal. The practice of these disciplines creates an atmosphere and occasion for the Holy Spirit to work in the believers' lives. Although, some stay away from personal disciplines because of fear that it may lead them to legalism. Granted, this could happen, but that should not deter a Christian from practicing them.⁶⁷ Spiritual disciplines provide opportunities for the transformation of individuals from the inside out. It is a process of building depth in a person's life.⁶⁸ Indeed, without transformation, one's spirituality is static.⁶⁹ There is no

⁶⁵ Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines*, 6-7.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁶⁷ Pettit, *Foundation of Spiritual Formation*, 48.

⁶⁸ Davin J Carr-Chellman and Michael Kroth, "The Spiritual Disciplines as Practices of Transformation," *International Journal of Adult Vocational Education and Technology* 8, no. 1 (January-March 2017): 24.

⁶⁹ Christo Lombaard, "Biblical Spirituality and Transformation," *In die Skriflig* 49, no. 2 (2015): 2.

way to circumvent this responsibility because godly people throughout Christian history have been spiritually disciplined individuals from the biblical era to the present.⁷⁰

Getting involved in spiritual practices is not a blueprint for transformation but a continuous encounter with the mystery of one's relationship with God. Self-determination alone does not guarantee an individual's communion with God. Indeed, spiritual practice can turn to bondages of work that misunderstand the reason for practicing the presence of God if embarked through the flesh instead of the means of the spirit.⁷¹ A perfect example of this approach was the mindsets of the teachers of the law and the Pharisees of Jesus' day. However, when driven from a clean heart to commune with God, spiritual practices become an avenue for the Holy Spirit to work intensely in the human heart, moving a person further into worship through a mutual love relationship.⁷² In fact, the crucial choice to follow Jesus and to abide in Him establishes moving a spiritual journey of sanctification.⁷³

The Link Between Christian Education and Spiritual Formation

The importance of Christian doctrine as a belief and practice can be attributed to several factors. According to the Scripture, Christian maturity and leadership responsibilities are associated with sound doctrine.⁷⁴ First of all, one of the goals of the Scripture for spiritually healthy believers and healthy churches is so that they "may no longer be children, tossed to and

⁷⁰ Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines*, 10.

⁷¹ Chandler, *Christian Spiritual Formation*, 70.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Dirk G. Van der Merwe, "Conceptualising Holiness in the Gospel of John (Part 2) The en route to and Character of Holiness," *HTS Theological Studies* 73, no. 3 (2017): 10.

⁷⁴ Gregg R. Allison, *50 Core Truths of the Christian Faith: A Guide to Understanding and Teaching Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2018), 2.

fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes” (Ephesians 4:14, NKJV). At least in part, Christian maturity is measured by the acceptance of sound doctrine and the rejection of false doctrine. Good theology is the hallmark of growing Christians and churches.⁷⁵ Furthermore, in Ephesians 4:12, Paul speaks of teaching to equip the believers for ministry work. In training, believers move toward a mature faith that has full knowledge of God’s Son and toward the unity of the faith. To attain the maturity described in Ephesians 4, the church needs a carefully articulated theological foundation to move it from instability and gullibility to wisdom, trust, and discernment.⁷⁶ In 1 Timothy 1:3-6, Paul presents a vision of Christian instruction that, when structured for its appropriate object and ends, teaches God’s self-giving plan for the world as the gospel reveals and forms people to love both God and neighbor.⁷⁷ The importance of Christian education in the formation process can never be overemphasized. Spiritual formation detached from Christian education gradually loses sight of the significance of the scriptural narrative and a sound doctrinal foundation from which to approach the formational undertaking. Christian education furnishes vital insights into the type of learning and growth, curriculum development, group dynamics, and educational practices.⁷⁸

Concerning the responsibilities of the church leadership, leaders must embrace and practice sound doctrine and be capable of refuting those who oppose it. Church leaders are

⁷⁵ Allison, *50 Core Truths*, 2.

⁷⁶ Dockery, *Theology, Church, and Ministry*, 18.

⁷⁷ Seth Heringer, “Beginning with the End: 1 Timothy 1:3-6 and Formative Theological Education,” *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 15, no. 2 (2021): 366.

⁷⁸ David Setran and Jim Wilhoit, “Christian Education and Spiritual Formation: Recent History and Future Prospects,” *Christian Education Journal* 17, no. 3 (2020): 542.

typified by sound theology.⁷⁹ Paul clarified these tasks to Timothy and Titus. To Timothy, he instructs that good minister is trained in the truth of the Scripture and of sound theology that they have followed (1 Timothy 4:6, NKJV). To Titus, he informs that leaders of the church must be faithful to the truth they learned, be able to teach sound doctrine, and be ready to defend it (Titus 1:9, NKJV). These instructions emphasize the importance of teaching the faith and living the faith.⁸⁰ Indeed, “Truth to be lived must first be known and understood and the truth is the Word of God.”⁸¹

It is crucial to recognize that theological education is not just about mastering a set doctrine or memorizing the scriptures. Nor should it be considered merely the accumulation of skills or job proficiency. The involvement in God’s life and global work is not determined by how much one knows about Him. It is about knowing Him intimately. Thus, theological education involves more than the presentation of content; it is about the formation of the receivers. It is about participating in intentional and occasionally unintentional practices which shape people as individuals in the community. It is about a person’s transformational journey in response to their accepted call. Individuals are not equipped to participate in God’s mission; they are being formed as they participate. This continuous relationship with God transforms them.⁸²

⁷⁹ Allison, *50 Core Truths*, 2.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Chung Gwan Joo, “Educating for Spiritual Development: An Evangelical Perspective for Today’s Churches,” *ACTS* 50, (2022): 468.

⁸² Kristine Stache, “Formation for the Whole Church: A New/Old Vision of Theological Education in the 21st Century,” *Dialog* 53, no. 4 (Winter 2014): 288.

Christian education is a means of character and spiritual formation if it strips up one's false masks and reveals their true faces that reflect God's glory, faces that present Christ.⁸³

The Word of God is not a mere speech. It is action-driven and possesses a transformative power. God utilizes His Word to accomplish His purpose.⁸⁴ The author of the book of Hebrews describes the Word of God as living and powerful (Hebrews 4:12, NKJV). In Jeremiah 23:29, God likened His Word to fire and a hammer that shatters the rock. Jesus Christ affirms in John 17:17 that God's Word is truth, and He prayed that the disciples be sanctified through it. Furthermore, God declares in Isaiah 55:10-11 that as the water from heaven accomplishes its desired purpose by assisting in providing human bodily needs, so would His Word produce its intended outcomes.

God continuously speaks to every generation through His Word. The Scripture is not merely the accumulation of ancient records that preserves God's Word for exhibition. Instead, it is an active Word issued to human beings by an active God and is relevant to the current generation.⁸⁵ God's Word is lively and perpetual, applicable to every era, and powerful and active consistently in all places. Therefore, it accomplishes God's plan in every generation.⁸⁶

Spiritual transformation occurs through the power of God embedded in His Word. The Word of God holds all power to reform an individual into whom God intends them to be. Church

⁸³ Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "Putting on Christ: Spiritual Formation and the Drama of Discipleship," *Journal of Spiritual Formation & Soul Care* 8, no 2 (2015): 154.

⁸⁴ Allison, *50 Core Truths*, 48.

⁸⁵ John Stott, *Between Two Worlds: The Challenge of Preaching Today* (Grand Rapids, MI: Win. B. Eerdmans, 2017), 70.

⁸⁶ Greg R. Scharf, *Let the Earth Hear His Voice: Strategies for Overcoming Bottlenecks in Preaching God's Word* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing Company, 2015), 30.

history and the history of dispensing God's Word show that transformation hardly happens without God's Word. Given the sacredness of this Word, teachers should be mindful of dispensing it the way God intended. All teachings about transformation should be grounded in the truth of the Scripture.⁸⁷ Therefore for the Scripture to exert its transformative power in the community of God's people, it should be studied, practiced, and understood.⁸⁸

The Holistic Nature of Spiritual Formation

God's work shapes the believers into the likeness of Jesus so that they may become what He created them to be in relationship with Him and other people. As such, in Mark 12:30-31, Christ summarized the entire law in the commandment to love God with one's whole heart, soul, mind, strength and love one's neighbor as oneself.⁸⁹ The reflection of the image of Christ helps in understanding spiritual formation for the sake of other people. It is the image of One that sacrificed himself entirely without restriction for others. This is how the Holy Spirit moves the believers toward wholeness. Anything contrary to that direction is not Christian spiritual formation, and it is not holistic spiritual formation. Instead, it is an illogical formation that is privatized and personalized, a spiritualized form of self-actualization. No matter how appealing that form of spirituality appears on the outside, it is not essential if it is not life-giving, healing, and redemptive for other people.⁹⁰

⁸⁷ Petitt, *Foundations of Spiritual Formation*, 254.

⁸⁸ Mark A Maddix, "Rediscovering the Formative Power of Scripture Reading for the Church," *Christian Education Journal* 15, no. 1 (2018): 40.

⁸⁹ Barton and Mulholland Jr., *Invitation to a Journey*, 48-49.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 49.

Human beings are created for union with another.⁹¹ Authentic growth in a relationship with God is most manifested in an ever-deepening ability to love and care for others. This challenge to grow in loving and caring for others is rooted in an individual's understanding of the God they meet in Christ and the nature of God's kingdom. Christ, God who became human, lived this love and taught what He lived. The language of the kingdom of God is self-sacrificing love. Thus, participation in this kingdom necessitates sharing with others the same type of compassion, love, and mercy received from God.⁹²

Furthermore, anywhere in a believer's life that is not shaped in Christ's image, there is an area they are unable to be all that God wants them to be with others, an area in which their life with others is inhibited and restricted in its usefulness and completeness; a place where their life is inclined to become disruptive and even detrimental to other people. Hence, if that unlikeness to Christ's image exists in a believer's life, they are incapable of being everything God wants them to be with others. Specifically, that part of unlikeness to the image of Christ in an individual's life is a place where their association with others is controlled by their own agenda, not by God's will. Thus, they manipulate their interactions with others to impose their agenda on them. However, if the effort fails, they become abusive to others or end the relationship entirely.⁹³

The nature and quality of a believer's relationships with others serve as a great measurement tool for their spiritual growth. The questions to consider are, are they "more loving, more compassionate, more patient, more understanding, more caring, more giving, more

⁹¹ Shane J. Wood, "Interpenetration Logic: Pauline Spirituality and Union with Christ," *Religions* 13, no. 8 (Aug 2022): 5.

⁹² Trevor Hudson, "Relationships: Discipleship that Promotes Another Kind of Life," *Christian Education Journal* 16, no. 1, (2019): 113.

⁹³ Barton and Mulholland Jr., *Invitation to a Journey*, 49-50.

forgiving”⁹⁴ than they were in the previous year? If the Christian cannot respond to these questions affirmatively, mainly if other people cannot attest to it, the believer must carefully evaluate the nature of their spiritual life and development.⁹⁵ The critical issue is that one cannot separate loving God from loving others. They are inseparable.

To emphasize the importance of loving God and others inseparably, John asserts that those that claim to be in the light but despise others are still in darkness. Those who love others dwell in the light; there is no reason to stumble. Also, those who hate others live in darkness and do not know where they are heading because the darkness has covered their eyes (1 John 2:9-11, NKJV). Furthermore, in Galatians 5:6, Ephesians 1:15, Colossians 1:4, 1 Thessalonians 1:3; 3:6; 5:8, 2 Timothy 1:13, and Philemon 1:5, Paul presents it differently when he writes to the churches about their faith in Jesus Christ and their love for others, and notably, in 2 Thessalonians 1:13, he correlates growth in faith with increasing love for other people.⁹⁶ A believer’s relationships with others serve not only as a gauge for their spiritual life but also the places where growth toward Christlikeness occurs. Even though there is an urge to assume that spiritual development happens in the privacy of one’s relationship with God, and then after it is fully developed, they can carry it into their relationships with others and be followers of Christ with them. However, holistic spirituality, the process of being shaped into Christ’s image, occurs amid relationships with others, not separate from them.⁹⁷

⁹⁴ Barton and Mulholland Jr., *Invitation to a Journey*, 50.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 50-51.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

It is essential to recognize that many people envision their spiritual life and development toward becoming like Christ as a relationship between them and God. They hardly place their relationships with others on that level. Thus, relationships with others are viewed as secondary and peripheral to the primary relationship with God. A holistic approach to spiritual growth runs counter to that tendency. If one must be developed holistically into Christ's image, their main focus must be trinitarian—God, self, and others. Every relationship creates an opportunity for transforming experience with God, and each development in the spiritual life has an essential and direct effect in transforming one's relationships with others.⁹⁸ In fact, for the spiritual formation processes or programs to produce their intended outcomes, they should be grounded in trinitarian theology. Spiritual formation is mostly well comprehended through the dynamic trinitarian lens of participation in the relationship of the Son and the Father. Central to this approach is the re-establishment of the role of the resurrected and ascended Christ as the primary agent in a believer's life. As believers participate in specific practices, habits, and attitudes, the Holy Spirit constantly leads them, calling them out of themselves and into the praying and worshipping life of Christ. From this vantage point, the main concern of the Spiritual formation is that the Father-Son relation be translated into the daily life of the believers through the Spirit.⁹⁹

Furthermore, as believers share in Jesus' knowledge of his Father, they experience Him, who is the presence of joy, peace, and love. They begin to encounter overpowering joy, peace, and love through fellowship with Him. Surrounded by this trinitarian context of grace, by which the believers share in the Son's relationship with the Father through the Spirit, human life is

⁹⁸ Barton & Mulholland Jr., *Invitation to a Journey*, 51.

⁹⁹ Geordie W. Ziegler, "Is it Time for a Reformation of Spiritual Formation? Recovering Ontology," *Journal of Spiritual Formation & Soul Care* 11, no. 1 (2018): 76-78.

characterized by participation, which is the fruit of union and communion with Christ. Such participation is centered on and illustrated by Jesus' human existence of knowing and loving the Father who dwells with Him and for Him through the Spirit. The essence and process of the Christian life are participatory communion.¹⁰⁰ Authentic Christian spirituality regards humankind as spiritual beings created in God's image and joining with God in a fallen creation that God plans to redeem completely.¹⁰¹

Holy Spirit's Participation in the Formation Process

Human beings are created in God's image to share a communal love relationship with God and others, through which the Holy Spirit spiritually forms them into Christ's image. The more God gains access to people, the more they resemble Christ. Indeed, the spiritual formation process begins with the Spirit and continues with the Spirit. Hence, the spiritual formation becomes a continuous, interactive, and grace-based process of being shaped into the likeness of Christ by the indwelling Holy Spirit within the church to produce fruit that glorifies the Father.¹⁰² Christ's Spirit is constantly the main agent of transformation for God's people.¹⁰³ This transformation process is viewed as a "Trinitarian" project. It starts with the Trinitarian work of God in the lives of those that genuinely believe in Christ through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit.¹⁰⁴ Without the work of the Holy Spirit in one's spiritual practices for growth, one

¹⁰⁰ Ziegler, "Is it Time for a Reformation?" 76-77.

¹⁰¹ M. Robert Mulholland Jr., "Spiritual Formation in Christ and Mission with Christ," *Journal of Spiritual Formation & Soul Care* 6, no. 1 (Spring 2013): 12.

¹⁰² Chandler, *Christian Spiritual Formation*, 70.

¹⁰³ Emmanuel Durand O.P., "God's Holiness. A Reappraisal of Transcendence," *Modern Theology* 34, no. 3 (July 2018): 433.

¹⁰⁴ Richard E. Averbeck, "Spirit, Community, and Mission: A Biblical Theology for Spiritual Formation," *Journal of Spiritual Formation & Soul Care* 1, no. 1 (2008): 29.

falls into the danger of descending to mere human effort in a self-help scheme. Such an approach denies the inability of humanity to redeem itself and the need for a Savior.¹⁰⁵

The continuing formation of the Holy Spirit reaches its fulfillment at the arrival of God's kingdom. Nevertheless, the work of the Holy Spirit in the believer's life can gradually demonstrate Christ's character.¹⁰⁶ Although the Holy Spirit directs the process of formation, spiritual formation necessitates an individual's cooperation and intention for the maximum result.¹⁰⁷ Importantly, the spiritual formation process is bound by grace. Therefore, irrespective of how well-intentioned, a person is incapable of conforming to Christ's image. Instead, through the continuous receipt of God's grace, they are equipped to embrace God's work in them and concede to the diverse ways chosen to achieve this conforming work.¹⁰⁸ Jesus is the Christian's model of growing in grace. As such, the formation process aims to become more Christlike in all life dimensions. Certainly, the Holy Spirit carries out the sanctifying process, which is expected to be nurtured within the community of God's people.¹⁰⁹

This nurturing involves all the church activities--teaching, learning, preaching, liturgy, and so on. For example, liturgy becomes ineffective, boring, and enslaving without the Holy Spirit's presence. However, the participation of the Holy Spirit makes liturgy God's instrument for spiritual formation.¹¹⁰ Unless today's Christians involve the empowering means of the Holy

¹⁰⁵ Frederick J. De Beer and J A Du Rand, "The Role of Spirituality in Facilitating Personal Development According to the Pauline Corpus," *In die Skriflig* 55, no. 1 (2021): 5.

¹⁰⁶ Chandler, *Christian Spiritual Formation*, 70.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Scott, "Practice Makes Perfect," 99.

Spirit, the divine sanctifying messenger, it is impossible to be shaped into Christ's image. The Holy Spirit's ministry is a crucial connection and transition between Jesus' life and ministry and the Christian's life and ministry. Assuredly, without the empowerment and participation of the Holy Spirit in Jesus' life and ministry, He could not have accomplished His messianic mission and His life example for the Christians.¹¹¹

Furthermore, without the Holy Spirit's involvement in transmitting the Word of God, the teachers or the preachers will not be able to change the hearts of the listeners or learners. Jesus Christ declares that apart from Him, the disciples are incapable of accomplishing anything (John 15:5, NKJV). The Holy Spirit transforms the heart. According to 1 Corinthians 4:1, all that handle God's Word are "servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God."¹¹² To be God's servants and stewards does not diminish one's role as a teacher or a preacher. However, those who handle the Word must recognize that the effectiveness of what they teach or preach is solely dependent on the involvement of the Holy Spirit.¹¹³ What differentiates good communication or excellent communication of the Word entirely depends on the operation of the Holy Spirit in the heart of the audience. Paul's sermon in Philippi, recorded in Acts 16:14 is a perfect example. The audience heard the same message from Paul, but only Lydia seemed transformed.¹¹⁴ Indeed, the Holy Spirit brings people to God and transforms them. In addition, the church exists and matures due to the work of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, being aware of the

¹¹¹ Klaus Issler, *The Formation of Christian Character: Living into the Life of Jesus* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 108.

¹¹² Pettit, *Foundations of Spiritual Formation*, 251.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Keller, *Preaching*, 11. Joe Thorn, *The Heart of the Church: The Gospel's History, Message, and Meaning* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2017): 98.

work of the Holy Spirit in one's salvation and sanctification, including the church's wellness, is the primary step to submitting to the control of the Spirit.¹¹⁵

If Christian education aims to foster the formation and transformation of the learners, the Holy Spirit's presence and ministry are vital and necessary. Christian formation and transformation depend on an indispensable reservoir of Christian truth, knowledge, and wisdom, which can be termed educationally as information. The implicit challenge for the teacher is how to allow the Holy Spirit to take His proper place of leadership. This contemplation of the importance of the Spirit should permeate all phases, from planning to execution. That necessitates the conscious dependence on prayer throughout all the teaching stages and keenness along with meticulous planning to give room for flexibility in teaching practice to allow for the Spirit's guidance.¹¹⁶

The Gradual Process of Spiritual Formation

The relationship of a person's activity to God's transforming grace in their spiritual life may be comprehended by considering the activity involved in physical life and growth. An individual's physical life was given to them through the natural generation and birth; likewise, their spiritual life was bestowed to them through new birth by the Spirit. Just as one's physical life is not of their work; their spiritual life is entirely God's gracious gift. Through the obedience of faith, He opens a person's heart to receive new life in Christ. Such an individual is merely a

¹¹⁵ Allison, *50 Core Truths of the Christian Faith*, 191.

¹¹⁶ Robert W. Pazmino, "Christian Education is More Than Formation," *Christian Education Journal* 7, no. 2 (2010): 358.

receptor of life. Before this gift, the believer was spiritually dead but now alive with the eternal life of God.¹¹⁷

As one's physical life, a believer's new spiritual life commences in infancy and is designed to disclose its reality through growth and maturing progression. Embedded deep in one's heart, the new life begins transforming the whole heart or total life. This process manifests through life activities, thoughts, emotions, and actions. At inception, an individual's obedience to faith only received a new life. However, through continuous and growing faith, a person receives spiritual nutrients that enliven the new life prompting it to grow stronger and increasingly manifest as good works. By the invigorating power of new life, an individual is active in these works, but they are still wholly the effect of the grace of God through faith. Understanding that transformation is entirely by grace through faith does not negate a person's participation in the activities of their life or in obedience to God's Word. God's instructions are part of the avenues through which He operates to activate His life in an individual by calling them to think, feel, and will in accord with His thoughts, feelings, and actions and consequently come to realize His life their experience.¹¹⁸

Furthermore, every activity vital for growth is subject to the nourishment received. The activities of eating, drinking, and breathing that allow an individual to receive external nutrition rely on life-giving air, food, and water they bring into the body. A person would die without this activity that sustains life and stimulates growth. Similarly, with one's spiritual life, as a new living person, an individual become active in the reception and ingestion of nutrients for their spiritual growth. As a newborn, one yawn for the authentic milk of the word for spiritual growth (1 Peter

¹¹⁷ Robert L. Saucy, *Minding the Heart: The Way of Spiritual Transformation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2013), 265-266.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 267, 269.

2:2).¹¹⁹ Underscoring the necessity and the absolute means of invigorating one's spiritual life, Jesus Christ declares in John 6:54-56 that everyone who eats His flesh and drinks His blood has eternal life. For indeed, His flesh is food, and His blood is drink. All that eat and drink of His flesh and blood abides in Him, and He will abide in them. Eating and drinking Christ's body and blood metaphorically symbolizes a person's need to consume through faith the spiritual food of Him that sacrificed His blood for humanity's sin so that they would partake in His resurrection. His nourishing food comes from the consumption and digestion of God's Word, just as one consumes and digests food and drink.¹²⁰

Transformation is a process that began with the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Indeed, God inaugurated His entire plan of new creation when He raised Christ from the dead and called all sorts of people to participate in that project, already here and now. As a result, there are steps one can take that lead to this goal, to the resurrection life within the new creation. These steps are character-transforming. The goal of the Christian life from the point of conversion is the life of a completely formed, flourishing Christian character. Through the risen Christ, this goal is attainable in the present life.¹²¹ Although through the work of Christ, character transformation or the development of healthy Christian life is within reach, it is important to recognize that it does not happen automatically. It is a process that needs to be developed, worked at, and deliberated on to make conscious choices to allow the Holy Spirit to form a person's character in ways that may seem initially uneasy and abnormal.¹²²

¹¹⁹ Saucy, *Minding the Heart*, 268.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 267.

¹²¹ Wright, *After You Believe*, 31-32.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 28.

The formation of character is a slow process. Indeed, forcing character on someone is like forcing a tree to produce fruit when it is not ready. The person must repeatedly decide to develop the moral muscles and skills that will shape and form a flourishing character. This process is likened to meaningful physical training that enables one to run a marathon, walk miles daily, and lift heavy items, which they never previously considered possible. The steady project of working on character strengths and virtues will enable a person to live in a way they never deemed possible, avoiding moral snares and pitfalls, and demonstrating an authentic flourishing life.¹²³

Furthermore, the Scripture did not teach instant growth in strength and formation in one's new life in Christ. Instead, throughout the Scripture, the Christian life is depicted as the growth of a tree. In Psalm 92: 7, 12-14, the psalmist characterizes the growth of the wicked as the grass and the righteous as the palm tree. The grass buds rapidly, but soon the scorching sun kills it. On the other hand, a tree stands firm with deep roots watering and nurturing it. Thus, a tree does not instantly grow to a full height; it takes time to get to that height. Like a tree, one should not be dismayed if their transformation sometimes appears slow. At some points, transformation may appear to stop as the root of a person's new heart reaches deeper into the recesses of the fragments of the old heart that remains and comes to the rocky soil or old patterns which have been there for a while.¹²⁴ Nevertheless, nothing can hinder the transforming power of God's presence in a person's life if they live with a humble heart wide open to His heart, which in His love is fully open to them to grant them everything which relates to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him that called all by glory and virtue.¹²⁵

¹²³ Wright, *After You Believe*, 35.

¹²⁴ Saucy, *Minding the Heart*, 268.

Conclusion

The review shows that Christian education is crucial to an individual's spiritual formation. However, what was apparent is that, for transformation to happen, the teachings must be rooted in the scriptural truth. Therefore, the teacher must thoroughly dissect the truth embedded in the Scripture before transmitting it to the learners. Hence, the maintenance of sound doctrine contributes to the maturity of the learners because the Word of God possesses transformative power. Furthermore, the involvement of the Holy Spirit's ministry in teachings was also underscored. The teacher is responsible for producing and delivering a good theology; however, they must recognize their limitations. Therefore, the leadership of the Holy Spirit is paramount throughout the teaching process.

Furthermore, the review shows that practicing biblical spiritual disciplines is crucial in a believer's Christian life. This importance stems from the fact that many renowned people of God through the ages to the present utilized the practice to attain godliness. Christ himself practiced both individual and corporate disciplines. Paul also did the same. Although Christians are encouraged to engage in these disciplines, they should be mindful of the type of disciplines they practice. Hence, what is noteworthy, is that Christian spiritual disciplines must be biblically supported. In addition, many Christians practice personal spiritual disciplines and neglect communal disciplines. Both individual and corporate disciplines are biblically supported and vital to a believer's growth. Thus, the Christian must balance both approaches to accomplish its intended purpose, recognizing that spiritual formation happens through the Holy Spirit in an

¹²⁵ Saucy, *Minding the Heart*, 294-295.

individual's loving relationships with God and others. For spiritual discipline to be classified as Christian, it must be holistic.

Finally, the review indicates that the Holy Spirit's participation is crucial in all aspects of the spiritual formation process. The formation process originates with the Spirit and continues with the Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the divine sanctifying agent, and for formation to occur, contemporary Christians must embrace His presence. Although believers have some obligations in the formation process, they must yield and be empowered by the Holy Spirit to be fruitful. Without the presence of the Spirit, no spiritual discipline, no amount of theological/biblical teaching, or any other church activities is enough to bring about spiritual formation in a person's life.

Theological Foundations

This section presents the researcher's insights through the biblical-theological interaction. First, some of the passages foundational to Christian spiritual maturity are presented. These include God's holiness, issues about the human heart, and the relationship between the believers. In addition, the commentaries of various theologians and authors on these themes are presented.

The Bible underscores the holiness of God and the command that His people be holy also. In Leviticus 11:44-45, He explicitly informs His people that He is their God; they should purify themselves and be holy because He, their God, is holy. Before the declaration, God instructs His people regarding their dietary and ritual processes in the preceding verses. He distinguishes between clean and unclean food and animals and commands His people to abstain from all unclean things. All these restrictions point to the holiness of God and the requirement

for His people to mimic such attributes.¹²⁶ Although these restrictions signal God’s holiness, but, some Christian interpretations link these dietary commands to Peter’s vision of the sheet full of the mixture of clean and unclean animals in Acts 10:9-16. In verse 15, Peter was instructed not to call common what God has cleansed. This instruction possesses purity language, and the concepts inherent in it are obtained directly from the Holiness Code in Leviticus 17-26. Obedience to the rules of holiness guarantees God’s presence, while disobedience brings God’s punishment. Given this stance, the Jewish opposition toward eating with the Gentiles appears to have been extensive. The words of Acts 10:15 thus certify a change in practice by imputing to God the task of altering these divinely given rules. The narrative indicates that a new understanding of holiness has come into play.¹²⁷

Indeed, holiness is God’s nature. The call for God’s people to replicate His holiness is not a mere idea. Instead, it is an essential quality that gives eternal meaning to serving God.¹²⁸ Thus, those restrictions remind them of God’s holiness, which they are to imitate. In other words, they are being taught to obey God in every aspect of their lives to gain a deeper understanding of the significance of obedience.¹²⁹

Holiness is at the center of one’s relationship with God and people. Holiness brings a believer closer to God and generates a loving relationship with other people. Hence, the book of Hebrews 12:14-15 emphasizes the importance of purity in the Christian life. There, it states,

¹²⁶ MacDonald, *Believer’s Bible Commentary*, 136-137.

¹²⁷ John T. Squires, “Acts” in *Eerdmans, Commentary on the Bible*, ed. James D. Dunn and John W. Rogerson (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 2003), 1235-1236.

¹²⁸ John E. Hartley, *Leviticus, Volume 4: Word Biblical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2018), lxiii. Kindle.

¹²⁹ MacArthur, *The MacArthur Bible Commentary*, 148.

“Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord: looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this, many become defiled.”¹³⁰ This passage underscores the importance of holiness in Christian living.¹³¹ Therefore, anyone that decides to live a sinful life has no guarantee of “seeing the Lord.”¹³² God is invisible; hence no one can see Him. Thus, this “gives the greater force to the biblical use of seeing God as a metaphor for enjoying personal fellowship with Him.” The Psalmist uses this metaphor in Psalm 27:4 to express his desire to be consistently in God’s presence. In Matthew 5:8, Jesus Christ declares it as a reward for those pure in heart. Furthermore, the call for holiness extends beyond the concern for one's purity. Believers must hold one another accountable to prevent anyone from falling short of God’s grace. Believers should be mindful of their lives to give a “testimony of peace and holiness,” and to look out and assist other believers in need of redemption.¹³³

In John 17:17 Jesus Christ affirmed the need for sanctification when He prayed for His disciples’ sanctification. The Greek *hagiazō* (sanctify, consecrate) is used in LXX for separating people and things for sacred use. Through that sanctification, a believer becomes holy and ready for the service of God.¹³⁴ Indeed, God's word purifies the believers and separates them for valuable service in the “present evil world” (Galatians 1:4, NKJV). His word delivered through

¹³⁰ George H. Guthrie, *The NIV Application Commentary: Hebrews* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998), 404.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

¹³² R. T. France, “Hebrews” in *Hebrews—Revelation*, vol. 13, *The Expositors Bible Commentary*, ed. Tremper Longman, III and David Garland (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006), 174.

¹³³ John MacArthur, *The MacArthur Bible Commentary*, 1874.

¹³⁴ Mounce, “John” *Luke—Acts*, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, 604.

His prophets is truthful. The prophet Amos prophesies that a time would come when God “will send a famine on the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD” (Amos 8:11, NKJV). This prophecy is evident in the contemporary world.

“Hungry parishioners are deprived of God’s word and offered as a substitute people’s best thoughts disguised in quasi-religious terms.”¹³⁵ In essence, many people long for God’s word but have been deprived of it.¹³⁶

The contention between God and His people has been what comes out of their hearts. Jeremiah's book states, “The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked; Who can know it (Jeremiah 17:9, NKJV)?” In Isaiah 29:13, the LORD declares that His people honor Him with their lips, but their hearts are far from Him. Indeed, Jesus Christ quoted that passage during His encounter with the Jewish Temple leaders (Matthew 15:8, NKJV). The heart, the conscience of the Christians, in its corrupt and fallen state, is untrustworthy above everything. In fact, unregenerated people are in dire condition without divine grace, hence the need to regenerate the soul through the Holy Spirit and God’s grace.¹³⁷ God affirms in Jeremiah 29:13 that His people will find Him when they approach Him with sincere hearts. Certainly, one that recognizes their need, observes the enriching gift of God, and sets their mind to seek Him, will find Him, if they seek Him wholeheartedly.¹³⁸ This call is amplified in the book of Joel, which states, “...rend your heart, and not your garments; Return to the LORD your God, For He is gracious and merciful, Slow to anger, and of great kindness, And He relents from doing harm” (Joel 2:13,

¹³⁵ Mounce, “John” in *Luke—Acts*, The Expositor’s Bible Commentary, 605.

¹³⁶ MacDonald, *Believer’s Bible Commentary*, 1024.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 925.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 933.

NKJV). Despite the sin of the believers, God has called them to true repentance. This call to repentance must be more than an outside ritual.¹³⁹

The reformation of the inner person to be like Christ is impossible without total dependence on Him. Christ affirms that fact in John 15:5, where He equates His relationship with His people as the vine and its branches. Indeed, “The life of the branch is the life of the vine. The branch has no life of its own. For this reason, it must remain in the vine.”¹⁴⁰ Here, Christ makes a binding promise to all believers that faithfully serve Him. They will be fruitful and not barren. This production of fruit is the outcome of an intimate relationship with Christ. The transformative power emerges from Christ. Paul declares that “...it is the God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Corinthians 4:6, NKJV). God, who created light from the darkness at the creation, will also illuminate the hearts through the knowledge of His glory manifested in Christ. The heart is inspired, purified, and transformed by genuine attention to the Word of God.¹⁴¹

Theoretical Foundations

The Bloom Taxonomy of educational model is among the academic models that have been proven successful in education and other fields and sectors. The researcher decided to employ this model for this action research project due to the model’s longevity and flexibility of usage in other areas, including church-related studies. Significant to this model is its six

¹³⁹ MacDonald, *Believer’s Bible Commentary*, 1015.

¹⁴⁰ Mounce, “John” in *Luke—Acts*, The Expositor’s Bible Commentary, 575.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

hierarchical levels of the learning process. The original model, titled “Taxonomy of Educational Objectives: The Classification of Educational Goals,” was issued in 1956. While its revision, titled, “A Taxonomy for Learning, Teaching, and Assessing: A Revision of Bloom’s Taxonomy of Educational Objectives,” was released in 2001. The reasons for the revision have no significant impact on the original model. The basic concepts of the learning process embedded in the original are still relevant today. Thus, the change the researcher will address is the modification in the six categories. The original model’s learning categories are knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation.¹⁴²

The revision model’s levels are remembering, understanding, applying, analyzing, evaluating, and creating.¹⁴³ Two changes are evident. First, the original model’s categories are presented in noun objectives, whereas the revised model presents them in verb-noun format. Second, level six switched places with the fifth level. These changes have no impact on the objectives of the model. Hence, users have options to use either of the models. For this action research, the researcher will use the original model.

In a recent study, researchers used the six categories of taxonomy to assess the reading comprehension of teenage students. The study found that the students’ skills acquired at the comprehension level provided a solid foundation to move to higher levels quickly. As a result, the researchers suggest that comprehension is the best level for language learning and for developing the higher-order thinking skills of adolescents.¹⁴⁴ These skills equip the students with

¹⁴² Benjamin S. Bloom, *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives--Book 1 Cognitive Domain* (New York: Longman, 1956), 18.

¹⁴³ Lorin W. Anderson & David R. Krathwohl, *A Taxonomy for Learning, Teaching, and Assessing. A Revision of Bloom’s Taxonomy of Educational Objectives* (New York: Longman, 2001), 268.

the capacity to “think critically and creatively,” which are crucial tools they will utilize throughout their lives.¹⁴⁵ In another study, the researchers employed all six elements for developing educational standards and teaching guidelines in e-learning settings to enable learners to accomplish their intended learning goals. Based on their findings, the researchers conclude that it is essential to develop standards and indicators for teaching methods in e-learning environments so that instructors can use them as a practical guide and explain the minimum requirements for implementing effective teaching in virtual learning environments.¹⁴⁶

This conclusion highlights that the taxonomy can be helpful for teaching and learning objectives. Furthermore, another study utilized the first four levels of the taxonomy to determine the level at which the healthcare students demonstrated mastery and the ability to perform at a higher level. The study found that students who master content at the comprehension level are more likely to succeed in learning at the application and analysis levels.¹⁴⁷ This finding shows that Bloom’s taxonomy can effectively assess the students’ learning stages.

In the following study, the researchers utilized the taxonomy to assess the learning success of educational games at the Stellenbosch Learning Factory implemented to remedy the skill shortage gap in South Africa. The result indicates that the games investigated satisfy each

¹⁴⁴ Bozena Horvathova and Lydia Nadovam, “Developing Critical Thinking in Reading Comprehension of Texts for Specific Purposes at All Levels of Bloom’s Taxonomy,” *The Journal of Teaching English for Specific and Academic Purposes* 9, no. 1 (2021): 1, 14-15.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 15.

¹⁴⁶ Nori Barari, Morteza RezaeiZadeh, Abasalt Khorasani, and Farnoosh Alami, “Designing and Validating Educational Standards for E-teaching in Virtual Learning Environments (VLEs), Based on Revised Bloom’s Taxonomy,” *Interactive Learning Environments* (2020): 10.

¹⁴⁷ Anne-Marie A. Verenna, Kim A. Noble, Helen E. Pearson, and Susan M. Miller, “Role of Comprehension on Performance at Higher Levels of Bloom’s Taxonomy: Findings from Assessments of Healthcare Professional Students,” *Anatomical Sciences Education* 11, (2018): 29.

dimension's level 3 and 4 criteria, showing high learning success.¹⁴⁸ Similarly, an Engineering college in India utilized the six levels of the taxonomy to develop and implement better learning strategies for engineering students to generate interest in PLC and Robotics courses. The course takes the students through the real-world application of fundamental concepts. In the end, the research finds that implementing the taxonomy's procedures was effective in the classroom setting, whereby the students' understanding of the concepts improved. In addition, their confidence in applying the knowledge they acquired was equally enhanced.¹⁴⁹ This research utilized the six levels of the taxonomy. However, the outcomes are visible in the first three levels- knowledge, understanding, and application- which are the project's objectives.

Furthermore, church-related training programs have successfully implemented Bloom's taxonomy model. A study designed to monitor the effect of daily Bible reading on the participants' spiritual growth found that such practice fosters spiritual growth.¹⁵⁰ The author utilized all six levels of the taxonomy. For his intervention, he grouped the first two levels (remember and understand) under the framework of knowing the faith. He equates the third and fourth levels (apply and analyze) as growing in faith. At the same time, he characterized the final two groups (evaluate and create) as showing faith.¹⁵¹ Indeed, many at CFC know the faith; however, knowing without doing it is meaningless. In other words, knowledge must produce

¹⁴⁸ M. Henning, D. Hagedorn-Hansen, and K.H. von Leipzig, "Metacognitive Learning: Skills Development Through Gamification at the Stellenbosch Learning Factory as a Case Study," *South African Journal of Industrial Engineering* 28, 3 (2017): 111-112.

¹⁴⁹ Madhuri Gummineni, "Implementing Bloom's Taxonomy Tool for Better Learning Outcomes of PLC and Robotics Course," *International Journal of Emerging Technologies in Learning* 15, no. 5 (2020): 191.

¹⁵⁰ Stephen J. Kimpel, "Information to Transformation: The Implementation and Effects of Sermon-Aligned Daily Bible Study on Spiritual Growth" (D.Min Thesis, Liberty University School of Divinity, 2020), 95. digitalcommons.liberty.edu

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 9.

action for it to be knowledge. In Matthew 25: 14-30, the Lord Jesus Christ used the parable of the talents to emphasize the tragedy of missed opportunity. Each believer bears the responsibility to continue Christ's ministry. Those that desire to make themselves available for God's glory are given the means. The more their level of participation, the more they are enabled to do for Him. Conversely, those who refuse to participate lose the gifts allotted to them for the task.¹⁵²

Believers trapped in the knowledge level are like the servants in Jesus' parable that fail to use their talents. Hence, this action research intervention focuses on the first four levels. The intervention will differ from Kimpel's in a few areas: First, he utilized a sermon-based outline to develop personal Bible studies to assess the biblical literacy of his congregation. This intervention will be conducted in a classroom setting format, plus using a personal reflective journal for the program's reflections. Second, Kimpel used all six taxonomy levels, whereas this intervention will utilize the first four levels. Finally, Kimpel used the revised Bloom-Anderson taxonomy, while this intervention will utilize the original model.

Another research employed the first four levels for intervention, and the result showed growth after the participants completed the training. The participants went from below fifty percent confidence in Bible knowledge, motivation, and effectiveness at the start of the program to the upper seventy-fifth percentile at the end of the program.¹⁵³ A measurable model in conjunction with spiritual disciplines is feasible in the church arena. This helps to decipher where the participants are in their spiritual growth and the areas where assistance is needed. Like Mathew's, this intervention focuses on tracking the participants' progress in spiritual growth.

¹⁵² Macdonald, *Believer's Bible Commentary*, 1222-1223.

¹⁵³ Steven Hugh Mathews, "A Spiritual Disciplines-Based Discipleship Curriculum for the Local Church" (D.Min Thesis, Liberty School of Theology, 2005), 95. digitalcommons.liberty.edu

Two other similarities exist. First, this intervention focuses on the first four levels and Mathew's. Second, this intervention will use Likert scales and surveys, like Mathew's. One difference is that the Likert scale will not involve a yes/no or true/false question format, which Mathew utilized in his; it will focus on statements where the participants select one item from five options (strongly agree, agree, undecided, disagree, and strongly disagree) on the scale.

The longevity and proven success of Bloom's taxonomy are evident. Many establishments continue to implement it. Given these benefits, the researcher deems it appropriate for this action research project. It will provide the opportunity to measure the participants' level of growth in their spiritual life. Such awareness will help the researcher to make recommendations where necessary.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Spiritual formation, which is transforming into the image of Christ,¹⁵⁴ is required of all Christ followers. Although the process begins inward with a believer, its fruit appears outward through a change in their character.¹⁵⁵ This change influences the way a believer interacts with other believers. Many adult women members of CFC struggle with spiritual maturity, which manifests in an unloving way; they interact with one another. Indeed, they are good at memorizing and reciting passages of Scripture and other good deeds; however, their interactions with each other do not demonstrate the attributes expected of those living the Christian faith. The community of God's people is one body with Christ as the Head, and all members constitute the various parts of that body. Hence, the well-being and wholeness of this body depend on the

¹⁵⁴ Pettit, *Foundations of Spiritual Formation*, 32.

¹⁵⁵ Wright, *After You Believe*, 28-29.

operations of each part. Likewise, CFC is one body in which Christ is the Head. If some parts of that body are not playing their functions effectively, the entire church, including Christ, will be affected. The CFC becomes ineffective in executing the task that Christ assigned to all churches to evangelize the world. To effectively execute that task, through the power of the Holy Spirit, CFC must endeavor to develop members that are Christlike. The primary goal of all churches, including CFC is to develop believers that are transformed into Christ's image.¹⁵⁶

As indicated previously, many adult members of CFC are not operating in a Christlike manner that will foster their spiritual growth and the growth of the church. To address this problem, seven-week theological training and spiritual discipline exercises for the adult women members of CFC were employed. For the intervention, the researcher utilized *Bloom's* Taxonomy of Educational Objectives for assessment purposes. The hierarchical model has six cognitive learning process levels: knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. Research shows that diverse fields and sectors have successfully implemented the model. Although the model contains six levels, the researcher only used the first four levels for this action research project intervention. The reasons for this decision are presented in the following section. For data collection, the researcher utilized a questionnaire, participants' journals, and the researcher's observation notes.

Intervention Design

Bloom's Taxonomy Description

As defined by Benjamin S. Bloom, knowledge concerns the recall of specifics and universals, usually pertaining to "pattern, structure, or setting."¹⁵⁷ The recollection process

¹⁵⁶ Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*, 247.

involves the organization of materials in a manner that provides cues to participants that enables them to remember the knowledge they acquired. Hence, in an assessment situation dealing with knowledge, the user makes some arrangements and rearranges the problem, which will furnish the proper signals for the information and knowledge the participant possesses.¹⁵⁸ Knowledge is essential; however, it will quickly be forgotten when it fails to attain its purpose. Put differently, unused knowledge is no knowledge. Hence, to produce any transformative effect, knowledge must embrace action.

While knowledge level deals with the process of recalling acquired information, the comprehension level relates to a student's understanding of what is being communicated and ability to use the material or concept without necessarily linking it to other material or seeing its complete implications.¹⁵⁹ Essentially, at this level, the student has acquired skills in organizing and reorganizing material to achieve a particular purpose.¹⁶⁰

At the application level, the student utilizes ideas and concrete situations. This may be in the form of common ideas, rules of procedures, or established methods. It may also be technical rules and concepts that must be remembered and applied.¹⁶¹ Bloom affirms that application objectives are an important part of the general curriculum since most of what individuals learn is intended to be applied to real-life problem situations. Comprehension of abstraction does not

¹⁵⁷ Bloom, *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives*, 201.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 204.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 205.

mean the learner can apply it correctly without practice.¹⁶² The effectiveness of understanding is applying it correctly in a real-world given situation.

The analysis level focuses on breaking a given material into its constituent parts and determining their relationships and how they relate to one another. That may also refer to the methods and devices used for conveying meaning and establishing a conclusion of the communication.¹⁶³ Analysis skill is vital in every field of study because it enables students to distinguish facts from fiction, distinguish pertinent information from irrelevant material, to decipher the relationship among various ideas.¹⁶⁴ Undoubtedly, this skill is crucial in Christian education because for a believer to properly decode biblical/theological issues that will enable them to mature, such skill with the empowerment of the Holy Spirit is needed.

Delving into the synthesis level, Bloom defines synthesis as the “putting together of elements and parts to form a whole.”¹⁶⁵ In this process, elements, parts, and other items are combined in such a way as to create a pattern or structure that was not visible previously. Usually, the process combines parts of previous experience with new materials, reassembling them into a new, integrated whole. This is the category in the cognitive domain whereby learners are most likely to engage in creative behavior.¹⁶⁶ At this juncture, the learner has developed the skills and abilities to take things learned and create a new product to transfer to others. A

¹⁶² Bloom, *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives*, 122.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 144.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 162.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

believer in this category can properly dissect biblical/theological matters to produce programs that will stimulate discipleship, apologetics, and other church ministries.

The evaluation level, which is the last level, is the “making of judgments about the value, for some purpose, of ideas, works, solutions, methods, material, etc.”¹⁶⁷ This function uses criteria and standards to assess the degree to which particulars are accurate, effective, economical, or satisfactory.¹⁶⁸ Bloom explains that although evaluation is the last category, it is not automatically the final phase in thinking and problem-solving. There is a possibility that, in some instances, the evaluative process serves as the prelude to gaining new knowledge, a new attempt at comprehension or application, or a new analysis and synthesis.¹⁶⁹ The user can use an evaluative process at all levels, depending on the purpose of the communication or objective.

As indicated previously, the researcher will utilize only the first four categories of this model: knowledge, comprehension, application, and analysis. Primarily, the educational objectives of the user of this model set the tone of which levels to employ. According to Bloom, educational purposes must correlate with the psychology of learning. In essence, “The faculty must distinguish goals that are feasible from goals that are unlikely to be attained in the time available, under the conditions which are possible, and with the group of students to be involved.”¹⁷⁰ Thus, given the amount of time (seven weeks) allotted for this action research project’s intervention, the researcher deemed it unrealistic to utilize the entire levels of the model. Moreover, the main objective of this research was to implement an intervention that will

¹⁶⁷ Bloom, *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives*, 186.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 27.

foster spiritual maturity in the participants' lives. Since genuine spiritual maturity is a continuous and sometimes arduous process,¹⁷¹ the participants will continue their growth after the intervention. Through the help of the Holy Spirit, such continuity will enable them to attain higher levels of maturity that will propel them to embark on the task of formulating programs to be used in discipleship, apologetics, and other church responsibilities. The vital issue was to get them on track to genuine spiritual maturity.

The theological training and spiritual discipline teaching will bring the participants to the first two levels of the taxonomy, that is, knowledge and comprehension. With each theme discussed, the participants could do three things. First, some may utilize the teachings to recall the knowledge of that theme stored away in their memory bank; second, some may perceive the theme as new and seize the opportunity to enhance their knowledge; and third, all the participants would have the opportunity to gain a better understanding of the theme. Such an acquisition will put them on track to level three, the application stage. To be exposed to that level, the participants practiced one spiritual discipline weekly with instructions on implementing the practice. This continuous exercise would boost their confidence to keep practicing the knowledge they acquired. As they continue this level, level four is right beside it. One of the assignments that the participants completed was journaling. The purpose of this process was for the participants to keep track of their various spiritual encounters as they practiced their spiritual disciplines and participated in theological/biblical training. The tracking entailed serious deliberation that prompts the participants to try and relate their experiences with what they learned to decipher its validity. At this juncture, they were at the analysis level because the

¹⁷¹ Saucy, *Minding the Heart*, 266.

experiences gained from the application equipped them to distinguish facts from falsehood. The outcome of the analysis impacted their responses to the final questionnaire, which they completed after the last session.

The researcher believes that the participants will gain a deeper understanding of theological and spiritual disciplines' issues after the intervention. Currently, the CFC members are good at reading and memorizing the scriptures, which is an excellent practice. However, accumulating biblical knowledge without putting it into practice defeats the purpose of embracing God's Word. Reading and memorizing the scriptures should not be the end of a means. Instead, it should be a means to an end. The Word of God is transformative and powerful.¹⁷² Thus, when engaged sincerely and appropriately, it must make a transparent impact on the lives of those engaged.¹⁷³ The writer of the Hebrew text underscores this fact by affirming that "...the Word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart" (Hebrews 4:12, NKJV). God's Word possesses the ability to break through a superficial religion to an inner, spiritual reality. Rather than dealing with externals like religious adherence, the penetrating word weighs the thoughts of the heart.¹⁷⁴

God's Word cannot lie; those participants that go the intervention as instructed will experience spiritual growth. Since the Holy Spirit is responsible for fostering growth, He will empower them to actively participate in Christ's work by reaching others in a manner that

¹⁷² Allison, *50 Core Truths*, 48.

¹⁷³ Ibid.,

¹⁷⁴ Guthrie, *The NIV Application Commentary: Hebrew*, 156.

replicates the image of Christ. That includes their relationship with one another in the church. This observable transformation will serve as an impetus to invest in theological training and spiritual discipline programs. The evidence of a believer's spiritual formation is a change in their character, which will reflect in one's behavior toward others.

Target Population and project setting

For this project, purposeful sampling was employed for participants' recruitment. This sampling process selects individuals who are aware of the situation and meets the criteria and attributes necessary for one's research.¹⁷⁵ The rationale and power of purposeful sampling hinge on selecting "information-rich" cases for extensive study. "Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of vital importance to the purpose of the inquiry, thus the term purposeful sampling. Studying information-rich cases yields insights and in-depth understanding rather than empirical generalization."¹⁷⁶ Purposeful sampling is purpose-driven. For instance, the purpose of this thesis project was to design an intervention program that assists in facilitating the spiritual maturity of the adult women of CFC. Hence, when selecting the project's participants, the researcher focused on members who have been around for a certain period and are aware of the situation to be investigated.

Furthermore, purposeful sampling is equivalent to purposive sampling. For researchers, it is a matter of preference. Sensing uses purposive sampling in his book, while Patton is purposeful. One of the reasons Patton ceased using purposive was for clear communications to individuals that are not researchers. Individuals that are not researchers could find the word

¹⁷⁵ Tim Sensing, *Qualitative Research: A Multi-Methods Approach to Projects for Doctor of Ministry Theses* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011), 83.

¹⁷⁶ Michael Quinn Patton, *Qualitative Research & Evaluation Methods, Fourth Edition* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 2015), 264.

purposive awkward because it is not generally used in everyday conversation.¹⁷⁷ Indeed, this researcher shares the same sentiment with Patton because the aim of human communication should be to communicate in a manner suitable to the intended audience so that they can easily grasp what is being communicated and respond appropriately.

The participants' recruitment process for this thesis project began after the Institutional Review Board's approval. The researcher contacted twenty-six potential participants that met the criteria specified for participation eligibility. This consisted of CFC adult women, ages 19 to 69, that have been members for two years or more. Contacts were made both by phone and in person. All received a recruitment letter that explained the purpose of the research, the researcher's school, the anticipated degree, the eligibility parameter, the duration of the research, the activities to be performed, and the voluntary nature of participation. In addition, the letter stated that participation would be anonymous, and they would receive a consent document that contained additional information about the research. Subsequently, eleven people agreed to participate. But, later, one withdrew because she specifically told the researcher she would withdraw from participation if two individuals she considered her adversaries would participate. The researcher told her that all eligible participants were free to participate, including those two that she mentioned. Then, she indicated that she was withdrawing from participation. All effort was made to make her grasp the harm that harboring such animosity would do to her spiritual life, but she refused to change her mind. Instead, she responded that her spiritual life is sound because she has a "good relationship with God and that God speaks to her. She prays meditatively and fast often. She reads the Bible, reads lots of books on various prayer patterns

¹⁷⁷ Patton, *Qualitative Research & Evaluation Methods*, 265.

and Christian living.” Interestingly, she uttered these words with an unquestionable conviction that all she needed for a healthy spiritual life was to be alone with God. As such, she must pray consistently, fast, read the Scripture, and read books that teach effective prayer styles and Christian life to nurture that relationship.

Indeed, this mindset denotes a lack of understanding of God’s commands and their applications. Primarily, God is a relational God, and since human beings are created in His image, they are relational beings. As such, only as one function in relationship with the Creator and other people are they fully complete as human beings and able to accomplish their life’s purpose.¹⁷⁸ Furthermore, it will be a false notion to disobey God’s commands and believe that one has a sound relationship with Him. This notion is contrary to Scriptural teaching. Accordingly, Jesus declares in John 14:15 that if anyone loves Him, they should keep His commandments. The firm link between love for Christ and obedience to Christ occurs repetitively in John’s writing.¹⁷⁹ Love is integral to Christian existence. Hence, Christ gave it as a new commandment that believers should love each other (John 13:34, NKJV). This mindset sheds some light on the depth of the problem at CFC that the researcher presented in the problem statement.

The sample included two students, three married individuals, and five single individuals, totaling ten participants. This sample size was not predetermined. The justification for the sample size of 10 was due to the context and nature of the study. The church is a small church with approximately seventy-one members, with fifty-two percent (37) as adult women. The

¹⁷⁸ Saucy, *Minding the Heart*, 211.

¹⁷⁹ D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991), 498.

sample size of 10 from the adult women population of thirty-seven translates to twenty-seven percent. The researcher believed that a sample size of 10 was appropriate for the study, given the sampling population. The reasons for this position are as follows: First, all potential participants were invited to participate, and only ten agreed. In addition, due to the voluntary nature of the project participation, the researcher abstained from putting pressure on anyone to participate. Second, the main purpose of this thesis project was to facilitate the spiritual maturity of adult women of CFC. As such, the focus should not be on the sample size; instead, it should be on the genuine transformation of those that participated. Finally, there was no definitive sample size in the qualitative research literature. In fact, questions have been raised among researchers and reviewers of qualitative research about what sample size is required for findings to have some validity, and various suggestions have been made. However, there are no conclusive answers to these questions. One of the recommendations is that efforts should be made to ensure the sample size is representative of the population. The concern of what constitutes an adequate sample size is answerable within the context and scientific paradigm of the research being conducted.¹⁸⁰

The research location was Hollis Community Christian Center in Queens, New York City. Hollis Community Christian Center is a small church with a food pantry that distributes raw food every Saturday. It has a basement, which the church utilizes for fellowship and other church activities. But the church granted the researcher permission to use the main worship area because the basement has an internet connection issue. The reason the researcher did not use her local church as the project research location was that she used a pseudonym for the church to

¹⁸⁰ Clive Roland Boddy, "Sample Size for Qualitative Research," *Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal* Vol. 19, no. 4 (August 2016): 429-430.

protect its image. As such, the actual name and the location of the church did not appear anywhere in this project.

A weekly session for the project was held for seven weeks. After the recruitment of the participants, some suggested that a Zoom participation platform should be created for those that may, for one reason or another would be unable to make it on time to the project's location. Some participants live far away from the research location, which was a concern for them. The researcher welcomed the suggestion and created a Zoom platform. In addition to the Zoom platform, the researcher set up a group chat so the participants, including her, would remain connected throughout the sessions.

Given the nature of this study, whereby the heart transformation was the target, the researcher deemed the setting of a group chat necessary and prudent to keep the participants invigorated and motivated. In I Thessalonians 5:11, Paul instructs Christians to encourage and build each other up. Even the weakest in faith is to be strengthened. Building up was Paul's favorite means of writing about growth in the Christian community (Ephesians 2:20-22; 4:12, 16, NKJV). An intellectual understanding of the provisions Paul illustrates leads to both individual and collective growth of the church.¹⁸¹ Paul's instruction requires intentional, continuous action. As Christians encourage and build up each other, it is also crucial to acknowledge progress as the process continues. Like what Paul did with the Thessalonian Christians.

Furthermore, all participants received a consent form (Appendix A) that delineated the purpose of the research, the activities to be performed, the direct benefits to the participants and the society, risks assertion, confidentiality statement, voluntary nature of participation,

¹⁸¹ Robert L. Thomas, "1 Thessalonians" *Ephesians—Philemon*, vol. 12, The Expositor's Bible Commentary, ed. Tremper Longman, III and David Garland (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006), 426.

withdrawal option assertion, contacts and questions information, and statement of consent. Due to the anonymous nature of the research, participants were not required to sign the consent form. However, time was allotted for them to ask questions or make comments on the content of the form. Participants were not identified by their names. Instead, each was identified by a four-digit number—1001; 1002; 1003; 1004; 1005; 1006; 1007; 1008; 1009, and 1010. Each participant's number was written on her questionnaire and journal for identification.

Theological Training/Spiritual Disciplines Material

To develop the intervention materials, the researcher utilized two books for theological training and one for spiritual discipline exercises. The first book was *50 Core Truths of the Christian Faith: A Guide to Understanding and Teaching Theology* by Gregg R. Allison. The second book was *Christian Theology*, 3rd edition, by Millard J. Erickson. The third was *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, by Donald S. Whitney.

The training materials comprised seven-week lesson plans that addressed the Word of God, Christology, the doctrine of salvation, the outcome of sin, the doctrine of God the Holy Spirit, and the role of the Church. For the spiritual disciplines exercise, the following disciplines were practiced: Studying God's Word, Journaling, Prayer, Fasting, Stewardship, Silence and Solitude, and Evangelism. (Appendix D). Week one addressed the inspiration of Scripture, its authoritativeness, and transformative power. It narrated how the Holy Spirit was explicitly responsible for the inspiration of the Scripture and operated through the human authors. Due to such divine inspiration, the Scripture is deemed authoritative and trustworthy in all aspects. As a result, when Christians read, study, memorize, and meditate on Scripture, they interact with God and His authority. The power of transformation embedded in the Scripture was addressed. It addressed how a genuine engagement in God's Word with the power of the Holy Spirit brings

about a holistic transformation of the Christian. Key Scriptural passages referenced were 2 Timothy 3: 16-17; 2 Peter 1: 21; Isaiah 55: 8-9; Matthew 13: 13-15; Mark 8: 17-18; Romans 1: 21; 1 Corinthians 2: 11,14; Genesis 1: 3; Psalm 33: 6; Jeremiah 23: 29; and 2 Corinthians 3:18.

Furthermore, the importance of studying God's Word and Journaling was explained for spiritual disciplines. Ezra's mode of prayer in Ezra 7:10 was explored and used as an example of searching for God with one's true heart. There, Ezra prepared his heart to study and practice the Law and to teach the Law. Hence, the process was seeking, doing, and teaching. Although journaling is not biblically supported, an example was taken from King David's recording of crucial moments and interactions with God, revealed in Psalms. Also, prophet Jeremiah's plea of anguish for the fall of Jerusalem revealed in Lamentation served as another example. Participants engaged in weekly Spiritual discipline exercise assignments.

Also, in the first session, the participants received a special assignment they did throughout the duration of the intervention. The assignment was for each to list two weaknesses that stand between them and God. The conduct or characters that prevent God from working through them. Then, these weaknesses were to be presented to God in prayers with an honest heart and ask Him to change them. The participants were also instructed to journal spiritual encounters experienced. The Word of God cannot lie, for He affirmed through Prophet Jeremiah that "...you will seek Me and find Me when you search for me with all your heart" (Jeremiah 29:13, NKJV). One will experience God's presence when they learn how to search for Him with a sincere heart. The heart problem stands between a believer and God.¹⁸² Thus, examples of some of those things that hinder God's presence are bitterness, envy, idleness, unforgiveness,

¹⁸² Saucy, *Minding the Heart*, 72.

lies, arrogance, slandering, self-indulgence, unfaithfulness, pride, and so on. In fact, this prayer was very crucial because the easiest way the enemy invades one's life, church, home, relationship with God, relationship with other people, and so on, is through their character.

Week two dabbled into the work of Christ and focused on some of His functions, which comprised His role as a Revealer (Prophet), a Ruler (King), and a Reconciler (Priest). God established these three offices in ancient Israel and was distinctively held by different individuals that played diverse roles. Although these offices were held individually, the Old Testament prophesied the coming One that would combine the offices. The Son of God, Jesus Christ, was the expected One that played the three roles simultaneously. Scriptural passages explored were, Deuteronomy 18: 15-18; 34: 10-12; Acts 3:22-24; 7:37; John 1:21, 25, 43-45; 6:14; John 7:40; Hebrews 5:6; 6:20; 7:3, 17, 21; Genesis 14:18-20, Ephesians 5:23; Romans 8:34. As a Revealer, He exhibited the truth and reality of God. As a ruler, He is presently displaying His lordship in churches that follow His rules and abide in Him. While as a Reconciler, He consistently makes intercessory prayers for the believers. The importance of closeness with Christ was stressed. For the spiritual disciplines' exercise, the relevance of prayer in a Christian journey was discussed, and a prayer assignment was given. Finally, Christ's prayer life and biblical instructions for Christians to pray were addressed.

The spiritual discipline exercise for week two consisted of the following: Participants were instructed to set aside 30 to 45 minutes daily for prayer. The prayer procedures were as follows: First, a short prayer was to be said for the Holy Spirit's guidance. Second, a bible passage as directed by the Spirit was to be read. Third, meditate on the revelation of that passage.

Finally, the participants were to connect their prayer to the revelation of the passage. As they proceeded, they should allow the Holy Spirit to direct the prayer. Then, Journal any experience.

Week three addressed the doctrine of salvation and emphasized the union with Christ. To highlight the importance of this union with Christ, the sacrament of baptism, which signifies the believer's identification with Christ in His death, burial, resurrection, and ascension, was narrated. Further explanation of this union stated how the celebration of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper fosters the believer's participation with Christ in His death and their association with each other. The necessity to embrace this union by imitating Christ's examples was underscored. Among other things, emphasis was placed on loving one another, forgiveness, encouraging each other, and so on. Key Scriptural passages utilized were Romans 6:1-6; 12:3-5; 1 Corinth 5:17; 10:2; 11:1; 2 Corinth 5:17; Ezekiel 36:26; Galatians 2:20; 3:27; 1 John 1:3; 2:6; 3:16; 4:11; John 13:34; 15:12; and Colossians 3:13. Finally, Christian fasting was discussed and assigned for spiritual exercise. To highlight the importance of fasting with a specific purpose, Ezra, Esther, and Christ's (Ezra 10:6; Esther 4:16, Matthew 4:2) examples were explained.

Christian fasting differs from non-Christian fasting because the main purpose of Christian fasting is to become more like Christ. Hence, individual, or corporate fasting must have a specific purpose and be God-centered. The fasting assignment for week three was to select two days and fast from 6 a.m. to 12 p.m. Participants were instructed to deliberate on a specific purpose and present it to God during the fast. Fasting was the absolute type of fast. That is, no food or liquid, even water. Participants were to Journal their spiritual encounters.

Continuing with the doctrine of salvation, week four focused on sanctification. Divine and human cooperative roles in the sanctification process were discussed. This process focused

on narrating how the Holy Spirit is responsible for sanctification and how God's Word is the tool by which sanctification occurs. The church is the context where sanctification flourishes. Also, the importance of constant progress toward greater Christlikeness was emphasized, including the need to create an atmosphere where the church members are nurtured to become holy. Key Scriptural passages utilized were John 16:5-11; 17:17; 1 Peter 1:2; 2:2; Thessalonians 2:13; 2 Peter 1:3-4; 1 Corinth 2: 14-16; 12:4-7; 2 Corinth 3:18; Romans 8:26-27; 6:13; 12:1; and Hebrews 10:24-25. Furthermore, stewardship of time was addressed and assigned for spiritual disciplines' exercise. Emphasis was made on the wise use of time and the cultivation of self-control. Time is a gift from God to everyone to be utilized in fulfilling His purposes. Indeed, "Godliness is the result of a biblically disciplined spiritual life. But at the heart of a disciplined spiritual life is the disciplined use of time."¹⁸³ Furthermore, all believers must cultivate self-control in these evil days, or else their bodies will gravitate toward evil than to God. Paul's instruction in Ephesians 5:15-16 states, "See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil."

For the spiritual discipline exercise assignment (stewardship of time), participants were asked to pay attention to how they used their time from morning to evening. Before they retire to their bed, they were to ask the following questions: First, how wisely did I use my time today? Second, what portion of my time was spent on irrelevant things which would not add to my spiritual growth? They were advised to be sincere in their assessment and commit to changing their time management if needed. Afterward, journal their experiences, if any.

¹⁸³ Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines*, 159-160.

Week five explored the doctrine of sin and focused on the consequences of sin. Sin affects one's relationship with God and other people. It also has a significant impact on the sinner. In terms of the relationship with God, sin brings about divine disfavor. This fact was demonstrated in God's relationship with Adam and Eve and the Israelites. Some of the effects of sin on the sinner were discussed. Such as enslavement (sin has enslaving power), denial (sin may be relabeled, whereby it would not be acknowledged as sin at all), and insensitivity (as an individual persists in sin and rejects God's warnings and condemnations, they become less and less responsive to the promptings of conscience, and the inspiration of the Word and the Spirit. Over time, even repugnant sins can be committed with no remorse). Some of the effects of sin on the relationship with other people are competition (one of the most noteworthy is the spread of competition. Since sin makes a person progressively self-centered and self-seeking, there will certainly be a conflict with other people), and inability to empathize (consumed with concern about one's personal desires, reputation, and opinions, one sees only their viewpoint. Unable to step into other people's shoes and envision their needs or see how they perceive a situation in a somewhat unique way). Key biblical passages used were Hosea 9:5; Jeremiah 12:8; Exodus 23:22; Isaiah 63:10; Lamentation 2:4-5; Romans 1:21; 8:7; 6:17-18; 8:2; Colossians 1:21-22; Genesis 12:10-20; Genesis 3:11-13; 1 Timothy 4:1-2; James 4:1-2; and Philippians 2:3-5. For spiritual discipline exercises, silence and solitude were discussed and assigned.

Indeed, the discipline of silence "is the voluntary and temporary abstention from speaking so that certain spiritual goals might be sought. Solitude is the spiritual discipline of voluntarily and temporarily withdrawing to privacy for spiritual purposes."¹⁸⁴ This withdrawal

¹⁸⁴ Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines*, 224-225.

can last anywhere from a few minutes to a couple of days. Solitude may be used to engage in other spiritual disciplines without interruption or just as an escape to be with God and deliberate on spiritual matters. In a noisy and busy world, one must cultivate the attitude of escaping to focus on the things of God. According to the Scripture, Jesus engaged in periods of silence and solitude that lasted a few minutes, hours, or days (Matthew 4:1; 14:23; Mark 1:35; and Luke 4:42 NKJV). Furthermore, the spiritual discipline exercise assignment for the week consisted of the following: Participants were instructed to select an evening or any other conducive time for one hour and go into silence and solitude. The phone, television, computer, and other messaging devices should be switched off. That moment was described as an escape to be with God. As they proceeded, spiritual issues were to be deliberated on, and in the process allow the Holy Spirit to saturate their mind. Then, journal their spiritual encounters, if any.

Moving to week six, the doctrine of God the Holy Spirit was addressed, concentrating on the knowledge of the Holy Spirit, the work of the Holy Spirit in the believer's life, and the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Before thinking about the gifts and the tasks of the Holy Spirit, it is crucial to have basic knowledge of the Person of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the third person of the Trinity or the triune God (God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit). The Old Testament shows that the Holy Spirit actively participated in the creation. This was the same Spirit the LORD promised through the prophet Ezekiel to put on His people. John the Baptist also proclaimed a new, unparalleled outpouring when he described the Messiah as the one that will baptize with the Holy Spirit. The Lord Jesus amplified this outpouring of the Holy Spirit when he promised to send another Helper/Comforter in His place. In terms of the work of the Holy Spirit, although the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit work inseparably, their roles in creation,

redemption, and consummation are also distinct. The Spirit's work is linked with speaking, the application of salvation (recreating and perfecting), and indwelling the people of God (the divine presence).

Before people embrace the gospel, the Holy Spirit is at work to convict the world. Through His conviction, the unbelievers sense their guilt and shame, preparing them for the only hope of rescue. He is involved in the removal of the old sinful nature and implanting of a new nature. Indeed, Christian spiritual maturity and the church's existence and growth are the operations of the Holy Spirit. The recognition of the Spirit for one's salvation and sanctification, and for the church's expansion and witness, is the first step in living the doctrine of God the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, regarding gifts, the Holy Spirit grants spiritual gifts to the church so that it will efficiently dispense its assigned tasks in the world. These gifts reflect the work of the Holy Spirit. Indeed, for any spiritual gift to be meaningful and noteworthy, it must be exercised with love because love is foundational to the Christian faith. Key Scriptural passages referenced were Genesis 1:2; Isaiah 61: 1-2; Luke 4: 18-21; Jeremiah 31: 31-34; Ezekiel 36: 25-27; Joel 2: 28-29; John 3: 1-8,14:16, 26; 16: 8-9; Ephesians 4: 7-16; and 1 Corinthians 13. Furthermore, for spiritual discipline, the necessity of evangelism was addressed, and a weekly assignment was issued.

Evangelism is communicating the gospel. The gospel is the Good News of salvation obtained through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Hence, in Matthew 28:19-20, Jesus Christ commands all His followers to participate in evangelizing the world. Evangelism is not limited to some people or groups of people. It is the responsibility of every believer. All believers are empowered to witness, but often, fear of failure hinders the work of the Holy Spirit

as witnessing proceeds. It is crucial to understand that not only does the Holy Spirit empower the believers as they circulate the gospel, but the gospel itself is also embedded with the power of the Holy Spirit. There is no specific mode of evangelizing. Evangelism happens whether the words of the gospel are spoken, written, or recorded, delivered to one person or a crowd. Indeed, as one embarks on that task, it is important to remember that “The most powerful ongoing Christian witness has always been the speaking of God’s Word by one who is living God’s Word.”¹⁸⁵ Furthermore, for the spiritual discipline exercise assignment, the participants were instructed to share the gospel with at least two persons. The communication can be in person or on the phone. Afterward, they were to journal their experiences.

Finally, the role of the Church was discussed in week seven with emphasis on some of its functions, specifically evangelism, and edification. The fact that the call for evangelism is nonnegotiable was stressed. Christ’s promise to be with the believers as they evangelize the world was highlighted. Also, the need for a meaningful engagement of this command was addressed because a church that fails to obey it will become spiritually unhealthy. On edification, the importance of mutual upbuilding of the church by all members, not only the ministers and pastors, was emphasized. Although Jesus Christ charged all believers with the task of evangelism, the edification of the believers is logically prior. Paul consistently emphasized the edification of the body of Christ. Some means of edifying the members, particularly fellowship and instruction or teaching, were narrated. Instruction or teaching is part of the wide task of discipleship. One of Jesus’s commands in the Great Commission was to teach them (the converts) to obey all that He commanded. Hence, one of God’s gifts to churches is for pastors

¹⁸⁵ Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines*, 127.

and teachers to prepare and equip God's people for service. The instruction or teaching need not always be carried out by the official pastor-teacher of a congregation, however, nor should it be conducted only within a large group. This example is depicted in Acts 18. There, Apollos, an educated and eloquent Jew that had come to the knowledge of Jesus, was speaking powerfully in the synagogue at Ephesus. Accordingly, Priscilla and Aquila observed him, then invited him to their home and adequately explained to him the way of God. Subsequently, Apollos continued his ministry with greater effectiveness. Key Bible passages referenced were Matthew 28:20; 16:18; Colossians 1: 18; Ephesians 1:22-23; 4:4, 11-13, 16, 29; 5:23-27, 31-32; 1 Corinthians 14:26, 12:26; Galatians 6: 1-2; and Acts 1:8; 18: 26.

Data Collection Process

For data collection, the researcher utilized a 5-point Likert scale closed-question questionnaire, participants' journal entries (presented on loose-leaf papers), and the researcher's reflective journal entries. The researcher believes that employing three methods (triangulation) of data collection strengthens the study. Single-method studies are more susceptible to errors related to that particular method (e.g., loaded interview questions, biased or untrue responses), unlike studies that employ multiple methods, whereby different kinds of data provide cross-data validity checks.¹⁸⁶ Thus, it makes intuitive sense to collect data from different sources, employing different methods, which work collectively as an efficient design.¹⁸⁷ Furthermore, the entire sessions were videotaped as a resource to supplement the researcher's own observations

¹⁸⁶ Patton, *Qualitative Research*, 317.

¹⁸⁷ Sami Almalki, "Integrating Quantitative and Qualitative Data in Mixed Methods Research—Challenges and Benefits," *Journal of Education and Learning* 5, no. 3 (2016): 292.

and notes. The researcher had an assistant that videoed the sessions and tracked questions and comments from the Zoom participants.

There is no research method without pros and cons. Accordingly, the closed-question format has inherent strengths and weaknesses. However, one of its key benefits is that “the responses are easily coded and analyzed.”¹⁸⁸ Indeed, the researcher believes this approach provides better data stratification, affording a great ability to quantify the responses. Also, the researcher considers the scaling questions technique a better fit to enable the participants to gauge the before and after views on the questions presented in the questionnaire. This intervention format evaluated the participants' “progress toward their goals.”¹⁸⁹ Furthermore, the participants' journal entries helped cross-checked the questionnaire responses. While the researcher's reflective journal entries documented observable participants' interaction with one another, noteworthy comments, and questions. In addition, it helped the researcher guard against conscious and unconscious personal biases due to her church affiliation with the participants. That was vital because the surveyor and the participants are equal stakeholders in action research.

The Likert scale questionnaire (Appendix B) consisted of seven sections of 28 statements, with four statements in each section. The scale comprised five levels of response options—Strongly Agree; Agree; Undecided; Disagree; and Strongly Disagree. All the sections started with a leading statement taken from Whitney's book regarding each spiritual discipline.

¹⁸⁸ Pauline M. McGuirk and Phillip O'Neill, “Using questionnaires in qualitative human geography,” *Faculty of Social Sciences – Papers*, 2016, accessed April 20, 2022, <https://ro.uow.edu.au/sspapers/2518>.

¹⁸⁹ Yu F., “Scaling Questions in Couple and Family Therapy,” In Lebow J.L., Chambers A.L., Breunlin D.C. (eds) *Encyclopedia of Couple and Family Therapy*. Springer, Cham. 2019, accessed April 20, 2022, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-49425-8_1065.

Accordingly, the questionnaire contained spiritual disciplines: studying God's Word, Journaling, Prayer, Fasting, Stewardship, Silence and Solitude, and Evangelism.

As indicated previously, each section of the questionnaire contained four statements. Each statement relates to that section's spiritual discipline. The statements were arranged to coincide with the four levels of taxonomy used for this project—knowledge, comprehension, application, and analysis. The first section's spiritual discipline was studying God's Word, which followed with the following leading statement: "Let the Word break over your heart and mind again and again as the years go by, and imperceptibly there will come great changes in your attitude and outlook and conduct."¹⁹⁰ The first statement assessed the participant's knowledge of the significance of God's Word. The second statement evaluated the participant's comprehension of what is expected when one diligently studies the Word of God. While the third statement weighed the participant's application strategy of studying the Word. Finally, the fourth statement assessed the outcome of the participant's analysis of all the statements.

The second section's spiritual discipline was journaling, and the leading statement was as follows: "Keeping a journal not only promotes spiritual growth by means of its own virtues, but it's a valuable aid to many other aspects of the spiritual life as well."¹⁹¹ The first statement evaluated the participant's knowledge of the value of maintaining a journal. The second statement examined the participant's comprehension of the goal of journaling in pursuing godliness. The third statement assessed the participant's application of this discipline. Finally, statement four evaluated the participant's analysis of the journaling discipline.

¹⁹⁰ Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines*, 35.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 252.

Furthermore, the spiritual discipline for section three was prayer, with the following leading statement: “Don’t think of prayer as an impersonal requirement. Realize that it is a person, the Lord Jesus Christ, with all authority and with all love, who expects us to pray.”¹⁹² In this section, the first statement weighed the participant’s knowledge about the necessity for all Christians to be prayerful. Moving to the second statement, there, the participant’s comprehension of the interconnectedness of a prayerful Christian and godliness was evaluated. While the third statement assessed the participant’s level of prayer life (application). The fourth statement measured the participant’s overall perception (analysis) of living an active prayer life.

Section four’s spiritual discipline was fasting, accompanied by the following leading statement: “Believers should fast according to biblical teaching and with purposes that are God-centered. It is voluntary in that fasting should not be coerced. And fasting is more than just the ultimate crash diet for the body; it is abstinence from food for spiritual purposes.”¹⁹³ The first statement of this section gauged the participant’s knowledge of fasting as a biblically supported discipline. The second statement evaluated the participant’s comprehension of the need for fasting to have a specific spiritual goal. In the third statement, the participant’s level of application of this discipline was weighed. Finally, the fourth statement evaluated how the participant perceived the outcome of adherence to this discipline (analysis).

Section five contained the spiritual discipline of stewardship of time, with the following leading statement: “The use of time is important because time is the stuff of which days are made. If we do not discipline our use of time for the purpose of godliness in these evil days,

¹⁹² Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines*, 80.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, 192.

these evil days will keep us from becoming godly.¹⁹⁴ The first statement delved into the participant's level of knowledge about the value of time as a gift from God to all persons for specific purposes. While the second statement assessed the participant's comprehension of the fact that all individuals will account for the gift of time God granted to everyone for the purpose of the kingdom task. The third statement weighed how the participant used their time (application). Then, the fourth statement evaluated the participant's analysis of the outcome of their usage of time for godly purposes.

Furthermore, section six tackled the spiritual discipline of silence and solitude, with the following leading statement: "There is something both appealing and transforming about silence and solitude. And there are moments in our pressure-cooker lives when years of escape to some hidden place sounds wistfully compelling."¹⁹⁵ The first statement explored the participant's knowledge about creating time out of the busyness of life to escape and be with God. Also, the second statement gauged the participant's comprehension that the purpose of silence and solitude is to grow into the image of Christ. The fourth statement evaluated the participant's experience when they made time to be in God's presence (analysis).

Finally, section seven addressed the spiritual discipline of evangelism, with the following leading statement: "The most powerful ongoing Christian witness has always been the speaking of God's Word by one who is living God's Word."¹⁹⁶ The first statement assessed the participant's knowledge of the requirement that all Christians participate in evangelizing the

¹⁹⁴ Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines*, 161.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 224.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 127.

world. The second statement measured the participant's comprehension of the Holy Spirit's empowerment as they disseminate the gospel. While the third statement evaluated the participant's adherence to the requirement (application). Finally, the fourth statement assessed the participant's analysis of their encounter as they shared the gospel.

Each of these statements was rated with the Likert five-option scale—Strongly agree; Agree; Undecided; Disagree; and Strongly Disagree. Each option was assigned a value from 1 to 5. Accordingly, Strongly Agree was assigned a value of 5, the highest value assigned. Agree was assigned a value of 4. While Undecided was assigned a value of 3. Disagree was assigned a value of 2. Finally, Strongly Disagree was assigned a value of 1, the lowest value assigned. The higher the value, the more positive the participant's responded to the statement. On the other hand, the lower the value, the more negative the participant's responded to the statement.

The questionnaire was administered in two phases. The pre-test questionnaire was distributed at the first session and returned in the second session. This first questionnaire served as a baseline for the measurement. While the post-test questionnaire was distributed at the last session and returned in a week. Each participant's first and second questionnaire responses were tallied and analyzed. The comparison between the pretest and posttest questionnaire responses provided the percentage of changes in the participants' spiritual growth. Furthermore, the participants' journal entries were collected within a week, after the last session. The researcher evaluated the journal entries to determine whether the documentation reflected the questionnaire responses. Furthermore, the researcher's reflexive journal entries were utilized to share some noteworthy observations.

Implementation of the Intervention Design

Given the complexity of this research, which addressed the transformation of the human heart, the researcher relied heavily on the assistance of the Holy Spirit. Hence, she prayed fervently from the beginning of the intervention to its completion. Indeed, prayer was crucial in this type of research because no human being is equipped to decipher the human heart, only the Spirit of God can do it. Stressing the complexity of the heart, Jeremiah 17:9 states, “The heart is deceitful above all things, And desperately wicked, Who can know it.” This verse may seem like a harsh indictment of the human heart, but it is the position of humankind without the regeneration of the soul by the Spirit and grace of God.¹⁹⁷

As narrated in the intervention design section, after the recruitment, some participants suggested that a Zoom platform option be provided because they reside far away from the research location. Thus, when they could not make it, they would participate through Zoom. The researcher deemed the suggestion appropriate, and as such, the Zoom provision was made. In addition to that provision, the researcher set up a group chat for all participants so that everyone would stay connected. The researcher urged the participants to utilize that avenue to post comments and encouraging words for the group. In fact, the researcher utilized it frequently to disseminate words of encouragement for the group to persevere to the end. For instance, there was heavy rain on the day of the sixth session, and the researcher posted the following in the group: “Greetings in the name of our Savior Jesus Christ. I trust that everyone is doing great physically and spiritually. To God be the glory. Comrades, it is a rainy day, and that would not deter us from marching forward. This is our Father’s world, and He has decided to provide rain,

¹⁹⁷ Macdonald, *Believer’s Bible Commentary*, 925.

so let us glorify Him for such provision. Ordinarily, we would all prefer to stay at home on a day like today and watch a good movie or preferably sleep. Nonetheless, when you are a soldier in God's army, the watchword is, no retreat and no surrender. Indeed, I am very proud of all of you. We are now in week 6 and expect to finish next week by the grace of our Heavenly Father. I am confident that we will all finish this race very strong and spiritually fit to tackle tasks assigned to us as children of the living God. I sincerely thank everyone and expect to see you on time today. Please stay safe and blessed." This process continued until the end of the intervention.

The first session started with all ten participants present at the research location, Hollis Community Christian Center, located in Queens, New York City. No one participated through Zoom at that first session. The stipulated day and time for all sessions were Saturdays from 5:30 p.m. to 7 pm. Throughout the sessions, the researcher and the assistant that helped videoed the sessions and staffed the Zoom came to the location approximately half an hour before the session began to test for the internet connection and set up the Zoom apparatus. At the first session, eight participants came on time, and two were roughly fifteen minutes late due to a traffic holdup. The researcher started the session by thanking the participants for coming. Afterward, she explained the necessity of commencing each session with prayers and closing with prayers. In other words, the participants were informed that the program's success hinges on the participation and leadership of the Holy Spirit; hence prayer for such leadership and participation was of the utmost importance. As the group started the task with a total dependence upon the Holy Spirit, they will experience His work.¹⁹⁸ Certainly, it is the Holy Spirit that illuminates the truth of the Scripture, assists the believers in understanding the Bible, convict them of the truth of the

¹⁹⁸ Jerry Bridges, *The Pursuit of Holiness* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2006), 90.

Scripture, and enables them to apply that truth in their lives.¹⁹⁹ Hence, the importance of His presence in all endeavors to pursue holiness. After these explanations, the researcher led the group in prayer.

Subsequently, the researcher distributed a three-ring binder containing a consent form, loose-leaf papers for journal entries, the questionnaire, and the sessions' handouts. The ten binders, numbered P1001 to P1010, represented each participant's identification number in place of their names. Everyone stated their binder number, and the researcher wrote them down to keep track of the research data. Then the researcher explained in sequence the content of the binder and the instructions that should be followed. Time was allotted for the participants to read the consent form and ask questions. In addition, the researcher carefully explained the procedures and purpose of completing the pre-test and post-test questionnaires because none of the participants except one had ever participated in a research project. Likewise, the journal entries process was explained. Due to the anonymous nature of the research, the participants were instructed to hold their consent forms. But they were informed to complete and return the pre-test questionnaire at the next session.

In anticipation that some of these participants had not participated in a project of this nature, the researcher purchased ten New King James version bibles (Giant Print Center-Column Reference Bible, Red Letter Edition) and ten journal books with biblical passages on each page, which were also given to all participants for their personal use. Each participant received a Bible with her first name engraved on the cover. The rationale for this action was that spiritual

¹⁹⁹ R.C. Sproul, *Essential Truths of the Christian Faith* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale Momentum, 1992), 150.

formation is a gradual process,²⁰⁰ and the researcher deemed it necessary to leave something with each participant that serves as a reminder of the spiritual formation journey that they started, which must continue after the research project. For example, all the participants admitted that they had no specific way of keeping a journal. Even though some indicated they write things and put it in their Bible or elsewhere. As indicated previously, the journal books the researcher gave each participant contain a Bible passage on each page, which is supposed to prompt the user to reflect on the message. For instance, the passage on a page states, “Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me” (Ps 51:10). While another page states, “God is working in you, giving you the desire to obey Him and the power to do what pleases Him” (Phil. 2:13). The other passage asserts, “You will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart,” (Jer. 29:12-13). Indeed, the pursuit of Christlikeness should be intentional.

The first session’s theological training delved into the inspiration of the Scripture and its authoritativeness and transformative power. The inner working of the Holy Spirit and His involvement in the transformation was emphasized. Key Scriptural passages referenced for the session were, 2 Timothy 3:16-17, 2 Peter 1:21, Isaiah 55:8-9, Matthew 13:13-15, Mark 8:17-18, Romans 1:21, 1 Corinthians 2:11,14, Genesis 1:3, Psalm 33:6, Jeremiah 23:29, and 2 Corinthians 3:18. To encourage the active involvement of all participants, the researcher explained that everyone, including her, are stakeholders, making everyone equal participants. Thereby comments and questions that would help to shed some light on the topic of discussion were welcomed. This participation rule was emphasized and encouraged throughout the sessions.

²⁰⁰ Wright, *After You Believe*, 35.

Accordingly, each scriptural passage referenced was read by a participant before the discussion. After reading, the researcher began a detailed teaching of that passage and its relationship with the theological theme under discussion. Participants were encouraged to ask questions or make comments as the teaching progressed. Those with questions or comments raised their hands, the researcher paused, and the questions were addressed, or their comments discussed. Although the session was interactive, only four people actively participated and talked the most. Observing this outcome, the researcher encouraged everyone to diligently go through each subsequent session's handout in their binder before coming to the session and write down questions or comments. So, this tactic became the practice moving forward. Action research entails the active involvement of all participants. Hence, participation is most effective when it provides substantial active involvement.²⁰¹

After the theological teaching and discussions, the spiritual disciplines of studying God's Word and journaling were addressed. Ezra's attitude toward God's Word recorded in Ezra 7:10 was utilized to instruct on the spiritual discipline of studying God's Word with a sincere heart. For the importance of the spiritual discipline of journaling, King David's examples of recording crucial encounters and interactions with God documented in the book Psalms were mentioned. In addition, Jeremiah's petition of anguish attributed to the fall of Jerusalem revealed in Lamentation was presented as another example of the necessity of keeping journal entries of crucial encounters in one's spiritual journey. Following these discussions, the participants were given three assignments. The first was to start studying God's Word meditatively by employing Ezra's method. Ezra began by setting his heart right to explore God's Word, apply it, and teach

²⁰¹ Ernest T. Stringer, *Action Research, Fourth Edition* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 2014), 28.

it. In the second assignment, participants were instructed to list two weaknesses that stand between them and God and lift them up to God with a sincere heart that He would change them. In other words, conducts or characters that hinders the Holy Spirit from working through them. For example, bitterness, envy, idleness, unforgiveness, lies, arrogance, slandering, self-indulgence, unfaithfulness, pride, and so on. This prayer continued for the entire session, and participants were instructed to journal any observable changes or encounters. The third assignment was to use the loose-leaf papers included in each participant's binder to keep journal entries of one's encounters throughout the sessions. Journal entries and the post-test questionnaire were collected a week after the completion of the sessions. The first session ended with a closing prayer conducted by one of the participants who volunteered to do the prayer.

The second session opened with a prayer led by the researcher. In attendance were eight on-site participants and two from the Zoom platform. Questions and comments from the Zoom attendees were tracked by the researcher's assistant. For theological teaching, Christology was explored, which focused on Christ's roles as a Prophet (Revealer: Exhibition of the truth and reality of God), a Priest (Reconciler: Intercessory ministry), and a King (Ruler: Presently ruling in the church). Scriptural passages explored were as follows: Deuteronomy 18: 15-18, 34: 10-12, Acts 3:22-24, 7:37, John 1:21, 25, 43-45, 6:14, John 7:40, Hebrews 5:6, 6:20, 7:3, 17, 21, and Genesis 14:18-20, Ephesians 5:23; Romans 8:34. The same procedures followed in the first sessions were employed in this session and subsequent ones. More people actively participated in the discussion of this session. Two from Zoom and five from the research site. However, the researcher kept encouraging everyone to get involved and with a constant reminder about the purpose of the project, which was the quest for holiness.

For spiritual discipline, prayer was the theme for the session. Christ's disciplined prayer life was discussed. In addition, His expectations for His followers to be prayerful were examined. Paul's instructions for all believers to remain constant in prayers were discussed. Bible passages employed for the discussion were the following: Luke 5:16, 11:9, 18:1, Matthew 6:5, 7, 9, Colossians 4:2, and 1 Thessalonians 5:17. After the discussion, the weekly assignment was assigned. The participants were instructed to reserve 30 to 45 minutes daily for prayer. Steps to follow were: First, the participants were instructed to say a short prayer for the Holy Spirit's guidance. Second, they were asked to read the scriptural passages as directed by the Spirit. Third, they were instructed to meditate on the revelation of that passage and link it to their prayer. Then they should allow the Spirit of God to direct the prayer. In the end, they should journal their spiritual encounter, if any. After the instruction, the session ended with a closing prayer by a participant.

Session three commenced with a prayer led by one of the participants. Seven on-site attendees and two from Zoom participated. One participant had COVID, and could not participate, not even through Zoom, because she had a fever and pains. However, the video of the session was sent to her. The theological theme explored was the doctrine of salvation, emphasizing the union with Christ. The sacrament of baptism that signifies the identification with Christ in His death, burial, resurrection, and ascension was addressed. The necessity for all believers to embrace this union by imitating Jesus's example was highlighted. Love for one another, forgiveness, encouragement of one another, and so on were emphasized. Some scriptural passages utilized were, Romans 6:1-6, 12:3-5, 1 Corinthians 5:17, 10:2, 11:1, 2 Corinthians 5:17, Ezekiel 36:26, Galatians 2:20, 3:27, 1 John 1:3, 2:6, 3:16, 4:11, John 13:34,

15:12, and Colossians 3:13. Indeed, participants' involvement in this session's discussion improved significantly. The researcher changed the discussion strategy after observing what might have caused some participants not to contribute to the discussion. It seemed that those who had not contributed anything to the discussion were either afraid or intimidated to speak because of a few who tried to dominate the discussion. To enable them to overcome whatever was holding them back, the researcher consistently asked them what their thoughts were about the issue under discussion. Furthermore, the researcher stated that everyone, including her, is a student of the Bible, which makes them learners. Hence, the goal was to learn and apply the truth of the Scripture. Learning without application amounts to nothing. This change of strategy helped tremendously. Not only did it enable those muted voices to start speaking, but it also controlled those that had the tendency to dominate the discussion.

Regarding spiritual discipline, biblical fasting was addressed and assigned to the participants. The distinction between biblical and non-biblical fasting was discussed. The purpose of Christian fasting, specifically for godliness, was examined. Christian fasting, whether individual or corporate, must have a purpose, which is God-centered. Biblical examples discussed were Christ's fasting (Matthew 4:2, NKJV), Esther's fasting (Esther 4:16, NKJV), and Ezra's fasting (Ezra 10:6, NJKV). After the discussion, the participants were given assignments. Accordingly, they were instructed to select two days and fast from 6 am to 12 pm. The fasting must have a specific purpose and should be the absolute type of fast. An absolute fast is a fast with no food and liquid, even water. Finally, the participants were asked to journal their encounters, if any. Subsequently, the researcher made concluding remarks, and a closing prayer was performed by one of the participants.

The fourth session began with an opening prayer conducted by the researcher. Seven participants attended on-site, while three participated through Zoom. The participant with COVID was one of those that attended from Zoom. For theological teaching, the doctrine of Salvation continued and focused on sanctification. The role (conviction of sin, illumination of the Scripture, empowerment for service, assistance through prayer, and so on) of the Holy Spirit in sanctification was examined. Scriptural passages referenced were, John 16:5-11, 17:17, 1 Peter 1:2, 2:2; Thessalonians 2:13, 2 Peter 1:3-4, 1 Corinth 2: 14-16, 12:4-7, 2 Corinth 3:18, Romans 8:26-27, 6:13, 12:1, and Hebrews 10:24-25. Certainly, all participants, including the Zoom attendees, got involved in the discussion. Everyone had something to say or questions to ask. Hence, making the session very interactive. This was what is expected in the action research. All participants are stakeholders and should be actively involved in the activities conducted to solve existing problems.

Furthermore, the spiritual discipline of the stewardship of time was explored. Emphasis was made on the wise use of time for godly purposes and the cultivation of self-control. Paul's instruction to the believers regarding wise usage of time (Ephesians 5:15-16, NKJV) was discussed. After the discussion, the weekly assignment was discussed. The assignment was for the participants to monitor the use of their time from morning to evening. In the night, before they retire to their bed, they should ask themselves these questions: First, how wisely did I use my time today? Second, what portion of my time was spent on irrelevant things which would not add to my spiritual growth? Participants were advised to be sincere in their assessment and commit to making changes where necessary. Then journal their experiences. With this last discussion, the session ended, and a participant led the closing prayer.

Session five started with a prayer conducted by one of the participants. Six on-site participants and three from Zoom participated. One participant was absent because she attended a funeral. But the video for the session was sent to her. The step was taken to make sure that all participants were on board. The theological theme examined was the doctrine of sin, with a focus on the consequences of sin. The effects of sin on one's relationship with God (divine disfavor), one's relationship with other people (self-centered, self-seeking, and so on), and some of its impact (enslavement, denial, insensitivity) on the sinner were examined. Biblical passages utilized were Hosea 9:5, Jeremiah 12:8, Exodus 23:22, Isaiah 63:10, Lamentation 2:4-5, Romans 1:21, 8:7, 6:17-18, 8:2, Colossians 1:21-22, Genesis 12:10-20, Genesis 3:11-13, 1 Timothy 4:1-2, James 4:1-2, and Philippians 2:3-5. Like what transpired in the fourth session's discussion participation, all participants actively contributed to the various issues discussed.

For spiritual discipline, silence and solitude were explored. The benefits of silence and solitude to other spiritual disciplines were discussed. In addition, the importance of cultivating this discipline as an escape to be with God in a noisy and busy world was emphasized. Jesus's examples recorded in Matthew 4:1, 14:23, Mark 1:35, and Luke 4:24 were discussed. Furthermore, for the weekly spiritual discipline assignment, the participants were asked to select an evening or any conducive time for an hour to go into silence and solitude. The phone, television, computer, and other messaging devices must be turned off. They were instructed to meditate on spiritual issues and allow the Holy Spirit to saturate their mind. Also, they should journal their encounters. After the instruction, the researcher ended the session, and one of the participants did the closing prayer.

The sixth session commenced with prayer by the researcher. Six on-site participants and four from Zoom participated. Indeed, the weather that day was horrifying. There was heavy rain throughout the day, and the researcher was compelled to send an encouraging message through the group chat, urging the participants to persevere and not let the rain deter them from attending that day's session. As the normal routine, the researcher and her assistant got to the research location approximately half an hour before the session started, not knowing how many participants would show up, if any. Interestingly, six showed up, and four appeared through Zoom. This was nothing short of the grace of God. For theological topics, the doctrine of God the Holy Spirit was explored, emphasizing the knowledge of the Holy Spirit, the work of the Holy Spirit in the believer's life, and the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Scriptural passages referenced were, Genesis 1:2, Isaiah 61:1-2, Luke 4:18-21, Jeremiah 31:31-34, Ezekiel 36:25-27, Joel 2:28-29, John 3:1-8, 14:16, 26, 16:8-9, Ephesians 4:7-16, and 1 Corinthians 13. The discussion was lively, and everyone contributed significantly to it.

Regarding spiritual discipline, evangelism was discussed and assigned for the weekly discipline exercises. The mandatory nature of evangelism was examined utilizing Matthew 28:19-20. The requirement for all believers to participate in evangelizing the world was highlighted. For the weekly assignment, the participants were instructed to share the gospel with at least two people, either in person or on the phone. As usual, the participants were to journal their experiences. Next, the researcher concluded the session, and the closing prayer was performed by a participant.

The last session (session seven) began with an opening prayer by a participant. Nine on-site participants and one through Zoom participated. For theological exploration, the role of the

Church was addressed, stressing specifically evangelism and edification. The necessity of mutual upbuilding of the church by all believers, not just the ministers and pastors, was underscored. Also, the means of edifying the believers, mostly fellowship and instruction or teaching, were discussed. Furthermore, the need for the church to engage in meaningful obedience to Christ's Great Commission was stressed. The scriptural passages referenced were, Matthew 28:20, 16:18, Colossians 1: 18, Ephesians 1:22-23, 4:4, 11-13, 16, 29, 5:23-27, 31-32, 1 Corinthians 14:26, 12:26, Galatians 6: 1-2, and Acts 1:8, 18: 26. This theological exploration ended with full involvement of all participants.

Before dismissal, the researcher provided time for the participants who wished to briefly share some of their experiences with the group for encouragement and learning purposes. A few shared some of the challenges they encountered during spiritual discipline exercises. While some spoke of the initial difficulties grasping some theological issues. When the participants finished speaking, the researcher used that opportunity to instruct them about the gradual nature of spiritual formation. It is a lifelong endeavor that requires patience, obedience to Christ's commands, perseverance, and continuous prayer for the Holy Spirit's guidance.

Afterward, the researcher informed the participants that they had one week to complete the post-questionnaire and finalize their journal entries. That information could be emailed to the researcher or hand delivered to her. In conclusion, the researcher thanked all the participants for their participation and endurance. She also advised them to continue the path of spiritual growth. With that, the researcher performed the closing prayer. All the participants delivered their information to the researcher within a week.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

As delineated in the problem and purpose statements, this thesis project was conducted to mitigate the spiritual maturity dilemma noted in the CFC women, which manifested in their unloving behavior toward one another. Hence, the project was for the renewal of the mind of the participants to reflect Christ's image. Paul urges the believers to put off "anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, and filthy language" from their mouths; and not to deal falsely with one another since the old man and its deeds have been eradicated and replaced with the new man that has been renewed in knowledge according to the image of Christ that created them (Colossians 3:8-10, NKJV). As the believers encounter perpetual renewal as new people in Christ, they no longer subscribe to the deeds of their old selves; they must conform to the new life.²⁰² The conformity to this new life for the CFC women triggered this project. The theological training and spiritual discipline exercises. The aim was for the CFC women to become doers of the word, not only the hearers (James 1:22, NKJV). Hearing the word of God without active application to one's life is defective interaction.²⁰³

The 5-point Likert scale questionnaire used to assess the intervention contained 28 statements with seven sections representing seven spiritual disciplines, with a leading statement pointing to the necessity of each spiritual discipline. Ten CFC women participated in the project. Each received pre-test and post-test questionnaires that assessed their spiritual growth over the period of the intervention. The pre-test questionnaire, which was given at the first session, served

²⁰² Todd D. Still, "Colossians" *Ephesians—Philemon*, vol. 12, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Tremper Longman, III and David Garland (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006), 329.

²⁰³ Guthrie, "James" *Hebrews—Revelation*. *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, 226.

as the baseline for measurement. The post-test questionnaire was given at the last session. The four levels of Bloom's taxonomy were used for the assessment—accordingly, knowledge, comprehension, application, and analysis,²⁰⁴ which denotes the learning process.

The Likert scale's five categories are as follows: Strongly Agree, Agree, Undecided, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree. The numbering is 1 to 5, and 1 signifies Strongly Disagree, 2, Disagree, 3, Undecided, 4, Agree, and 5, Strongly Agree. The higher the number, the more positive the participant's response to the statement. Each section contained four statements that assessed the participant's level of knowledge, comprehension, application, and analysis of the spiritual discipline of that section. The pre-test and post-test summary report (Appendix C) contains the average results of the seven spiritual disciplines. In addition, the average results of each discipline are presented in this section.

The first spiritual discipline exercise was studying God's Word. The researcher believes a proper knowledge of the Scripture, which comes from diligent studying, is fundamental to the spiritual formation of the CFC women. Highlighting the importance of God's Word, Paul affirms that the inspiration of God produces the entire Scripture, and it is beneficial for doctrine, reproof, correction, for teaching in righteousness so that the man of God may be complete and adequately equipped for every good work (2 Tim 3:16-17). God's inspired, and infallible Word serves many valuable purposes in a believer's life. One that the Spirit of God teaches recognizes spiritual nourishment in every word from His mouth.²⁰⁵

²⁰⁴ Bloom, *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives*, 18,

²⁰⁵ MacDonald, *Believer's Bible Commentary*, 2192.

Spiritual Discipline 1: Studying God's Word

Leading statement: "Let the Word break over your heart and mind again and again as the years go by, and imperceptibly there will come great changes in your attitude and outlook, and conduct."²⁰⁶

Statement 1: I know the Bible possesses hidden truth.

Statement 2: I understand that studying the Bible involves a diligent search for its everlasting truth.

Statement 3: I study the Bible meditatively to understand what God is saying to me.

Statement 4: I notice that when I study the Bible, it enriches my spiritual life.

The survey results of statement 1 before participation in the theological training showed that one participant selected Undecided, number 3 on a scale of 1-5. Seven participants selected Agree, which was number 4 on the scale. While two participants selected Strongly Agree, the number 5 on the scale. This averages 3.2 on a scale of 5.

The after-participation results of statement 1 show that seven participants selected Agree, the number 4 on the scale. Three participants chose Strongly Agree, indicating the number 5 on the scale. Averaging 4.3 on a scale of 5.

The outcome shows an improvement of 1.1, which translates to 34% development.

Statement 2 survey results before theological training participation show three participants selected Undecided, number 3 on a scale of 1-5. Seven participants chose Agree, the number 4 on the scale. This averages 3.6 on a scale of 5.

²⁰⁶ Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines*, 35.

The results of statement 2 after the theological training participation indicate that eight participants selected Agree, number 4 on a scale of 1-5. While two chose Strongly Agree, the number 5 on the scale. Averaging 4.2 on a scale of 5.

The outcome indicates a growth of 0.6, or 17% growth.

The survey results of statement 3 before the theological training participation show that five participants chose Disagree, the number 2 on a scale of 1-5. Two participants selected Undecided, the number 3 on the scale. Three participants chose Agree, the number 4 on the scale. This averages 2.8 on a scale of 5.

The statement 3 results after the theological training participation reveal that two participants chose Undecided, the number 3 on a scale of 1-5. Six participants selected Agree, the number 4 on the scale. Two participants chose Strongly Agree, the number 5 on the scale. Averaging 4.0 on a scale of 5.

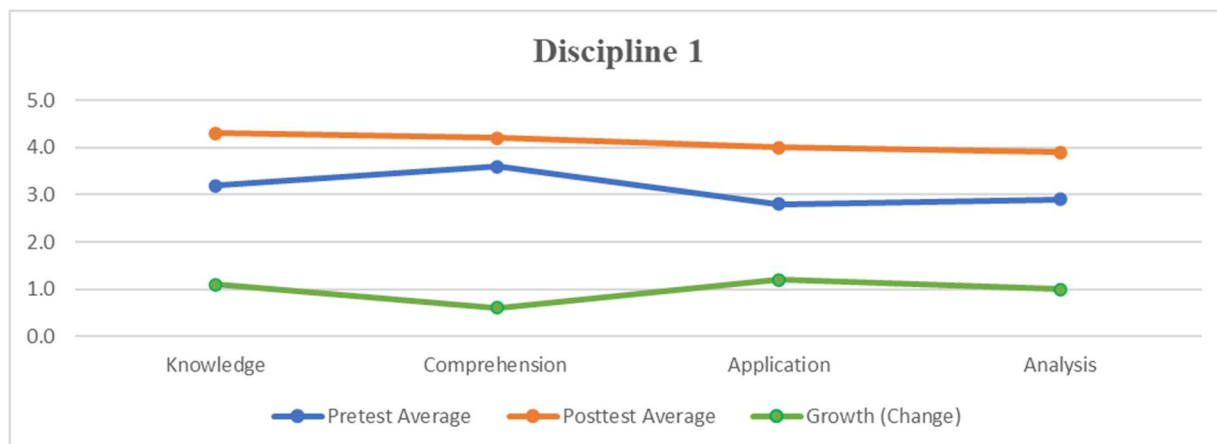
The finding indicates a development of 1.43, which translates to a 51% improvement.

Statement 4 results before the theological training show that one participant selected Strongly Disagree, the number 1 on the scale. Three participants selected Disagree, the number two on the scale. Three participants chose Undecided, the number 3 on a scale. Two selected Agree, the number 4 on the scale. While one selected Strongly Agree, the number 5 on the scale. This averages 2.9 on a scale of 5.

Statement 4 results after participation in the theological training declare that one participant selected Disagree, the number 2 on the scale. One participant chose Undecided, the number 3 on the scale. Six participants chose Agree, the number 4 on the scale. Two selected Strongly Agree, the number 5 on the scale. Averaging 3.9 on a scale of 5.

This outcome shows a growth of 1.35, or 47% growth.

Figure 1



The second spiritual discipline exercise was meant to help the CFC women to cultivate the attitude of tracking their spiritual encounters and progress through journaling. The journal can serve as a mirror by which they see their attitudes, thoughts, words, and actions. It is prudent to evaluate them since everyone will be held accountable for each at the Judgment.²⁰⁷

Spiritual Discipline 2: Journaling

Leading Statement: “Keeping a journal not only promotes spiritual growth by means of its own virtues, but it’s a valuable aid to many other aspects of the spiritual life as well.”²⁰⁸

Statement 1: I know that journaling is valuable for a believer’s spiritual journey.

Statement 2: I understand that the goal of journaling is to help one draw closer to Christ.

Statement 3: I maintain a journal to track my spiritual experiences.

Statement 4: Reading through my journal helps me to assess the patterns of my spiritual journey.

²⁰⁷ Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines*, 254.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 252.

The survey results of statement 1 prior to theological training participation show that two participants selected Disagree, the number 2 on a scale of 1-5. Seven participants chose Undecided, the number 3 on the scale. While one participant selected Agree, number 4 on the scale. Averaging 2.9 on a scale of 5.

Statement 1 results after participation in the theological training reveal that two participants chose Undecided, the number 3 on the scale. Eight participants selected Agree, the number 4 on the scale. This averages 3.8 on a scale of 5.

The finding indicates a development of 0.9, which translates to 31% development.

The results of statement 2 before the theological training participation indicate that two participants selected Disagree, number 2, on a scale of 1-5. Seven participants chose Undecided, number 3 on the scale. While one participant selected Agree, number 4 on the scale. This averages 2.9 on a scale of 5.

Statement 2 results after the theological training participation show that five participants selected Undecided, 3 on a scale of 1-5. Four participants chose Agree, number 4 on the scale. One selected Strongly Agree, number 5 on the scale. Averaging 3.6 on a scale of 5.

The results reveal an improvement of 0.7, or 24% improvement.

The survey results for statement 3 before the theological training participation show that seven participants selected Strongly Disagree, number 1 on a scale of 1-5. One participant chose Disagree, number 2 on the scale. One participant selected Undecided, number 3 on the scale. While one participant chose Agree, number 4 on the scale. This averages 1.6 on a scale of 5.

Statement 3 results after the theological training participation indicate that seven participants chose Undecided, number 3 on a scale of 1-5. Three participants selected Agree, number 4 on the scale. Averaging 3.3 on a scale of 5.

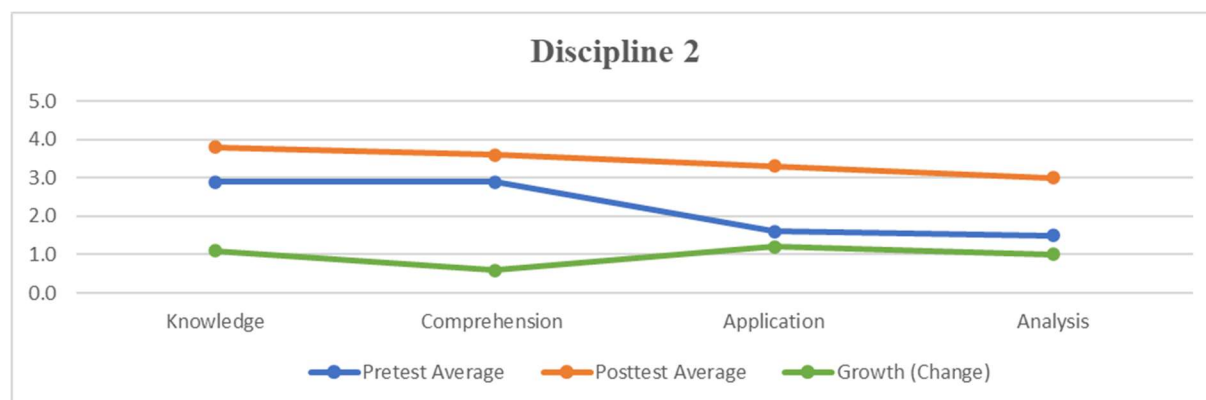
The outcome indicates an improvement of 1.7, which translates to a 106% improvement.

Statement 4 results before participation in the theological training show that seven participants selected Strongly Disagree, 1 on a scale of 1-5. One participant chose Disagree, number 2 on the scale. Two participants selected Undecided, number 3 on the scale. This averages 1.5 on a scale of 5.

After participating in the theological training, the results of statement 4 indicate that two participants chose Disagree, number 2 on a scale of 1-5. Six participants selected Undecided, number 3 on a scale of 1-5. Two participants chose Agree, number 4 on the scale. Averaging 3.0 on a scale of 5.

The results reveal an improvement of 1.5, or 100% improvement.

Figure 2



The third spiritual discipline exercise of prayer is a requirement for every faithful Christian. Paul instructs believers to pray unceasingly (1Thes 5:17). This command does not

mean one must pray without a break, but one must pray frequently.²⁰⁹ The CFC women should benefit from that discipline to deepen their understanding of the prayer that leads to godliness. Prayer is the gateway to authentic self-knowledge.²¹⁰ Through meaningful prayer, the Holy Spirit reveals one's genuine self—weaknesses, and strengths.

Spiritual Discipline 3: Prayer

Leading Statement: “Don’t think of prayer as an impersonal requirement. Realize that it is a person, the Lord Jesus Christ, with all authority and with all love, who expects us to pray.”²¹¹

Statement 1: I know that prayer is required of all believers.

Statement 2: I understand that prayerful Christians become godly Christians.

Statement 3: I am inspired to pray regularly.

Statement 4: I experience the Holy Spirit’s presence when I pray.

The survey results of statement 1 before participation in the theological training indicate that seven participants selected Agree, number 4 on a scale of 1-5. Three participants chose Strongly Agree, number 5 on the scale. This averages 4.3 on a scale of 5.

Statement 1’s results after participating in the theological training show that four participants selected Agree, number four on a scale of 1-5. Six participants chose Strongly Agree, number 5 on the scale. Averaging 4.6 on a scale of 5.

The results indicate a growth of 0.3, or 7% growth.

²⁰⁹ Howard Marshall, “1 Thessalonians” *New Bible Commentary*, eds. G. J. Wenham, J. A. Motyer, D. A. Carson, and R. T. France (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2010), 1284.

²¹⁰ Timothy Keller, *Prayer: Experiencing Awe and Intimacy with God* (New York, NY: Penguin, 2014), 18.

²¹¹ Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines*, 80.

The Statement 2 results prior to participation in the theological training show that three participants selected Undecided, number 3 on a scale of 1-5. Seven participants chose Agree, number 4 on the scale. This averages 3.7 on a scale of 5.

The results of statement 2 after the theological training participation reveal that eight participants selected Agree, number 4 on a scale of 1-5. Two participants chose Strongly Agree, number 5 on the scale. Averaging 4.2 on a scale of 5.

The outcome indicates a growth of 0.5, which convert to 14% growth.

Statement 3 results before participation in the theological training show that three participants selected Disagree, number 2 on a scale of 1-5. Three participants chose Undecided, number 3 on the scale. Four participants selected Agree, number 4 on the scale. Averaging 3.1 on a scale of 5.

The results of statement three after the theological training participation reveal that one participant selected Undecided, number 3 on a scale of 1-5. Seven participants chose Agree, number 4 on the scale. While two participants selected Strongly Agree, number 5 on the scale. This averages 4.1 on a scale of 5.

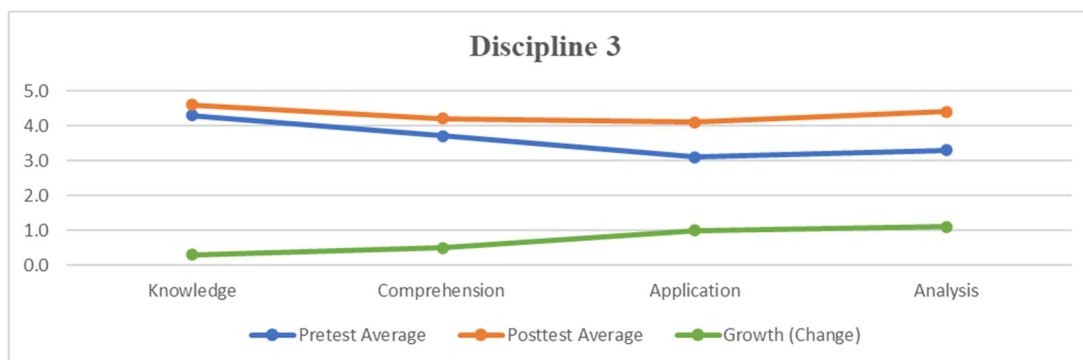
The finding indicates an improvement of 1.0, which translates to a 32% improvement.

The survey results of statement 4 before participation in the theological training show that one participant selected Strongly Disagree, number 1 on a scale of 1-5. Two participants chose Disagree, number 2 on the scale. Four participants selected Undecided, number 3 on the scale. Three participants chose Agree, number 4 on the scale. Averaging 3.3 on a scale of 5.

Statement 4 results after the theological training participation indicate that four participants selected Undecided, number 3 on a scale of 1-5. While six participants selected

Agree, number 4 on the scale. Averaging 4.4 on a scale of 5. The results reveal a growth of 1.1, or 33% growth.

Figure 3



The spiritual discipline of fasting enables CFC women to understand the necessity of fasting with biblical, Christ-centered purposes. Biblical fasting serves many purposes. For instance, before Paul and Barnabas appointed elders in the churches they founded, they primarily prayed and fasted for God’s guidance (Acts 14:23).²¹² Seeking the Spirit of God’s guidance and submitting to His authority would help CFC women overcome their present dilemma and clear the path for godliness.

Spiritual Discipline 4: Fasting

Leading Statement: “Believers should fast according to biblical teaching and with purposes that are God-centered. It is voluntary in that fasting should not be coerced. And fasting is more than just the ultimate crash diet for the body; it is abstinence from food for spiritual purposes.”²¹³

Statement 1: I know that fasting is a biblically supported discipline.

²¹² Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines*, 203.

²¹³ *Ibid.*, 192.

Statement 2: I understand that fasting must always have a spiritual purpose.

Statement 3: I do not have a fear of fasting, I enjoy fasting.

Statement 4: I experience the grace of God when I fast with a biblical, God-centered purpose.

The survey results of statement 1 prior to the theological training participation show that one participant selected Undecided, number 3 on a scale of 1-5. Seven participants chose Agree, number 4 on the scale. While two selected Strongly Agree, number 5 on the scale. This averages 4.1 on a scale of 5.

Statement 1 results after participation in the theological training reveal that seven participants selected Agree, number 4 on a scale of 1-5. Three participants chose Strongly Agree, number 5 on the scale. Averaging 4.3 on a scale of 5.

The results show an improvement of 0.2, or 5% improvement.

The Statement 2 results before the theological training participation indicate that two participants selected Disagree, number 2 on a scale of 1-5. Six participants chose Undecided, number 3 on the scale. One participant selected Agree, number 4 on the scale. While one chose Strongly Agree, number 5 on the scale. Averaging 3.1 on a scale of 5.

The results of statement 2 after participation in the theological training show that two participants selected Undecided, number 3 on a scale of 1-5. Seven participants chose Agree, number 4 on the scale. One participant selected Strongly Agree, number 5 on the scale. Averaging 3.9 on a scale of 5.

The finding reveals an improvement of 0.8, which translates to a 26% improvement.

The Statement 3 results before theological training participation indicate that two participants selected Strongly Disagree, 1 on a scale of 1-5. Three participants chose Disagree,

number 2 on the scale. Three participants selected Undecided, number 3 on the scale. Two participants chose Agree, number 4 on the scale. Averaging 2.5 on a scale of 5.

Results of statement 3 after participation in the theological training reveal that five participants selected Undecided, number 3 on a scale of 1-5. Five participants chose Agree, number 4 on the scale. This averages 3.5 on a scale of 5.

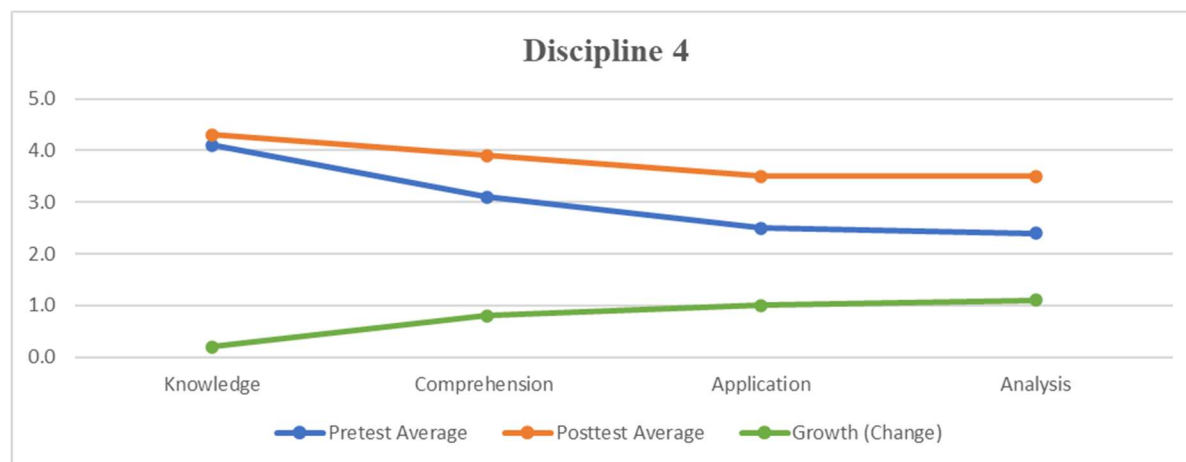
The outcome indicates a growth of 1.0, or 40% growth.

The results of statement 4 before participation in the theological training find that two participants selected Strongly Disagree, number 1 on a scale of 1-5. Four participants chose Disagree, number 2 on the scale. Two participants selected Undecided, number 3 on the scale. While two participants selected Agree, number 4 on the scale. Averaging 2.4 on a scale of 5.

Statement 4 results after the theological training participation show five participants selected Undecided, number 3 on a scale of 1-5. Five participants chose Agree, number 4 on the scale. This averages 3.5 on a scale of 5.

The results indicate an improvement of 1.1, which translates to a 46% improvement.

Figure 4



The spiritual discipline of stewardship of time is crucial because godliness is the product of biblically disciplined spiritual living. However, the disciplined usage of time is at the core of disciplined spiritual life.²¹⁴ Hence, this discipline was to enable CFC women to recognize the value of time and its significance in spiritual growth.

Spiritual Discipline 5: Stewardship

Leading Statement: “The use of time is important because time is the stuff of which days are made. If we do not discipline our use of time for the purpose of godliness in these evil days, these evil days will keep us from becoming godly.”²¹⁵

Statement 1: I know that the gift of time that God gave to everyone is for a purpose.

Statement 2: I understand that everyone will give an account of the gift of time that God gave to them for the purpose of His work.

Statement 3: I use my time wisely.

Statement 4: When I use my time wisely, I feel the inner joy that my time is used for a godly purpose.

The survey results for statement 1 before the theological training participation find that ten participants selected Agree, number 4 on a scale of 1-4. Averaging 4.0 on a scale of 5.

Statement 1 results after participation in the theological training show that seven participants chose Agree, number 4 on a scale of 1-5. While three participants selected Strongly Agree, number 5 on the scale. This averages 4.3 on a scale of 5.

The finding indicates an improvement of 0.3, or 8% improvement.

²¹⁴ Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines*, 159.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 161.

Statement 2 results before participation in the theological training reveal two participants selected Disagree, number 2 on a scale of 1-5. Five participants chose Undecided, number 3 on the scale. Three selected Agree, number 4 on the scale. Averaging 3.1 on a scale of 5.

The results of statement 2 after the theological training participation find that eight participants selected Agree, number 4 on a scale of 1-5. Two participants chose Strongly Agree, number 5 on the scale. Averaging 4.2 on a scale of 5.

The results reveal a growth of 1.1, which translates to 35% growth.

The results of statement 3 before the theological training indicate that one participant chose Strongly Disagree, number 1 on a scale of 1-5. Five participants selected Disagree, number 2 on the scale. Three participants chose Undecided, number 3 on the scale. While one participant selected Agree, number 4 on the scale. This averages 2.4 on a scale of 5.

Statement 3 results after participation in the theological training find that five participants selected Undecided, number 3 on a scale of 1-5. Five participants chose Agree, number 4 on the scale. Averaging 3.5 on a scale of 5.

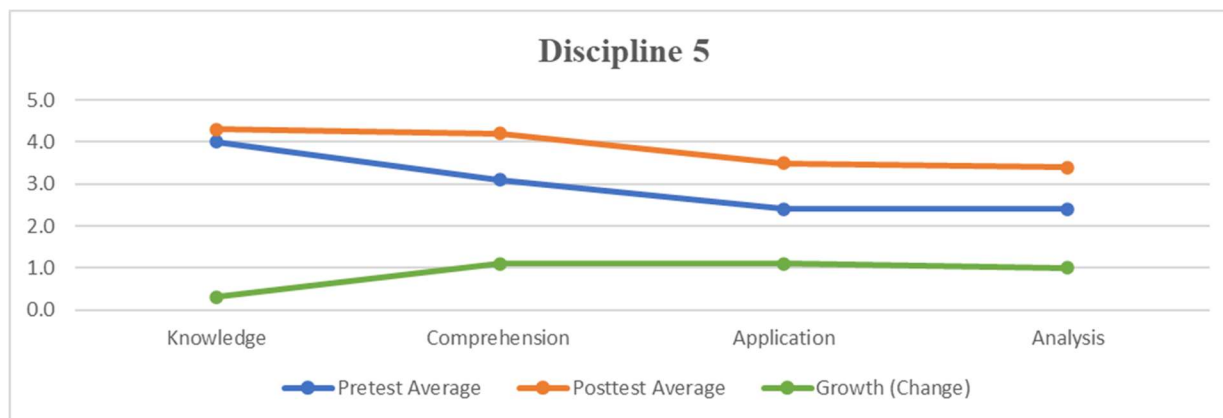
The finding indicates an improvement of 1.1, or 46% improvement.

Results of statement 4 before participation in the theological training reveal that seven participants selected Disagree, number 2 on a scale of 1-5. Two participants chose Undecided, number 3 on the scale. While one participant selected Agree, number 4 on a scale of 5. Averaging 2.4 on a scale of 5.

Statement 4 results after the theological training participation indicate that six participants selected Undecided, number 3 on a scale of 1-5. Four participants selected Agree, number 4, on a scale of 5. Averaging 3.4 on a scale of 5.

The results reveal a growth of 1.0, which translates to 42% growth.

Figure 5



The spiritual discipline of silence and solitude is most important in the contemporary busy and noisy world. Amidst the busyness of life, CFC women must make time for silence and solitude to be more Christlike. The Scripture reveals that after Jesus Christ dismissed the crowds, He departed to the mountain by himself to pray. During the evening, He was alone (Mt 14:23). Jesus knew the necessity of this discipline to create time to be alone with the Father.²¹⁶

Spiritual Discipline 6: Silence and Solitude

Leading Statement: “There is something both appealing and transforming about silence and solitude, And there are moments in our pressure-cooker lives when years of escape to some hidden place sounds wistfully compelling.”²¹⁷

Statement 1: I know that in the busyness of life, it is vital to find time of silence and solitude to be with God.

²¹⁶ Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines*, 226-227.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 224.

Statement 2: I understand that to be like Jesus, believers must create times of silence and solitude.

Statement 3: I make time for silence and solitude.

Statement 4: When I escape to a period of silence and solitude, I feel closer to God.

The survey results for statement 1 before participation in the theological training find that nine participants selected Agree, number 4 on a scale of 1-5. While one participant chose Strongly Agree, number 5 on the scale. Averaging 4.1 on a scale of 5.

Statement 1 results after participation in the theological training show that six participants selected Agree, number 4 on a scale of 1-5. Four participants chose Strongly Agree, number 5 on the scale. This averages 4.4 on a scale of 5.

This finding indicates an improvement of 0.3, which converts to a 7% growth.

Statement 2 results before participation in the theological training reveal that two participants chose Disagree, number 2, on a scale of 1-5. Five participants selected Undecided, number 3 on the scale. Three participants chose Agree, number 4 on the scale. Averaging 3.1 on a scale of 5.

The results of statement 2 after the theological training participation show that nine participants selected Agree, number 4 on a scale of 1-5. While one chose Strongly Agree, number 5 on a scale of 5. Averaging 4.1 on a scale of 5.

This outcome reveals a growth of 1.0, or 32% growth.

The results of statement 3 before the theological training participation indicate that two participants chose Strongly Disagree, number 1 on a scale of 1-5. Six participants selected

Disagree, number 2 on the scale. One participant chose Undecided, number 3 on the scale. While one selected Agree, number 4 on the scale. Averaging 2.1 on a scale of 5.

Statement 3 results after participation in the theological training show that one participant selected Disagree, number 2 on a scale of 1-5. Four participants chose Undecided, number 3 on the scale. Five participants selected Agree, number 4 on the scale. This averages 3.4 on a scale of 5.

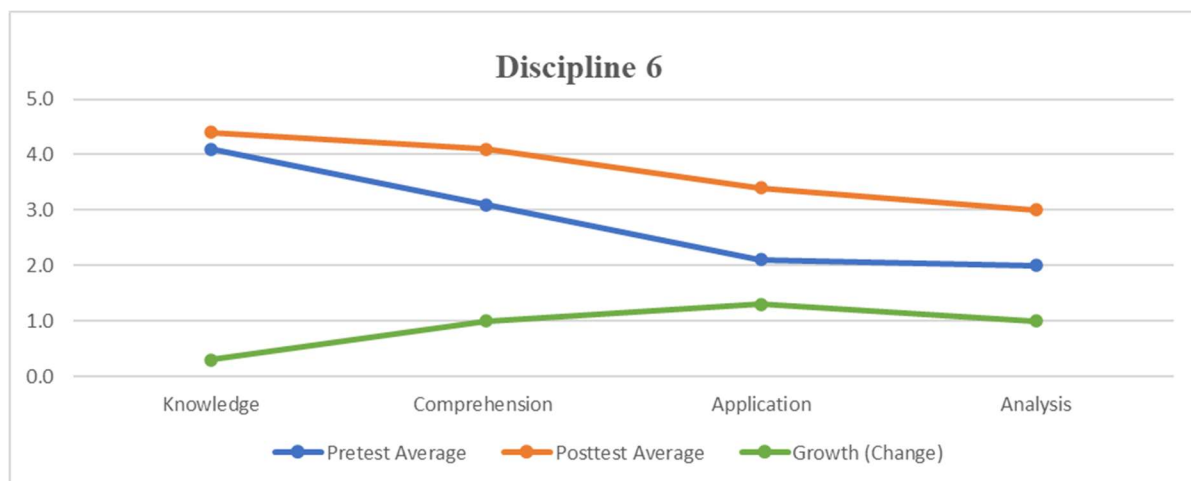
The results indicate a growth of 1.3, which translates to 62% growth.

Statement 4 results before the theological training participation reveal that two participants selected Strongly Disagree, 1 on a scale of 1-5. Seven participants chose Disagree, 2 on the scale. One participant selected Agree, 4 on the scale. Averaging 2.0 on a scale of 5.

The results of statement 4 after participation in the theological training find that one participant selected Disagree, 2 on a scale of 1-5. Four participants chose Undecided, 3 on the scale. Four selected Agree, 4 on the scale. Averaging 3.0 on a scale of 5.

This finding reveals an improvement of 1.0, or 50% improvement.

Figure 6



The spiritual discipline of evangelism was for CFC women to understand the obligatory nature of Christ's command to all believers to share the gospel (Mat 28:19-20). This understanding encompasses not only sharing the gospel but living the gospel.²¹⁸

Spiritual Discipline 7: Evangelism

Leading Statement: "The most powerful ongoing Christian witness has always been the speaking of God's Word by one who is living God's Word."²¹⁹

Statement 1: I know that all Christ's followers are called to witness everywhere.

Statement 2: I understand that the Holy Spirit empowers believers as they share the gospel.

Statement 3: I take delight in sharing the gospel.

Statement 4: When I share the gospel, I feel empowered.

The results of statement 1 before participation in the theological training show that one participant selected Disagree, number 2 on a scale of 1-5. Five participants chose Undecided, number 3 on the scale. Four participants selected Agree, number 4 on the scale. Averaging 3.3 on a scale of 5.

Statement 1 results after the theological training reveal that ten participants selected Agree, number 4 on a scale of 1-5. Averaging 4.0 on a scale of 5.

The results indicate an improvement of 0.7, translating to a 21% improvement.

Statement 2 results before the theological train show that six participants selected Undecided, number 3 on a scale of 1-5. Two participants chose Agree, number 4 on the scale. One participant selected Strongly Agree, number 5 on the scale. Averaging 3.1 on a scale of 5.

²¹⁸ Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines*, 134.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 127.

The results of statement 2 after participation in the theological training find that two participants selected Undecided, number 3 on a scale of 1-5. Seven participants chose Agree, number 4 on the scale. One participant selected Strongly Agree, number 5 on the scale. Averaging 3.9 on a scale of 5.

This finding reveals a growth of 0.8 or 26% growth.

Statement 3 results before the participation in the theological training find that two participants chose Strongly Disagree, number 1 on a scale of 1-5. Four participants selected Disagree, number 2 on a scale of 5. Two participants chose Undecided, number 3 on the scale. Two participants selected Agree, number 4 on the scale. This averages 2.4 on a scale of 5.

The results of statement 3 after participation in the theological training reveal that one participant selected Strongly Disagree, number 1 on a scale of 1-5. Three participants chose Disagree, number 2 on the scale. Three participants selected Undecided, number 3 on the scale. Two participants chose Agree, number 4 on the scale. While one participant selected Strongly Agree, number 5 on the scale. Averaging 2.9 on a scale of 5.

The results indicate an improvement of 0.5 or 21% improvement.

Statement 4 results before the theological training participation show that three participants selected Strongly Disagree, number 1 on a scale of 5. Four participants chose Disagree, number 2 on the scale. One participant selected Undecided, number 3 on the scale. Two participants chose Agree, number 4 on the scale. Averaging 2.2 on a scale of 5.

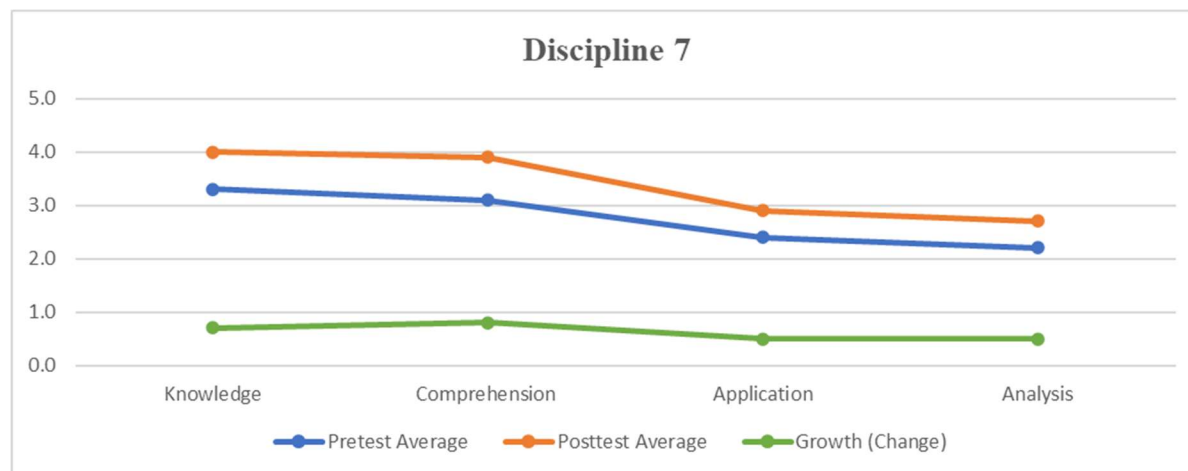
The results of statement 4 after participation in the theological training reveal that one participant selected Strongly Disagree, number 1 on a scale of 1-5. Three participants chose

Disagree, number 2 on the scale. Four participants selected Undecided, number 3 on the scale.

Two participants chose Agree, number 4 on the scale. Averaging 2.7 on a scale of 5.

The finding indicates an improvement of 0.5 or 23% improvement.

Figure 7



Participants' Journal Entries

Participants were instructed to journal their experiences in theological training and spiritual discipline exercises. According to the discussion during the intervention, many participants admitted that they do not journal, and some indicated they write things down but not for the purpose of tracking their spiritual journey. This lack is reflected in their pretest results of the spiritual discipline of journaling. The posttest shows a noticeable improvement. Since journaling is a personal reflection of encounters in one's spiritual journey, every participant wrote differently. Some wrote extensively, while some wrote little. Notwithstanding, summaries of some of their relevant encounters are presented. In fact, no matter the extent of each participant's entries, the genuineness of the heart is what God desires. In Jeremiah 17:10, the

LORD declares that He searches the heart and tests the mind and deals with everyone accordingly. The heart is the basis of character, and the LORD knows a person's character.²²⁰

Summary of P1001 Journaling

The participant started by stating that she had never kept a journal and had no idea about its relevance to one's spiritual life. She also affirmed that she had never participated in a research project, and as such, she was initially nervous until the researcher clearly explained what it entailed. Furthermore, she indicated that she struggled to identify two weaknesses she must pray about during the entire sessions because she had many and could not decide on the most important ones. Finally, identified two which she prayed about for the entire session. She disclosed that she used to pray for her sins to be forgiven but had never identified them one by one in praying. Initially, she felt uncomfortable doing it, as if someone else may know about them and belittle her. However, she became calm when she remembered that she was not approaching a human being but a God that already knew all her sins. Since she started it, her prayer pattern has significantly changed, and she feels relieved and more secure. Indeed, the importance of confessing one's sins before God can never be overemphasized. The Scripture affirms that anyone that conceals their sins will not prosper, but those that confess and abstain from them will obtain mercy (Proverb 28:13 NKJV). There is no blessing for one that refuses to confess their sins to God and forsake them.²²¹

Regarding the Bible study and prayer assignments, she declared that she strives to study her Bible constantly. However, she slacks occasionally due to a heavy workload. She indicated

²²⁰ Gordon McConville, "Jeremiah" *New Bible Commentary*, eds. G. J. Wenham, J. A. Motyer, D. A. Carson, and R. T. France (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2010), 687.

²²¹ MacDonald, *Believer's Bible Commentary*, 793.

that one of the things she learned during the theological training about studying the Bible was not how many chapters one studies that matters; it is the quality and the spiritual impact of what was studied, those matters. This insight has helped her to change her Bible study approach and her prayer pattern. This participant's approach to Bible study is common practice at CFC. Many members spend time reading and memorizing passages without putting what they acquired into action. Hence, the dilemma with the female members. Without action, the knowledge acquired is meaningless.²²²

Furthermore, for the fasting assignment, she explained that before her participation in this project, she fasted solely for personal issues and not for spiritual purposes. But, during the two day fast, she was conscious of how she directed her prayer, thereby asking that the Holy Spirit directs her prayers as she presented her petitions. In fact, asking for the Spirit's guidance as one prays is a prudent approach to prayers because it is the Spirit that directs the path of a genuine believer. Psalm 37:23 declares that God directs the steps of a good man. The LORD plans and orders the ways of the one that lives in fellowship with Him.²²³

Regarding the stewardship of time and evangelism assignments, she disclosed that she struggles to manage her time. When she evaluated the time she spent in a day, she realized she was busy doing many things without making enough provision for the things that revitalized her spiritual life. She emphasized that she tends to fill her schedule with work-related and personal tasks without thinking deeply about the issues that matter most, nurturing the spiritual life. She also disclosed that she shared the gospel with two colleagues for the evangelism assignment. Her

²²² Saucy, *Minding the Heart*, 78.

²²³ MacDonald, *Believer's Bible Commentary*, 551.

colleagues were receptive, but her problem was that she was not as articulate as she had wanted. She ended her entries by stating that although she struggles with many issues, theological teaching, and spiritual discipline practices helped her in many areas. At CFC, evangelism is not a top priority, and that could explain this participant's anxiety about sharing the gospel. However, as she continues to practice that discipline, she will be empowered to become bold. Christ promised to be with the believers as they spread the gospel. Hence, the response to her perceived poor evangelism is not to stop telling the gospel story but to tell the true story honestly.²²⁴

Summary of P1002 Journaling

The participant disclosed that she was unsure what to expect when she agreed to get involved in the project because this was her first experience. Although the researcher explained the goal of the project and what was expected from the participants, she was still clueless about how things would work. But, when the session began, and everyone was encouraged to get involved in the discussion, she realized the path to follow. Speaking of journaling, she indicated that she keeps a journal on her notepad, but not an elaborate structure. She journals some of her thoughts, Bible passages she wants to memorize, and other personal encounters with other people.

Regarding studying the Bible, prayer, and fasting assignments, she indicated that she delights in studying the Scripture. Still, her main problem is understanding and reconciling what she is learning. However, she stated that during the theological training, she learned that one must pray for the Holy Spirit's guidance as one begins to study the Bible. She has started practicing it each time she studies the Scripture. Likewise, she does it with prayers. She prays

²²⁴ Michael J. Gorman, *Becoming the Gospel: Paul, Participation, and Mission* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2015), 133.

that the Holy Spirit will direct her prayers. Also, she fasted as instructed, but she does not practice fasting frequently. This participant is striving to learn how to study the Scripture to have a spiritual impact. Studying the Scripture is serious and diligent work, and if a person must cultivate that discipline, they must recognize from the outset that God's grace is needed to persevere.²²⁵ Speaking of the usefulness of God's Word, which is applicable to all believers, Paul states in 2 Timothy 3:17 that the man of God may be adequate and fully equipped to do every good work. Hence, a believer who is not carefully involved in a serious study of the Bible is inadequate as Christ's disciple.²²⁶

Furthermore, for the stewardship of time, silence and solitude, and evangelism assignments, she disclosed that after assessing how she spent her day, she saw areas where she mismanaged her time. She is striving to work on those areas. Regarding silence and solitude, she conducted it in the early morning before she began her daily activities. She indicated that she felt an inner peace during the event, which stayed the entire day. For evangelism, she shared the gospel with her neighbor. She also admitted that she shared the basic stuff since she is still trying to understand some key issues. She ended her entries by stating that she enjoyed the group chat and the sessions but had hoped it would run longer than seven sessions.

Summary of P1003 Journaling

The participant noted that her journey in this project began with prayerfully jotting down two of her weaknesses she considers sinful in the sight of God, as instructed in the first weekly assignment. She prayed fervently as she practiced the weekly spiritual disciplines that the Holy

²²⁵ R. C. Sproul, *Knowing Scripture*, Expanded Edition (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2016), 20.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*, 26.

Spirit would change those weaknesses. Also, she indicated that her meditation scripture was Proverbs 3:5-6, which helped her remain focused. This change came in the third week, the fasting week. Suddenly she noticed the craving for those weaknesses was dwindling, and with it came an indescribable joy in her heart. She asserted that the joy continued. In addition, she stated that in the same week, the Holy Spirit opened her eyes to see a “major idol” in her Christian journey. She asserts, “An idol which I did not realize was an idol. Like I relied on and trusted in the idol more than God.” She concluded that this was equally a considerable encounter. The participant did not disclose those sins that stood between her and God. Still, she narrated her transforming encounters, which also revealed what she classified as a significant idol in her Christian journey. The Scripture cannot lie. Isaiah 59:1-2 affirms that God’s hand is not shortened that it is unable to save, neither is His ear heavy, that it is incapable of hearing. But iniquities and sins have created barriers between God and His people. God’s power is more than enough to deliver His people.²²⁷

Furthermore, touching the stewardship of time, she admitted she was very slack in using her time wisely. She asserted that she spent significant time “scrolling through Instagram and social media for meaningless content.” Also, she stated that she spends hours on the phone with people, not for godly purposes. Hence, during the theological teaching and the discussion about the stewardship of time, she felt uncomfortable because the bulk of things said seemed directed at her. Thus, when she left that night, she vowed to make drastic changes in her time management. She indicated that she has become more conscious of the use of her time. One of the things the researcher observed was that almost all the participants struggled with stewardship

²²⁷ MacArthur, *The MacArthur Bible Commentary*, 834.

of time. Undoubtedly, the present world makes it challenging to utilize time prudently, particularly for purposes of biblical spirituality and godliness.²²⁸ Although this participant has made up her mind to make a significant change, which would only happen through the enabling of the Holy Spirit. In Philippians 2:13, Paul declares that God's Spirit works in the believers so they may decide and act according to God's good purpose.²²⁹

On the issue of the Silence and Solitude assignment, she indicated that she did hers in her car on her way to work. On that day, she turned off her phone and radio, the car was quiet. She began her time with God, which she concluded she cherished tremendously. Accordingly, she asserted, "This moment was amazing and refreshing as my mind traveled down memory lane of the beginning of my walk with God. Taking me back to when I was not even a Christian, and His presence was always there with me. It was like God was giving me some real Aha moment. I could hear Him saying, yes, I was there when you had not surrendered and did not know me. But God was always behind the scene doing great things in my life. From people I have encountered in life, through the workplace, and elsewhere, all have been intentional and carefully orchestrated by God. Even down to the disappointments and harsh situations, God was telling me that He was there." Indeed, this participant chose her car as the preferred place of silence and solitude, where she encountered the presence of the Holy Spirit. There is no limitation to one's place or length of silence and solitude. It could happen at a traffic light, elevator, in line at a drive-through, or anywhere.²³⁰ The main issue is to create time alone with God for spiritual purposes.

²²⁸ Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines*, 160.

²²⁹ Bridges, *The Pursuit of Holiness*, 54.

²³⁰ Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines*, 238.

In evangelism, she indicated that her encounter happened in the bank. She visited the bank to make some transactions but was also not in the best of moods that day. On reaching the bank, the guard greeted her pleasantly with a smile, and she was forced to stop and speak to him. As the conversation went on, she saw an opportunity to speak to him about the goodness of God. In the process, one passerby overheard the discussion, stopped, and joined the conversation. The entire conversation became about God and His goodness. When she finished and left the bank, her mood changed, and she became very happy. Unexpectedly, and within her unhappy mood, the participant was moved to share the gospel. The power of evangelism lies with the Holy Spirit.²³¹

She summed her journal entries by stating that the entire spiritual formation process enriched her beyond measure. She affirmed that until participating in this project, she rarely spoke about doing things for godliness or becoming like Christ. Now she is conscious of her actions and their impact on her, others, and God.

Summary of P1004 Journaling

The participant states that participation in this program has enriched her and enabled her to start making some changes in the way she approaches things pertaining to God and other people. She indicated that she would be studying the Scripture to have a deeper understanding of what is being said and how it applies to her. She affirmed that what stuck in her mind now from the theological teaching and spiritual discipline exercises was that everything a Christian does must have a spiritual purpose that would gradually, through the Holy Spirit, transform them into the image of Christ. Just like other participants, she has a problem managing her time, and that

²³¹ Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines*, 124.

affects other areas of her life. Accordingly, she states, “Time management has been one of my biggest concerns, and I believe that if I get that under control, I will devote more time to prayer, silence and solitude practice, evangelism, and other things that are required of a true believer. I am praying for the Holy Spirit to help me overcome that problem.” Indeed, among other things, the pursuit of godliness requires time. For instance, “Discipleship is a commitment to Christ.”²³² However, without investing proper time, that commitment will not materialize.

This participant wrote little, but that does not matter. Her heart toward what she learned is the most important. God cares less about outward display. He responds to the heart because that is what human beings are—who they decided to be or have chosen to become.²³³

Summary of P1005 Journaling

The participant began her journal entries by stating that sometimes when she reads the Bible or prays, she does not feel God’s presence. As such, she occasionally feels disconnected from God. Also, she indicated that growing up, she was constantly compared with her cousin, and she hated it with a passion. Due to that, she developed a spirit of competition, constantly comparing herself with others, and sometimes wished to have what other people have. She believes that these are weaknesses that stand between her and God, and she must pray for the Holy Spirit’s intervention. This participant wrote candidly about her challenges, and that was the best place to start. In Matthew 9:12-13, Jesus affirms that a healthy person does not need a physician, but those that are sick. He came to call sinners to repentance, not the righteous. In fact,

²³² Geoffrey B. Kelly and John D. Godsey, ed., *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Discipleship, Volume 4* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2003), 59.

²³³ Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*, 153.

Jesus provides mercy, forgiveness, restoration, and healing to sinners.²³⁴“God is the only restorer of souls.”²³⁵ Hence, as this participant continues to practice godly living, the Spirit of God will gradually transform her into Christ’s image.

She indicated that she recorded all seven teaching sessions on her phone device and played them on her way to work to have a better understanding of some of the issues discussed. That has been helpful for her growth. Furthermore, she stated that after the Bible Study and prayer assignments, she noticed that she is beginning to pay more attention to what she is reading and how she conducts her prayers. She fasted for two days for the fasting assignment but had mixed results. She indicated that as she fasted and prayed, she felt unusual inner peace several times, and in some instances, she felt nervous, and her thoughts wandered a lot. Also, for her silence and solitude assignment, she stated that she did not feel the presence of the Holy Spirit. Instead, she heard her own voice, which was filled with “fears, worries, and anxieties.” For the evangelism assignment, she indicated that she shared the gospel with her husband, who is constantly worrying about his job security. She concluded her journal entries by stating that she would continue praying that the Holy Spirit would transform her into the person God had designed her to be.

Summary of P1006 Journaling

The participant began her entries by acknowledging that she had no clue about the benefits of journaling in one’s spiritual growth. She stated that at her job, she maintains a to-do list that keeps her organized in her daily work activities. She uses the calendar on her iPhone for

²³⁴ D. A. Carson, “Matthew” *Matthew and Mark*, vol. 9, The Expositor’s Bible Commentary, ed. Tremper Longman, III and David Garland (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 264.

²³⁵ Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*, 221.

her personal tasks to keep track of things to do. But never had she connected journaling to spiritual growth. After the explanation of the benefits of journaling for spiritual purposes, she saw the need to embrace the practice.

Regarding the Bible study, prayer, fasting, and stewardship of time assignment, she maintained that she enjoys meditating on the words of the Scripture. She stated that she prefers studying at night because she is more focused. Also, she asserted that Family Radio is another avenue she utilizes in studying and understanding the Scripture. In terms of prayer, she indicated that praying is like a companion to her because she has many challenges that she wrestles with, and prayer gives her the comfort and strength to persevere. For the fasting assignment, she fasted for two days and indicated that she was specific about what she fasted for, and the outcome was great. Pertaining to the stewardship of time, she indicated that she is struggling in that area because sometimes she wastes too much time on things that do not add value to her spiritual life. She started keeping track of her time by journaling her daily activities to remedy that situation.

Furthermore, for the silence and solitude assignment, she stated that she had her quiet moment with the LORD in the midnight hour. The moment was peaceful and heartening. She admitted that she does not make provisions for such moments frequently. For the evangelism assignment, she indicated that she shared the gospel with three individuals and even introduced one of them to Family Radio programs. She concluded that she takes pleasure in sharing the gospel but sometimes gets nervous, which impedes her progress. She prays that she will be empowered to start doing it with ease. Indeed, this participant is not alone in evangelism phobia. A few people delight in sharing the gospel, and most are frightened.²³⁶

²³⁶ Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines*, 123.

Summary of P1007 Journaling

The participant affirmed that she was not used to journaling before participating in the program, but when she started, she realized its benefits. It is helping her to put her thoughts on paper and quietly process them. She indicated that she has a troubled marriage and now writes down the bulk of her overwhelming thoughts. In addition, she stated that the two weaknesses she prayed about throughout the sessions were “fear and resentment.” She reflected on 2 Timothy 1:7 and Psalms 27:1 during her prayers. As she prayed, she realized the fear was not as overwhelming as before the program. Also, the resentment she had carried for a long time seemed to be losing its power on her. Regarding Bible study, she states, “I thought the number of Scripture passages I packed in my head made me a good Christian.” But, during the first week’s session on the authority of the Scripture and its power to change people, she realized her errors in approaching the Scripture. Right now, she studies the Bible meditatively to gain spiritual insights. This participant spends time reading and memorizing the passages of the Scripture, which is commendable. However, the most important part of studying the Scripture is its application to one’s life situation.²³⁷ The Word of God must dictate the actions believers take in their earthly affairs. Psalm 119: 105 affirms that God’s Word is a lamp to the believer’s feet and a light to their path. The Word guides an individual by forbidding certain behavior patterns and illuminating them in the right way.²³⁸

Concerning the prayer and fasting assignments, she stated that felt inner peace when she finished the fasting, which allowed her to remain calm in the face of trials. For the Silence and

²³⁷ Bridges, *The Pursuit of Holiness*, 81.

²³⁸ MacDonald, *Believer’s Bible Commentary*, 679.

Solitude assignment, she affirmed that the thought of carving out time for that assignment seemed impossible because she has four children that need her attention consistently. Also, she states, “Thinking about turning off the phone, the television, the computer, and all other messaging devices appeared unattainable, and prayed that God would grant me the wisdom to create time for that important moment. He answered my prayer.” She stated that she decided, with the help of the Holy Spirit, to create time in the morning when the children were in school. The opportunity to stay in a quiet place and feel God’s presence was incredible. She affirmed that the moment was so peaceful and comforting that she exceeded the one hour for the assignment without realizing it. Also, regarding evangelism, she indicated that she was able to interact with one of her coworkers during lunch. After the sharing of the word, she felt that it did not make the expected impact on her coworker. As such, she concluded that she did a poor job of delivering the message.

This participant believed that she was unsuccessful in her evangelism because her coworker was not as receptive as she expected. Probably she anticipated an instant conversion. Undoubtedly, that is what people expect to happen when they do evangelism. However, one must understand that successful evangelism is sharing the gospel. God is the only one that produces the fruit of evangelism named conversion.²³⁹ The role of the Holy Spirit in evangelistic tasks needs to be understood as one proceeds in doing that task. Christ emphasized that in Acts 1:8. From the moment the Holy Spirit indwells the believer, He grants them the power to witness. This power is gifted differently to all Christians. As such, the ways, and methods of sharing the gospel reflect that spiritual gift.²⁴⁰

²³⁹ Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines*, 124.

Summary of P1008 Journaling:

The participant is a college student, and she indicated that since she started college, her “relationship with God has not been at its best.” She narrated that she became negligent in prayers, reading her Bible, and fasting. She could not remember when she fasted last or did meaningful Bible studies and prayers. As such, she was ready to go through the seven weeks spiritual formation journey with the hope of revamping her relationship with God.

She affirmed that she has started reading her Bible but with a different mindset. She has included daily Bible studies in her schoolwork schedule. Whereby the way she viewed the importance of studying to succeed in her classes, she has taken the same approach for her Bible studies. This innovative approach, she affirmed, is the acquisition of Bible knowledge and living by it. Furthermore, she stated that she has started praying frequently but with a different technique. Accordingly, she states, “I would avoid making my prayers sound like one reading a wish list. I want to make my prayers as transparent and honest as possible. Since I have realized that praying to God with a sincere heart is important.” The participant was gradually drifting away spiritually, but the Holy Spirit is putting her back on track through participation in this project. Assuredly, when the Holy Spirit quickens an individual to new life in Christ, He continues to work in them and change them.²⁴¹ The change in this participant also attests to the transformative power of the Scripture. In fact, the power is the result of the God of Scripture working with His words.²⁴²

²⁴⁰ Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines*, 124-125.

²⁴¹ R.C. Sproul, *The Holiness of God*. (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale Momentum, 1998), 10.

²⁴² Allison, *50 Core Truths of the Christian Faith*, 48.

Regarding the fasting assignment, she affirmed that when she used to fast, she always thought that fasting was just not eating or drinking and nothing beyond the physical. As such, she would eagerly be counting down time and longing for food. She affirmed that the view has changed. During the fasting week's assignment, she stated that her new view of fasting was tested. She indicated that she forgot that the day she picked to start her fasting was her school's open house. Accordingly, she stated, "I worked at my school's open house on the day I was fasting. During these types of events, food and other goodies are normally served. As we were serving food, I kept praying that the Holy Spirit would assist me so that I do not succumb to the temptation. As I was praying, I was not bothered by the variety of food we served. But something happened in the interim. My senior Ambassador came and reassigned me to a different location where food was not present, with a few people around. That location provided a good opportunity for me to pray and worship. I attributed the action as the work of the Holy Spirit." Certainly, this participant's encounter during her day of fasting was nothing other than the manifestation of the Spirit of God. Paul declares in Romans 8:26 that the Spirit helps in the believer's weaknesses and intercedes for them. The Spirit that knows the believer's shortcomings and their inadequacy in prayers come alongside assisting them.²⁴³

Summary of P1009 Journaling:

The participant started her journal entries by identifying some of her weaknesses that interfere with her relationship with God. She stated, "As a human, I have many weaknesses. But some inhibit my relationship with God. I tend to limit God's ability to use me. I consistently downplay my abilities, feeling like an imposter, shrinking, and not walking in the path God

²⁴³ MacDonald, *Believer's Bible Commentary*, 1709.

wants me to follow.” After, she wrote about her Bible study, prayer, and fasting assignments. She asserted that she takes delight in studying the Scripture, praying, and fasting. However, sometimes when she is sad, she finds studying the Bible difficult, or even praying or fasting. During the Bible study week’s assignment, she reflected deeply on Nehemiah’s intercessory prayers for Israel’s predicament recorded in Nehemiah 1: 1-11. She indicated that she used the passage to deliberate on God’s mercy and prayed that God would not forsake her because of her shortcomings. But transform her so that her life will reflect the life of Jesus. From all indications, this participant is wrestling with feelings of inadequacy and uncertainties about her Christian life. Spiritual growth is a continuous process, but the present world’s instant gratification mentality pushes many Christians to think that spiritual formation must happen instantaneously.²⁴⁴ The reality is that spiritual formation is not optional for believers. The Christian journey is an “intentional and continual commitment to a lifelong process of growth toward wholeness in Christ.”²⁴⁵ As the participant perseveres in her Christian walk and becomes more of the image of Christ, she will understand this truth.

Furthermore, regarding the stewardship of time, she stated, “When I evaluate my day, I see I spend an obscene amount of time on irrelevant things, such as watching TV, talking on the phone, going to Instagram, or doing other meaningless things.” She admitted that spending excessive time on things of those nature is unhealthy for one’s Christian life, yet she continues to indulge in them. But the turning point was what she heard during one of the theological teaching sessions. She heard the researcher emphasize that “We become what we feed most.” The

²⁴⁴ Barton and Mulholland Jr., *Invitation to a Journey*, 27.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 29.

statement pierced through her, and she decided to make a drastic change. She set up a feature in her iPhone that tracks how much time a person spends during each activity daily. This strategy, she asserts, has been helping her to minimize and monitor the time spend doing an activity. Indeed, this participant is not alone in her addiction to technology. Technology is one of the areas people are prone to excess.²⁴⁶

Regarding silence and solitude, she indicated that her car was the best place she could find a quiet space. She drives a long distance to work and uses her car as her little sanctuary where she has uninterrupted quiet moments with God. Thus, she used that space to reflect on her relationship with God, leading her to cry intermittently. Cry of joy mixed with anguish because of the trials the Holy Spirit helped her to overcome and the victories she obtained from Him. Like some participants, this participant had her silence and solitude in her car. This discipline can be done for various spiritual reasons—to seek God’s salvation, to regain a Spiritual Perspective, to seek God’s will, and so on.²⁴⁷

Furthermore, she shared the gospel with two individuals for the evangelism assignment. She had known the first person for a long time and needed her to hear the gospel. Hence, she called her, and they started their usual talk, and the participant decided to introduce the issue of the gospel, and the outcome was unexpected. She indicated that the person became enraged and told her she did not want to hear about God because she felt He abandoned her and her family. The person feels that her mother’s death and the trials her family has been experiencing since her passing are signs of God’s abandonment. The participant stated that she stopped discussing the

²⁴⁶ Sophia Steibel and Martha S. Bergen, “The Body: Discipleship of our Physicality,” *Christian Education Journal* vol. 16, no. 1 (2019): 103.

²⁴⁷ Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines*, 231, 233,235.

gospel but calmed her down. Since then, she has been praying for her and her family that the Holy Spirit will comfort and heal their pain. In addition, the second person was a coworker. This happened at the end of the workday. The person had a severe disagreement with her supervisor, leading to an outburst. Then the person approached the participant to vent her anger, and that provided her with a perfect opportunity to share the gospel with her. The discussion went well and lasted for almost an hour. Indeed, all Christians are disciples.²⁴⁸

The participant closed her journal entries by stating that when she was approached to participate in this project, she had some reservations because she had never participated in such a project. So, she reluctantly accepted to join because she did not want to offend the researcher. She affirmed that the program woke her up from her spiritual sluggishness and wished that it lasted for more than seven sessions.

Summary of P1010 Journaling

The participant started her entries by listing two weaknesses she had to pray about for the program's duration. She stated that she is angry and quarrelsome, and some people try to avoid her because of that, but it never bothered her. In addition, she affirmed that she knows the behavior is wrong but feels it gives her the power to control people. She hopes the Holy Spirit will help make her a better person because she feels trapped. This participant is struggling with two behaviors that the Scripture strongly discourages. However, if she continues in the pursuit of godliness, the Spirit of God will transform her. 2 Peter 3:9 affirms that God is not slow in keeping His promise. Instead, He is patient toward the believers and does not desire that anyone should perish, but all should come to repentance. The Lord is not slack in fulfilling His promise,

²⁴⁸ John MacArthur, *The Gospel According to Jesus: What Is Authentic Faith?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), 219.

even though it may appear so. Instead, at the center of the issue of slowness is divine patience. The aim of this patience is for all people to bow their knees and allow for repentance.²⁴⁹ Spiritual growth constantly necessitates victory over sin's power.²⁵⁰

For the Bible study and prayer assignments, she indicated that she believes the Bible is God's Word but has a problem reading it and relating it to herself. She makes out time to study the Bible but struggles with most of its content. Likewise, when she prays, she has difficulty focusing on the prayers. Sometimes her mind wanders away to things that are not related to what she is praying about. This also applies to her silence and solitude moments with the Holy Spirit. She consistently struggles to keep her mind focused, but it has been a big challenge.

In her closing journal entries, she indicated that she is struggling with many things and trusts that as she continues praying and applying what she learned, there will be a significant change in her Christian life.

Researcher's Reflective Journal

As previously noted, the researcher prayed passionately for the Holy Spirit's leadership and involvement from the beginning to the end of the project. The Holy Spirit is He that possesses the power to change the spiritual dilemma of CFC women. The issue of spiritual growth rests in the Spirit of God. Hence, 1 Corinthians 3:6 declares that Paul planted, while Apollos watered, but God provided the growth. Only God can grant faith to the spiritually ignorant and dead.²⁵¹ Bearing this limitation in mind, the researcher committed the teachings,

²⁴⁹ J. Daryl Charles, "2 Peter" *Hebrews—Revelation*, vol. 13, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Tremper Longman, III and David Garland (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006), 408.

²⁵⁰ Saucy, *Minding the Heart*, 120.

²⁵¹ MacArthur, *The MacArthur Bible Commentary*, 1569.

discussions, various spiritual discipline exercises, the participants, herself, and everything related to the project into the hand of the Spirit of God. Also, the researcher prayed that her observations were without bias. The observations consisted of how the participants interacted with one another, the content and styles of their conversations, and subtle factors, such as silence, body language, and tone of voice.²⁵²

None of the participants knew who was participating in the project. They all found out that at the first session. When they all arrived, the researcher observed that four participants were uneasy sitting there because they had been quarreling with one another. They barely spoke to each other during that first session, and as soon as the session was over, they greeted the researcher and left quickly to avoid interacting with one another. Furthermore, their antagonism manifested during the discussion and comments on the designated issues at that first session. They dominated the discussions not to edify or enrich other participants but to prove they were more knowledgeable than their perceived opponents.

The researcher did not discourage the behavior at the first session but emphasized on the assignment that every participant should select two weaknesses (characters) they believe hinders their relationship with God. The following examples were provided: bitterness, envy, idleness, unforgiveness, lies, arrogance, slandering, self-indulgence, unfaithfulness, pride, and so on. The researcher utilized Jeremiah 29:13 to underscore the necessity of this assignment. Accordingly, Jeremiah declares, “You will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart.” This passage was intentionally selected to stress the importance of approaching God with a pure heart. A pure heart bears the fruit of the Spirit. Paul declares the fruit of the Spirit as “love, joy,

²⁵² Sensing, *Qualitative Research*, 76.

peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control” (Gal 5:22-23). Indeed, these are the characteristics of an individual growing in holiness.²⁵³ To produce such characteristics, CFC women must practice the fruit of the Spirit.

These four individuals replicated the same behavior in the second session. They avoided one another and again tried to dominate the discussions. Still, the researcher cautiously used the passages of Scripture to emphasize love, unity, holiness, and so forth as some of the attributes of a faithful Christian. She consistently reminded everyone, including herself, of the reason they embarked on the project—the transformation of everyone’s heart to reflect the image of Christ. This approach was necessary because, among other things, the formation process must involve wise planning. Those in charge would prayerfully strive to implement what is desired in a particular situation.²⁵⁴ Hence, the desire for this project was for the CFC women to embrace the truth of the Scripture and apply it in their daily Christian walk. As a result, their lives would be transformed to reflect the image of Christ.

As previously noted, the researcher and her assistant came to the project location about half an hour before the session started to set up the Zoom device. This also helped the researcher observe the interactions and expressions of participants as they arrived. In the third session, two of those four participants sat on the same row of chairs and exchanged greetings. Both did not arrive at the same time, one came in first, sat in the second row, and the other one came in and went and sat by her and greeted her. The researcher did not know whether they heard any discussion before coming to the session or whether the change of heart occurred at that moment.

²⁵³ Sproul, *The Holiness of God*, 169-170.

²⁵⁴ James C. Wilhoit and Evan B. Howard, “The Wisdom of Christian Spiritual Formation,” *Journal of Spiritual Formation & Soul Care* 13, no.1 (2020): 7.

After the session, the four did not rush out as they did in the first and second sessions. They stayed and conversed with other participants for about twenty minutes.

Furthermore, from that third session, the discussion interactions during the sessions gradually became cordial. The uneasiness that was felt during the first and second sessions lessened. The atmosphere allowed other participants to participate and contribute to the discussion. With each subsequent session, the interactions and contributions from the participants were meaningful and encouraging. The researcher observed a significant change in the sixth session. After the session, all participants, including the researcher, discussed the horrible weather that day and how everyone braved it to show up. One discussion led to another, and at one point, one of the participants made a funny comment, and everyone started laughing. Amid all the laughter and chatting, the researcher observed that the four rivals were talking to each other and laughing. Eventually, everyone left at the same time, which had not happened in the previous sessions. Whatever happened, it was the intervention of the Holy Spirit through the truth of the Scripture. In John 17:17, Jesus prays for His followers to be sanctified by the truth of God's word. Spiritual life and its growth in all its phases emerge from the knowledge of God's revelation.²⁵⁵

The last session mirrored the sixth session's participants' involvement. The interactions were lively. To keep the momentum going, the researcher suggested at the end of the session to keep the group chat continuous so that participants would continue to post encouraging words or disseminate information that enriches spiritual life. All participants agreed to leave it open. Hence, the group chat device remains active. Knowing the spiritual predicament of CFC women,

²⁵⁵ Saucy, *Minding the Heart*, 134.

the researcher deemed it necessary to keep the channel of communication open to continue encouraging one another because spiritual growth is a gradual process. Hence accountability is important. Proverbs 27:17 declares, “As iron sharpens iron, So a man sharpens the countenance of his friend.” The advantages of intellectual conversation encourage joy through a keen mind and the enhancement of good character, which the face will reveal.²⁵⁶

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

This project was conducted to address the spiritual formation dilemma found among the CFC female members. The intervention consisted of theological training and spiritual discipline practices. Four levels of Bloom’s Taxonomy, knowledge, comprehension, application, and analysis were used to measure the intervention. Ten adult female CFC members participated in the project. The theological training curriculum was structured to buttress each spiritual discipline practiced. Seven spiritual disciplines, namely studying God’s Word, Journaling, Prayer, Fasting, Stewardship, Silence and Solitude, and Evangelism. Each discipline was practiced after the weekly theological training.

Spiritual Discipline 1: Studying God’s Word

The first statement on the spiritual discipline of studying God’s Word measured the level of the participants’ knowledge that the Scripture contains hidden truths about God, Jesus Christ, the Law of God, and so forth. This level of measurement involves little more than recalling the appropriate information.²⁵⁷ At this juncture, the participants were expected to respond based on their recollection of what they previously learned about God’s Word and what they learned

²⁵⁶ MacArthur, *The MacArthur Bible Commentary*, 724.

²⁵⁷ Bloom, *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives*, 201.

during the theological training. Hence, the pretest and posttest procedures. Accordingly, the average pretest result was 3.2 on a scale of 5. The average post-test result was 4.3. This result shows a 1.1 growth, which translates to a 34% improvement. The baseline average of 3.2 on a scale of 5 indicated the participants' level of remembrance of what they knew thus far about God's Word. However, after undergoing theological training about God's Word, their knowledge level increased to 4.3. This shows that the theological training positively impacted their knowledge of the Word of God.

Although the participants did not hit 5.0 on the scale, their pretest and posttest levels are indications that they are conversant with remembering what they learned about God's Word. This outcome supports what the researcher presented in the problem statement about the participants' approach to God's Word. They are good at memorizing and reciting Scripture passages, which is a commendable practice. This attribute is also revealed in the participants' journal entries on the discipline of studying the Word. Some participants wrote that they read and memorized a lot of Scripture verses. Indeed, memorization enables one to deliberate, which equips one to do and empowers one to obtain good success according to God's plan for them.²⁵⁸

Statement two of studying God's Word discipline measured the participants' comprehension that studying the Word entails thorough examination to find the enduring truth. This measurement level refers to an individual's ability to understand what is being communicated and be able to utilize the information.²⁵⁹ Here, the average pretest result was 3.6 on a scale of 5. The posttest average result was 4.2. This result parallels the knowledge pretest

²⁵⁸ Dallas Willard, "Spiritual Disciplines, Spiritual Formation, and The Restoration of the Soul," *Journal of Psychology and Theology* vol.26, No.1, (1998): 108.

²⁵⁹ Blooms, *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives*, 204.

and posttest results with a slight difference. From all indications, the participants' approach to handling the Word of God, which prompted Statement 1's results, was the same factor that influenced the outcome of this statement 2. The participants are conversant with reading and studying God's Word, and their participation in theological training increased that understanding.

The third statement of the spiritual discipline of studying God's Word measured the participants' manner of application in relation to spiritual maturity. Indeed, the application category is important because most of what individuals learn is intended to be applied to real-life problem situations. Therefore, the effectiveness of a program depends on how well participants can appropriately apply what they learned in a particular situation.²⁶⁰ Accordingly, the statement three average pretest result was 2.8 on a scale of 5. On the other hand, the post-test average result was 4.0. This result showed a 1.2 growth, which translates to a 43% improvement from the baseline of 2.8. The outcome revealed the spiritual maturity dilemma among the CFC adult women. In fact, the participants demonstrated the ability to know and comprehend the Scriptures; however, that ability was lacking when it came to the application, hence the baseline of 2.8. A growth of 1.2 after the theological training indicates that the participants are becoming aware of the necessity of studying the Scripture for spiritual growth.

Statement four of the spiritual discipline of studying God's Word measured the participants' ability to analyze the spiritual effect the study made on their Christian life. Analysis ability is vital because it enables the students (participants) to differentiate facts from fiction, relevant from irrelevant information, to interpret the relationship among numerous ideas.²⁶¹ The

²⁶⁰ Blooms, *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives*, 122.

pretest average of statement four was 2.9 on a scale of 5, and the post-test average was 3.9. The result showed a 1.0 growth, which converts to 34.5% growth. This outcome replicated the application level's result. The disconnect between studying God's Word and living God's Word for spiritual formation revealed itself in the application and analysis stages' pretest results, which was the purpose of pursuing this action research project. A 34.5% growth after theological training specifies that the participants grasp the importance of evaluating one's spiritual journey. The participants' journal entries support this finding. Some wrote that their approach to studying God's Word changed after theological training.

Spiritual Discipline 2: Journaling

Statement one of the spiritual disciplines of journaling measured the participants' knowledge about the value of journaling for spiritual purposes. Journaling is not a direct outgrowth from the Scripture; however, Christians have been unrestrained chroniclers of their spiritual journey. Its main purpose is godliness.²⁶² The pretest average was 2.9 on a scale of 5. The post-test average was 3.8. This finding shows an improvement of 0.9, which turns into a 31% growth. Statement two measured the participants understanding that journaling aims to enable one to write down their spiritual reflections about God and the things of God, consequently leading to closeness with Christ. The pretest average was 2.9 on a scale of 5, and the post-test average was 3.6. Resulting in an improvement of 0.7, or 24%. Statement three measured the participants' application approach. The average pretest result was 1.6 on a scale of 5. While the average post-test result was 3.3. The result indicates a growth of 1.7, which converts

²⁶¹ Blooms, *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives*, 144.

²⁶² Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines*, 250-251.

to a 106% improvement. Statement four measured the participants' ability to assess the impact of journaling for the purpose of godliness. The average pretest result was 1.5 on a scale of 5. On the other hand, the average post-test result was 3.0. Leading to the development of 1.5, or 100% growth.

The pretest and post-test results reflected the participants' attitudes regarding journaling. During the theological training, the researcher observed that many participants did not maintain a journal. Some that kept a journal admitted that their journaling was not for godliness. In the participants' journal entries for this project, some wrote that they were unaware of the relevance of maintaining a journal. However, as the post-test result shows, this approach to journaling started changing after the theological training.

Spiritual Discipline 3: Prayer

Statement one of the spiritual disciplines of prayer assessed the participants' awareness that prayer is required of all Christians. The average pretest result was 4.3 on a scale of 5. On the other hand, the average post-test result was 4.6. The results revealed a growth of 0.3, or 7% growth. Statement two assessed the participants' understanding that prayerfulness leads to godliness. The average pretest result was 3.7 on a scale of 5, and the post-test was 4.2. This outcome showed an improvement of 0.5, translating to a 14% growth. Statement three measured the participants' commitment to prayer. The average pretest result was 3.1 on a scale of 5. While the post-test result was 4.1. The results indicated a growth of 1.0, which converts to a 32% improvement. Statement four assessed the participants' evaluation of their prayer life for holiness. The average pretest result was 3.3 on a scale of 5, and the average post-test was 4.4. Leading to a 1.1 growth, or 33% growth.

These findings reveal the CFC women's perception of prayer. The first statement's pretest and post-test results of 4.3 and 4.6, respectively, showed that the participants knew that prayer is expected of every Christian. In other words, the scores are high, indicating that participants know that prayer is inherent in the Christian life. However, this pattern changed from statement two to the last statement. These statements connected prayer to godliness, and mentioning godliness and what it entails, impacted the outcome. The participants scored high in their level of knowledge, but when it came to doing activities for godliness purposes, the scores dropped. This discovery supported the spiritual maturity issue the researcher noted in the problem statement. The gap is between knowing and doing. Knowing God is living and doing like Christ. Hence, knowing requires action; without it, one does not know.²⁶³

Spiritual Discipline 4: Fasting

Statement one of the spiritual disciplines of fasting assessed the participants' knowledge of fasting as a biblically supported discipline. The average pretest result was 4.1 on a scale of 5. The post-test average result was 4.3. Resulting in a 0.2, or 5% improvement. Statement two measured the participants' understanding that Christian fasting must always be for spiritual purposes. The average pretest result was 3.1 on a scale of 5. While the post-test average was 3.9. This leads to an improvement of 0.8, or 26%. Statement three assessed the participants' application approach to fasting for spiritual purposes. The average pretest result was 2.5 on a scale of 5, and the post-test average was 3.5. Leading to a growth of 1.0, or 40%. Statement four measured the participants' analysis of fasting in relation to godliness. The average pretest result

²⁶³ Saucy, *Minding the Heart*, 78.

was 2.4 on a scale of 5. On the other hand, the post-test average was 3.5. The results show an improvement of 1.1, which converts to a 46% growth.

These outcomes revealed patterns like studying God's Word, Journaling, and Prayer disciplines' results. The participants scored the highest in the knowledge stage, and the scores gradually decreased in the subsequent statements. Accordingly, the participants know that fasting is biblically supported, hence the results of 4.1 and 4.3 in the pretest and post-test of the knowledge stage. However, when the statement affirmed that fasting must always be done only for spiritual purposes, the scores dropped to 3.1 and 3.9 in the pretest and post-test. In addition, when it came to application and analysis for spiritual purposes, the scores dropped lower to 2.5 and 3.5 in the pretest and post-test application stage and 2.4 and 3.5 in the analysis stage. As narrated in the problem statement, fasting is standard practice at CFC. Hence, the participants have no problem fasting. Although fasting is easy for them, the problem was that many participants hardly connect it to godliness. Consequently, the low scores. Some of the participants' journal entries attest to this deficiency. For instance, one participant asserted that until she participated in this action research project, her fast consisted of presenting her personal problems, which did not include deliberation on godliness. Another participant stated she fasted for physical reasons because she thought fasting was abstaining from food and nothing else. Hence, as she fasted, she counted down the time to go and eat food. Indeed, fasting discussion during the theological training indicated that many participants thought that fasting was only to present one's personal life's problems to God for help. Christian fasting must be Christ-centered.²⁶⁴

²⁶⁴ Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines*, 192.

After the theological training participation, the participants gained insights into the Christ-centered type of fasting. This effect was reflected in their post-test results. Also, their journal entries revealed their attitudes toward fasting, which supports the pretest and post-test results. In as much as the average post-test results showed an improvement, the individual results varied. Some scored lower than the average score, while some scored higher. This outcome was not unusual because changes in individuals do not happen uniformly.

Spiritual Discipline 5: Stewardship

Statement one of the spiritual disciplines of stewardship of time assessed participants' awareness that time is a God-given gift to everyone for a purpose. The average pretest result was 4.0 on a scale of 5. The post-test average was 4.3. Yielding a growth of 0.3, or 8%. Statement two assessed participants' understanding that everyone would account for the time God gave them for His work. The average pretest result was 3.1, and the average post-test was 4.1. Producing a development of 1.1, or a 35% growth. Statement three measured participants' approach to utilizing their time for godliness. The average pretest result was 2.4 on a scale of 5. While the post-test average was 3.5. Resulting in a growth of 1.1, which translates to a 46% growth. Statement four assessed the participants' experience when their time was used for godly purposes. The average pretest result was 2.4 on a scale of 5. Conversely, the post-test average was 3.4. Leading to a growth of 1.0, which converts to 42% growth.

These results indicated that at the knowledge level, the participants knew that time is a gift God has assigned to all individuals for a purpose. Hence the average scores of 4.0 and 4.3 in the pretest and post-test assessments. The scores decreased to the average of 3.1 and 4.2 when the statement emphasized that God will hold everyone accountable for the use of time given to

them for His work. In addition, the scores dropped more to the average of 2.4 and 3.5 when the statement pointed to how prudently the participants used their time. The same results, average scores of 2.4 and 3.4, occurred when the statement prompted the participants to rate their experience when they utilized their time for spiritual purposes. The participants' journal entries revealed their struggles with managing their time for godly purposes. There, the participants narrated the challenges they encounter in utilizing their time for godliness.

After the theological training participation, the scores increased, signifying the impact the training had on the participants. Although the results demonstrate the training affected the participants, the post-test results of 3.5 and 3.4 for the two statements illustrated the challenges ahead for the participants in managing their time for godliness. Without a doubt, time management for godliness is a significant challenge in today's world. Consistently, individuals are confronted with family, work, school, church, and other anxiety-producing responsibilities that relate to either time or money. These two factors are important in so many aspects of life that one must contemplate their role in any serious conversation about godliness.²⁶⁵

Spiritual Discipline 6: Silence and Solitude

Statement one of the spiritual disciplines of silence and solitude measured the participants' awareness that creating time to be alone with God in today's busy world is imperative. The average pretest result was 4.1 on a scale of 5. The post-test average was 4.4. Producing an improvement of 0.3, which translates to a 7% improvement. Statement two assessed the participants' understanding that to be Christlike, one must create time for silence and solitude. The average pretest result was 3.1 on a scale of 5. While the post-test average was

²⁶⁵ Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines*, 159.

4.1. Resulting in a growth of 1.0, or 32%. Statement three assessed the participants' dedication to this discipline for godliness. The average pretest result was 2.1 on a scale of 5. On the other hand, the post-test average was 3.4. Yielding an improvement of 1.3, which converts to 62% of growth. Statement four measured the participants' encounters as they escaped to be alone with God. The average pretest result was 2.0 on a scale of 5. Conversely, the post-test average was 3.0. Leading to a growth of 1.0, or 50% improvement.

Like the outcomes of the stewardship of time, the results of silence and solitude demonstrate that the participants knew the importance of this discipline in relation to their Christian life, thus the average scores of 4.1 and 4.4 in the first statement. However, the scores gradually decreased in subsequent statements when this discipline was connected to Christlikeness. Statement two result indicated that the participants comprehended to some extent the relationship of this discipline to spiritual maturity, hence the average scores of 3.1 and 4.1. Furthermore, the scores decreased significantly in the application and analysis statements. These results demonstrated the struggles the participants have with practicing this discipline. Their journal entries disclosed these challenges. In addition, during the theological training discussion, the researcher observed that all participants had challenges creating meaningful time to be alone with God. As revealed in their journal entries, after theological training participation, many showed seriousness in managing their time for spiritual maturity.

Spiritual Discipline 7: Evangelism

Statement one of the spiritual disciplines of evangelism measured the participants' awareness that all Christians are required to disseminate the gospel to all nations. The average pretest result was 3.3 on a scale of 5. While the average post-test was 4.0. Producing an

improvement of 0.7, which translates to a 21% growth. Statement two assessed participants' understanding of the Holy Spirit's involvement in spreading the gospel. The average pretest result was 3.1 on a scale of 5. On the other hand, the average post-test result was 3.9. Resulting in a growth of 0.8, or 26% growth. Statement three measured the participants' level of involvement in disseminating the gospel as mandated by Jesus Christ. The average pretest result was 2.4 on a scale of 5. While the average post-test result was 2.9. Yielding a growth of 0.5, which converts to 21% of growth. Statement four assessed the participants' spiritual experience when they shared the gospel. The average pretest result was 2.2 on a scale of 5. On the other hand, the post-test average result was 2.7. Leading to a development of 0.5, which translates to a 23% improvement.

These results demonstrate the participants' attitudes toward evangelism. The average scores of 3.3 and 4.0 at the awareness stage indicate that participants know that evangelism is every Christian's responsibility. Likewise, statement two's outcome of the average scores of 3.1 and 3.9 revealed that they also understand the Holy Spirit's leadership in disseminating the gospel. Nonetheless, the average scores dropped considerably when the statements pointed to doing and analyzing the effects. These outcomes disclose the participants' struggles to comply with this great task of gospel dissemination. Also, these challenges were noted in the participants' journal entries. Anxiety was one of the key issues noted, which hampers their zeal to evangelize. The anxiety translates to feeling inadequate to do the task assigned to everyone. At CFC, evangelism is not a top priority. Consequently, the participants are ill-prepared for the task. In fact, the local church is the principal channel whereby evangelism and equipping should occur. Believers need a profound knowledge of the Scripture. To be effective in their ministry,

they must acquire the necessary skills. Thus, they must discover and develop their gifts and utilize them to share their faith and witness to others.²⁶⁶

The outcomes of the seven spiritual discipline practices, participants' journal entries, and the researcher's observations revealed that theological training impacted the spiritual maturity of the learners. Accordingly, the participants improved in all seven spiritual discipline practices after the training. The growth level varied from one discipline to another. This variation indicated that the participants found some disciplines more challenging to apply than the other ones. Such growth outcome is common in spiritual formation quests. Spiritual formation is a gradual process that does not happen automatically. The process needs to be developed, worked at and pondered to make sensible choices to allow for the Holy Spirit's formation of an individual's character in ways that may initially appear uneasy and peculiar.²⁶⁷

The participants' journal entries revealed their various growth processes. Though some wrote more extensively than others, all disclosed some areas of spiritual maturity they struggle with and the effects the theological training had on them. The openness with which the participants journaled their encounters points to the work of the Holy Spirit. For example, one of the participants wrote that she was a quarrelsome and angry person, which never perturbed her because it gave her control over other people. After this disclosure, she stated that she feels trapped and hoped that the Holy Spirit will help her. If this has been the behavior she exhibited for a long time without remorse, and during the theological training she suddenly felt trapped, then this was nothing other than the inner work of the Holy Spirit to transform the heart. In other

²⁶⁶ Roy T. Edgemon, "Evangelism and Discipleship," *Review and Expositor* vol. 77, issue 4, (1980): 541

²⁶⁷ N.T. Wright, *After You Believe*, 28.

words, God's Word through His Spirit confronted this participant and opened her eyes to the gravity of her sinful behavior, which she never saw before. This demonstrates the interconnectedness between God's Word and the Holy Spirit's task of the heart's transformation. God's Word is not a mere speech written on paper, it is action-driven and must accomplish what God intended.²⁶⁸

As narrated in the researcher's reflective journal, the seven-week spiritual formation journey with the CFC adult women revealed some challenges and triumphs inherent in such endeavors. The researcher began by consistently praying for the leadership of the Holy Spirit. This was a vital request because no individual is equipped or has what it takes to deal with the formation of the heart. It is solely the task of the Spirit of God. Hence, one must recognize that the effectiveness of their teaching is entirely dependent on the participation of the Holy Spirit.²⁶⁹ Furthermore, the request for the Holy Spirit's involvement involved prayer for wisdom and patience. Accordingly, the researcher's observations showed that one who leads a spiritual formation project must ask for wisdom and patience, especially when it deals with the type of problem at CFC.

The first and second sessions were the most challenging of the entire sessions because four participants who were quarreling among themselves tried to use the forum to get at each other. The four dominated the discussion, not for the edification of other participants, but it was purely a competition about who knew the Scripture the most. This display of antagonism created an uncomfortable atmosphere. Given that the role of a researcher is to assist the participants and

²⁶⁸ Allison, *50 Core Truths*, 48.

²⁶⁹ Pettit, *Foundations of Spiritual Formation*, 251.

not to control them²⁷⁰, this researcher cautiously and prayerfully utilized passages from Scripture to prompt the participants about the characteristics of a godly person. This was done in anticipation of the Holy Spirit's intervention. The intervention manifested in the third session. Those participants who could not stand each other sat in the same row and exchanged greetings. The training discussion and comments became cordial, and the uneasiness that was felt in the first and second sessions evaporated. After the session, those four participants stayed and participated in the general conversation that the participants had before departure. Contrary to their actions in the two previous sessions, where they quickly left to avoid contact with one another. These changes carried throughout the remaining sessions.

The entire outcome supports the proposition that there is a relationship between theological education and spiritual formation. Although, the questionnaire results supported this assertion. However, the most striking outcomes were the participants' journal entries' revelation and the changes in the participants' behavior observed by the researcher. In their journal entries, the participants wrote with remarkable openness. They highlighted some of their strengths and weaknesses and delineated plans to tackle them. Also, the participants' warm interactions with one another during the third session and the remaining sessions suggest a process of inward transformation.

Other Research Outcomes

Spiritual formation is crucial to Christian living, and as such, it will remain a topic of discussion in the community of faith. Thus, enormous writings and research have been produced on the issue. At Trinity Theological College in Singapore, a sixteen-week semester-long course

²⁷⁰ Stringer, *Action Research*, 220.

was utilized to teach, practice, and assess theological students' spiritual formation. The course consisted of theological education and the practice of spiritual disciplines. Ten spiritual discipline exercises and students' written reflections were utilized. In addition, two prayer exercises were employed to bring all the practices together in an integrated manner. The purpose of the course was to assist theological students to perceive the relatedness of theological education and their Christian daily living. At the beginning of the course, a significant majority of the students were unfamiliar with the spiritual discipline of silence, reflective Bible reading, and daily examination of one's conscience. Some students considered prayer as a task that is effective at a particular point of the day, instead of an ongoing conversation with God.

The findings after the course participation showed, first, that the "students became more aware of their spiritual theology. They became more conscious of the gap between their professed and operative theologies." Second, "as students progress through the semester, the cumulative impact of the prayer exercises begins to forge in them a deepened consciousness of the Lord's presence and the possibility of remaining in that communion."²⁷¹

The outcomes of the research revealed an interrelatedness of theological education, practices of spiritual disciplines, and spiritual formation of the students. The author affirmed that the three cannot be separated. Teaching and practicing should produce godliness. Although this research was done in a college context, the outcomes are like this researcher's project intervention outcomes. Regardless of the context, the goal of the spiritual formation process is for the participants to continuously be transformed into the image of Christ.

²⁷¹ Jimmy Boon-Chai Tan, "Christian Spiritual Formation in a Southeast Asian Theological College," *Journal of Spiritual Formation & Soul Care* vol. 11, no 2 (2018): 164, 167-178.

Research Implication

The outcomes of this action research project for CFC adult women revealed the necessity to revamp spiritual formation practices in the church for the sake of godliness. The problem with the CFC women that led to this project intervention was a lack of godly love in their midst. They quarreled and antagonized one another. The behavior was contrary to the biblical instructions and commands on how Christians interact with each other. As indicated in the problem statement, these women knew their Scripture and memorizes and recites passages from it. Although these attributes are required in Christian living, the behavior of these women failed to reflect the character of those that live by God's Word. Hence, the issue was the disconnect between knowing the Word and living out the Word. This gap eclipsed the manifestation of the power of the Word in their lives. Indeed, the Word of God possesses transformative power.²⁷² The power embedded in the Word is supposed to regenerate the lives of those that seek to genuinely live out its commands. In His prayer to His Father, Christ prayed that He sanctifies the disciples by His truth, which is His word (John 17:17, NKJV). This prayer is applicable to all believers because they are disciples of Christ, set apart solely for God's purposes. The sanctification of the disciples is attained by means of the truth revealed in the Scripture. Hence, the importance of handling God's Word with utmost care so that it will accomplish its intended purposes.

Doubtlessly, the sanctification of believers is crucial because of the issues at stake. Christ's assertion in John 17: 18 points to this stake. There He states that as the Father had sent Him into the world, He is also sending the disciples into the world. This sending was clearly

²⁷² Allison, *50 Core Truths*, 48.

articulated after His resurrection and before His ascension. In Matthew 28:18-20, Christ, based on absolute authority granted to Him, sends His disciples to “make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe” everything He had commanded. This task or the Great Commission as it is commonly identified is the responsibility and purpose of the church. The goal is that Christ’s followers will live like Him, and lead others in that direction. Christians are to be taught and commanded to teach others. Most local churches neither intentionally do evangelism nor discipleship.²⁷³ Indeed, one of the consequences of this neglect is producing spiritually immature Christians that are ill-equipped for the task assigned to all believers.

Effectual teaching of God’s Word must produce disciples who possess head knowledge and heart transformation. The two are intertwined. Without the heart transformation, the discipling process is incomplete. Both must be intact and with the power of the Spirit of God, genuine disciples will emerge who are equipped to take the gospel to every nation. Hence, the necessity for an authentic heart transformation can never be overestimated. The effect of this transformation manifests in the character of the believer. In other words, one’s character bears testimony to the level of their spiritual growth. In Matthew 7:17-20, Christ utilizes the metaphor of a tree as a litmus test for a genuine disciple. There, He declares that one would recognize a good tree by the fruit they produce. A good tree would yield good fruits. Conversely, a bad tree would bear bad fruits. Indeed, bearing good fruits is becoming like Christ, which is the essence of spiritual discipline practices. The goal is to become Christlike.

²⁷³ Lawless, Chuck, “To All The Nation: The Great Commission Passages in the Gospels and Acts,” *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 15, no. 2 (Summer 2011): 19.

In Galatians 5:22-23, Paul delineates the fruits or the characteristics expected of those who identify themselves as the followers of Christ. Accordingly, he affirms, "...the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control." These attributes define all meaningful and God-fearing Christians, as such the church must endeavor to teach, encourage the cultivation, and nurturing of them. If Christians are called to love one another (John 13:34, NKJV), bear each other's burdens (Galatians 6:2, NKJV), be the salt of the earth and light of the world (Matthew 5:13-14, NKJV), proclaim the gospel to the world (Mark 16:15, NKJV), and make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:19, NKJV), then the acquisition of these attributes is not negotiable. All these tasks involve active interactions with the Spirit of God and with those within and outside the community of faith. Indeed, the Christian life is not live in isolation.²⁷⁴ Hence, to effectively discharge these duties one must gradually and intentionally through the enablement of the Holy Spirit become Christlike.

Research Application

The main issue that contributed to the spiritual maturity dilemma of the CFC adult female members which this project captured, was a gap between the knowledge of God's Word and the application of the Word. This gap manifested in their behavior toward one another. Although, through the involvement of the Holy Spirit in the intervention project, these women made noticeable improvements in their spiritual life, the work of formation continues. Indeed, the transformation process of a sin-broken individual to becoming a spiritually empowered, Christlike person is not an easy process. It takes time.²⁷⁵ Spiritual formation is a lifelong venture,

²⁷⁴ Losel, Steffen, "Church, Theology and the Holiness of God," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 72, 2 (2019): 212.

²⁷⁵ Chandler, *Christian Spiritual Formation*, 25.

necessary for the Kingdom task. Hence, for the participants to maintain the progress made and continue to grow, the CFC must develop strategies that would enable the continuance of this endeavor. To address this issue, the church could develop a teaching ministry where the participants' active involvement is encouraged, and the importance of growing into the image of Christ is consistently emphasized. In addition, a technique for evaluating progress should be put in place. This approach could enable the participants to recognize their position as stakeholders in the Kingdom assignments. "When people feel acknowledged, accepted, and treated with respect, their feelings of worth are enhanced, and the possibility that they will contribute actively to the work of the group is maximized."²⁷⁶ Doubtlessly, these action research cues could work in any human endeavor where there is a common goal.

The common goal in the CFC participatory teaching ministry would be, becoming like Jesus. As a result, the ministry will thrive, and the participants are adequately equipped for the Kingdom tasks. Furthermore, the CFC should be mindful of the attitudes of those that would lead the ministry. They should realize that authentic leadership necessitates much more than competency and skill. "The calling to lead God's people, in whatever capacity, carries a moral responsibility. To take charge of leadership without awareness and sensitivity toward the human factor is proud and leads to self-serving corruption. Leaders must know the impact that their decisions and actions take upon people."²⁷⁷ In every situation, the group dances to the tone the leaders play. As such, the attitudes of leaders matter significantly. A leader must not only speak

²⁷⁶ Stringer, *Action Research*, 29.

²⁷⁷ Benjamin K. Forrest and Chet Roden, *Biblical Leadership: Theology for the Everyday Leader*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic, 2017), 213.

about their expectation for the group, but they must also model those expectations. According to the Scripture, “A man who has friends must himself be friendly” (Proverbs 18:24, NKJV).

A true leader must mimic Christ’s leadership style of servanthood. This assertion goes beyond the CFC context. If the church is entrusted with the responsibilities of nurturing and equipping believers for the Kingdom’s work, then those delegated by the church to carry out these responsibilities should possess attributes that create a healthy and thriving environment for the believers. This does not undermine or minimize the Holy Spirit’s involvement, instead, it enhances His presence. In fact, since the church is the body of Christ and Christ is the Head of the church, His presence will never be lacking. Christ gave this assurance in His Great Commission. There, He affirms, “..., and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:20, NKJV). Without a doubt, Christ will keep this enduring promise. However, the church bears the responsibility of creating an atmosphere for the manifestation of this promise. Hence, Christ declares in Revelation 3:20 that, He stands at the door and knocks if anyone listens and lets Him in, He will come in for fellowship. Indeed, the church should be mindful and take seriously the consequences of Jesus’s presence.²⁷⁸ The key issue is to always remember that as the church moves forward with evangelizing the world, the subject of formation into the image of Christ must never be neglected. The watchword must always be, “Be holy, for I am holy” (Leviticus 21:8, 1 Peter 1:16, NKJV). This requirement should be taken seriously.

Research Limitations

The project intervention was conducted in a small church context, as such a small sample size was utilized. The target population was adult women, which have been members of CFC for

²⁷⁸ Loren T. Stuckenbruck, “Revelation” *Eerdmans*. Commentary on the Bible, ed. James D. G. Dunn and John W. Rogerson (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2003), 1544.

at least two years. Participation was restricted to those women who understand and write the English language. If this intervention was conducted in a larger context without gender or language restrictions, the outcomes may be different. Although this may happen, that would not negate the fact that size has no bearing on the complexity of the problem being addressed. The problem of the heart. This problem brings everyone to the same level because all persons are broken sinners longing to be transformed into Christ's image through God's grace. Hence, the success of any spiritual formation project depends on the number of individuals whom the Holy Spirit transformed.

Further Research

Spiritual formation research is a complex and unique undertaking because it deals with the human heart. Thus, the truth that connects past, present, and future research is that the success of such research depends on the operations of the Holy Spirit. With the realization of such limitation, one should approach the research cautiously and humbly in submission to the promptings of God's Spirit. Furthermore, two things this researcher suggests for future research are extending the research duration and sustainability. This project's intervention was seven weeks, and the researcher believes that a longer period of intervention could produce better outcomes. Also, future research should consider a mechanism for sustaining and monitoring the participants' progress because spiritual formation is a gradual process and participants need sources of encouragement to keep moving forward.

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APPENDIX A
Consent

Title of the Project: The Effect of Theological Education on the Spiritual Formation of the Women in a Local Church

Principal Investigator: Grace Nkenke, a doctoral candidate in the John W. Rawlings School of Divinity at Liberty University.

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be an adult woman between the ages of 19 to 69. You must have been a member of your current church for at least two years. In addition, you understand and write the English language. Taking part in this research project is voluntary. To protect the privacy of your church and the participants, a pseudonym, Christ the Foundation Church (CFC), will be used to identify the church.

Please read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to participate in this research.

Purpose: The purpose of the study is to conduct seven weeks of theological training sessions in conjunction with spiritual discipline exercises designed to facilitate the spiritual maturity of the CFC's adult women members.

Procedure: If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following things:

1. Participate in seven weeks, one-and-a-half-hour weekly theological training class with spiritual disciplines assignments.
2. You will journal your spiritual encounters if any, as the program progresses.
3. At the first session, you will complete a questionnaire regarding your spiritual life.
4. At the end of the session, you will complete the same questionnaire to assess the progress you made in your spiritual journey.

Benefits: The direct benefits participants should expect to receive from taking part in this study are positive changes in one's characteristics, enhanced desire to do God's will, interaction with other people in a Christlike manner, and the awareness of the importance of continued spiritual growth.

Benefits to society include the display of God's love through godly interactions with other people outside and inside the church, increased craving for discipleship, and genuine participation in building a flourishing church.

Risks: There are no known risks associated with this study.

Confidentiality: There will be no personal information identifiers. Participants will be identified through the use of numerical codes. Questionnaire responses and journaling data will be kept confidential through the codes.

The researcher will scan questionnaire responses and journal data into the computer system for data storage and password protection. In addition, the researcher will delete the data after three years of the study completion.

Voluntary Participation: Participation in this study is voluntary. If you decide to participate, you are free to answer or decline to answer any question. Also, you may discontinue participation at any time.

Withdrawal Option: If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number in the next paragraph. Should you decide to discontinue, data collected from you will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study.

Contacts and Questions: The researcher conducting this study is Grace Nkenke. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact her at [REDACTED]. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Jeffrey L. Cockrell, at [REDACTED].

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, you are encouraged to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515, or email at irb@liberty.edu.

Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.

Statement of Consent: As indicated previously, the researcher will protect the privacy of the church and the participants in this study. Thus, you are not required to sign this consent form. However, make sure you understand what the study is about before participating. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. In addition, the researcher will keep a copy for the study records.

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

_____ N/A _____

Printed Subject Name

_____ N/A _____

Signature & Date

APPENDIX B
ASSESSMENT TOOL

SPIRITUAL FORMATION

Instruction: Please read each statement carefully and respond by checking the appropriate box. Please be advised that this questionnaire is anonymous, so be completely open and honest in your responses to make the information valuable for this research.

Spiritual Discipline 1: Studying God's Word

Section 1—*Let the Word break over your heart and mind again and again as the years go by, and imperceptibly there will come great changes in your attitude and outlook and conduct.*

1. I know the Bible possesses hidden truth.
Strongly Agree Agree Undecided Disagree Strongly Disagree
2. I understand that studying the Bible involves a diligent search for its everlasting truth.
Strongly Agree Agree Undecided Disagree Strongly Disagree
3. I study the Bible meditatively to understand what God is saying to me.
Strongly Agree Agree Undecided Disagree Strongly Disagree
4. I notice that when I study the Bible, it enriches my spiritual life.
Strongly Agree Agree Undecided Disagree Strongly Disagree

Total Points for Discipline 1

Spiritual Discipline 2: Journaling

Section 2—*Keeping a journal not only promotes spiritual growth by means of its own virtues, but it's a valuable aid to many other aspects of the spiritual life as well.*

1. I know journaling is valuable for a believer's spiritual journey.
Strongly Agree Agree Undecided Disagree Strongly Disagree
2. I understand that the goal of journaling is to help one draw closer to Christ.
Strongly Agree Agree Undecided Disagree Strongly Disagree
3. I maintain a journal to track my spiritual experiences.
Strongly Agree Agree Undecided Disagree Strongly Disagree
4. Reading through my journal helps to assess the patterns of my spiritual journey.
Strongly Agree Agree Undecided Disagree Strongly Disagree

Total Points for Discipline 2**Spiritual Discipline 3: Prayer**

Section 3—*Don't think of prayer as an impersonal requirement. Realize that it is a person, the Lord Jesus Christ, with all authority and with all love, who expects us to pray.*

1. I know that prayer is required of all believers.

Strongly Agree Agree Undecided Disagree Strongly Disagree
2. I understand that prayerful Christians become godly Christians.

Strongly Agree Agree Undecided Disagree Strongly Disagree
3. I am inspired to pray regularly.

Strongly Agree Agree Undecided Disagree Strongly Disagree
4. I experience the Holy Spirit's presence when I pray.

Strongly Agree Agree Undecided Disagree Strongly Disagree

Total Points for Discipline 3**Spiritual Discipline 4: Fasting**

Section 4—*Believers should fast according to biblical teaching and with purposes that are God-centered. It is voluntary in that fasting should not be coerced. And fasting is more than just the ultimate crash diet for the body; it is abstinence from food for spiritual purposes.*

1. I know that fasting is a biblically supported discipline.

Strongly Agree Agree Undecided Disagree Strongly Disagree
2. I understand that fasting must always have a spiritual purpose.

Strongly Agree Agree Undecided Disagree Strongly Disagree
3. I do not have a fear of fasting, I enjoy fasting.

Strongly Agree Agree Undecided Disagree Strongly Disagree
4. I experience the grace of God when I fast with a biblical, God-centered purpose.

Strongly Agree Agree Undecided Disagree Strongly Disagree

Total Points for Discipline 4**Spiritual Discipline 5: Stewardship**

Section 5—*The use of time is important because time is the stuff of which days are made. If we do not discipline our use of time for the purpose of godliness in these evil days, these evil days will keep us from becoming godly.*

1. I know that the gift of time that God gave to everyone is for a purpose.
Strongly Agree Agree Undecided Disagree Strongly Disagree
2. I understand that everyone will give an account of the gift of time that God gave to them for the purpose of His work.
Strongly Agree Agree Undecided Disagree Strongly Disagree
3. I use my time wisely.
Strongly Agree Agree Undecided Disagree Strongly Disagree
4. When I use my time wisely, I feel inner joy that my time is used for a godly purpose.
Strongly Agree Agree Undecided Disagree Strongly Disagree

Total Points for Discipline 5

Spiritual Discipline 6: Silence and Solitude

Section 6—*There is something both appealing and transforming about silence and solitude, And there are moments in our pressure-cooker lives when years of escape to some hidden place sounds wistfully compelling.*

1. I know that in the busyness of life, it is vital to find time for silence and solitude to be with God.
Strongly Agree Agree Undecided Disagree Strongly Disagree
2. I understand that to be like Jesus, believers must create times of silence and solitude.
Strongly Agree Agree Undecided Disagree Strongly Disagree
3. I make time for silence and solitude.
Strongly Agree Agree Undecided Disagree Strongly Disagree
4. When I escape to a period of silence and solitude, I feel closer to God.
Strongly Agree Agree Undecided Disagree Strongly Disagree

Total Points for Discipline 6

Spiritual Discipline 7: Evangelism

Section 7—*The most powerful ongoing Christian witness has always been the speaking of God's Word by one who is living God's Word.*

1. I know that all Christ's followers are called to witness everywhere.
Strongly Agree Agree Undecided Disagree Strongly Disagree

2. I understand that the Holy Spirit empowers a believer as they share the gospel.

Strongly Agree Agree Undecided Disagree Strongly Disagree

3. I take delight in sharing the gospel.

Strongly Agree Agree Undecided Disagree Strongly Disagree

4. When I share the gospel, I feel empowered.

Strongly Agree Agree Undecided Disagree Strongly Disagree

Total Points for Discipline 7

APPENDIX C

SUMMARY OF ASSESSMENT TOOL

	Discipline 1				Discipline 2				Discipline 3				Discipline 4			
Assessment	K	C	A	A	K	C	A	A	K	C	A	A	K	C	A	A
Pretest Average	3.2	3.6	2.8	2.9	2.9	2.9	1.6	1.5	4.3	3.7	3.1	3.3	4.1	3.1	2.5	2.4
Posttest Average	4.3	4.2	4.0	3.9	3.8	3.6	3.3	3.0	4.6	4.2	4.1	4.4	4.3	3.9	3.5	3.5
Growth (Change) %	34%	17%	51%	47%	31%	24%	106%	100%	7%	14%	32%	33%	5%	26%	40%	46%

	Discipline 5				Discipline 6				Discipline 7			
Assessment	K	C	A	A	K	C	A	A	K	C	A	A
Pretest Average	4.0	3.1	2.4	2.4	4.1	3.1	2.1	2.0	3.3	3.1	2.4	2.2
Posttest Average	4.3	4.2	3.5	3.4	4.4	4.1	3.4	3.0	4.0	3.9	2.9	2.7
Growth (Change) %	8%	35%	46%	42%	7%	32%	62%	50%	21%	26%	21%	23%

*K=Knowledge

C=Comprehension

A=Application

A=Analysis

APPENDIX D
CURRICULUM OUTLINE

Week 1

The Word of God (Allision Ch. 1, 3, 6 and Erickson Ch. 10)

Inspiration of Scripture

A. Wholeness of God-breathed word

Authority of Scripture

A. Inner working of the Holy Spirit

Transformative Power of Scripture

A. Holy Spirit's Involvement in Transformation

Spiritual Discipline—Studying God's Word and Journaling (Whitney Ch. 2 & 11)

Studying God's Word:

Explore Ezra's attitude toward God's Word (Ezra 7:10)

His process: First, Ezra "set his heart," second, "to study the Law of the LORD," third, "and to do it," and fourth, "and to teach his statutes and rules in Israel."

A genuine interaction with God and everything about Him starts from the heart of the believer. Just like Ezra, when one approaches God or His Word, one must come with an honest heart. Hence, when one studies God's Word, in-depth soul searching must accompany it.

Journaling:

No explicit biblical instruction for journaling, however an individual like King David poured out his heart to God in the scrolls of the Psalms. Also, Prophet Jeremiah did likewise in his Lamentation over the fall of Jerusalem. Their actions were not different from the contemporary Christian that documents their Christian journey in a word processor, labeled Journal. Granted, *unlike the words of David and Jeremiah in Scripture, no believer's writings today are divinely inspired. But the example of these men in writing their prayers, meditations, questions, and so on provides scriptural validation for encouraging Christians today to consider the value of doing the same in a journal.*

Special Assignment: List two of your weaknesses that stands between you and your God. Those conducts or characters that prevent God from working through you. Present them with an honest heart to God in prayer and ask Him to change you. You will continue the prayer for the duration (seven weeks) of this intervention and journal any spiritual encounters that you experienced. The Word of God can not lie, for He affirmed through Prophet Jeremiah that "...you will seek Me and find Me when you search for me with all your heart" (29:13). We will experience God's presence when we learn how to search for Him with a sincere heart. Indeed, the problem of the

heart is what stands between God and us. Examples of things that stand between the believer and God are bitterness, envy, idleness, unforgiveness, lies, arrogance, slandering, self-indulgence, unfaithfulness, pride, and so on. Presenting one's sin before God with a genuine heart would free one from the bondage of sin. Accordingly, Proverbs 28:13 declares, "He who covers his sins will not prosper, But whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy."

Note: This prayer is very vital because the easiest way the enemy invades our life, our church, our homes, our relationship with God, our relationship with other people, and so on, is through our character. Hence, the need to fortify our character to prevent the enemy's invasion.

Week 2

Christology – The Work of Jesus Christ (Allison Ch. 20)

The functions of Christ

A Jesus Christ as a Revealer (Exhibition of the truth and reality of God)

B Christ as a Ruler (Presently ruling in the church)

C Christ as a Reconciler (Intercessory ministry)

Spiritual Discipline – Prayer (Whitney Ch. 4)

Purpose of prayer: The call for this discipline is for the purpose of godliness.

Christ's example: Christ lived a disciplined prayer life (Luke 5:16).

Instruction on prayers: All believers are urged to pray continuously (Colossians 4:2; I Thessalonians 5:17)

Christ expects His followers to pray—(Matthew 6:5,7, 9; Luke 11:9; 18:1).

What is prayer? It is similar to a conversation between two people. God's Word set this conversation in motion. Through His Word, He speaks to the believers, and the believers speak to Him in response to His Word.

Assignment: Set aside 30 to 45 minutes every day for prayer.

Steps to follow: First, say a short prayer for the Holy Spirit's guidance. Second, read a passage from the Scripture as directed by the Spirit. Third, meditate on the revelation of that passage.

Finally, link your prayer to the revelation of the passage. As you pray, allow the Holy Spirit to direct your prayer. Journal your encounter, if any.

Week 3

Doctrine of Salvation (Allison Part 6, Ch. 27)

Union with Christ

- A Identification with Christ
- B Community and unity with other believers
- C Following Christ's examples

Spiritual Discipline – Fasting (Whitney Ch. 9)

Purpose of Christian fasting: Christian fasting differs from non-Christian fasting because the main purpose of Christian fasting is to become more like Christ. Hence, the believers must fast according to biblical teaching with purposes that are God-centered.

Christ fasted: Fasted for forty days and forty nights—Matthew 4:2

Other biblical examples: Ezra fasted (Ezra 10:6); Esther fasted (4:16).

The uniqueness of biblical fast: Individual or corporate fasting must have a specific purpose.

Assignment: Pick two days and fast from 6 am to 12 pm. Specify your purpose and present it to God. This fasting will be an absolute type of fast. That is, no food and liquid, even water.

Journal your spiritual encounters, if any.

Week 4

Doctrine of Salvation (Allison Part 6, Ch. 33)

Sanctification

- A Progressive Sanctification
- B The Divine Role in Sanctification
- C The human role in sanctification

Spiritual Discipline – Stewardship (Whitney Ch. 8)

Disciplined use of time: *Godliness is the result of a biblically disciplined spiritual life. But at the heart of a disciplined spiritual life is the disciplined use of time.*

What is time? Time is a gift from God to everyone to be utilized for work assigned to them.

Self-control: Every believer must cultivate self-control in these evil days, or else their bodies will gravitate toward evil than to God. Note Paul's instruction to the Ephesians—"Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil" (Ephesians 5:15-16).

Everyone must give an account of the stewardship of time given to them.

Assignment: Pay attention to how you use your time from morning to evening. Before you retire to your bed, ask this question, how wisely did I use my time today? What portion of my time was spent on irrelevant things which would not add to my spiritual growth? Be sincere in your assessment. Then commit to making changes in those areas. Journal your experiences as you proceed, if any.

Week 5

The Consequences of Sin (Erickson Ch. 27)

Results Affecting the Relationship with God

A Divine Disfavor

Effects on the Sinner

A Enslavement

B Flight from Reality

C Denial of Sin

D Self-Deceit

E Insensitivity

F Self-Centeredness

G Restlessness

Effects on the Relationship to Other Humans

A Competition

B Inability to Empathize

C Rejection of Authority

D Inability to Love

Spiritual Discipline – Silence and Solitude (Whitney Ch. 10)

Note: The Discipline of silence is the voluntary and temporary abstention from speaking so that certain spiritual goals might be sought. Solitude is the Spiritual Discipline of voluntarily and temporarily withdrawing to privacy for spiritual purposes. This withdrawal can last anywhere from a few minutes to a couple of days. Solitude may be used as a means to engage in other spiritual disciplines without interruption, or just as an escape to be with God and deliberate. In a noisy and busy world, one must cultivate the attitude of escaping to focus on the things of God.

Jesus's example: According to the Scripture, Jesus engaged in periods of silence and solitude that lasted a few minutes, hours, or days—Matthew 4:1; 14:23; Mark 1:35; and Luke 4:42.

Assignment: Select one evening, for one hour and go into silence and solitude. Turn off your phone, the television, the computer, and all other messaging devices. Call that moment, An Escape to be with my God. Journal your spiritual encounter, if any.

Week 6

The doctrine of God the Holy Spirit (Allison – Part 5, Ch. 22, 23, 24)

The Person of the Holy Spirit

A. Knowing the Holy Spirit

The Work of the Holy Spirit

A. Narratives of the Holy Spirit's Mighty Acts

The Gifts of the Holy Spirit

A. Spiritual gifts as reflections of the works mainly connected with the Holy Spirit

B. Exercising spiritual gifts in an atmosphere of love

Spiritual Discipline —Evangelism (Whitney Ch. 6)

What is evangelism? Simply, evangelism is communicating the gospel.

What is the gospel? The Good News of Salvation was obtained through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Is evangelism limited to some people? No. The Lord Jesus Christ commanded all His followers to witness –Matthew 28:19-20. So, evangelism is the responsibility of every Christ follower.

All believers are empowered to witness, but often, fear of failure hinders the work of the Holy Spirit as witnessing proceeds. Reminder!!! Not only does the Holy Spirit empower the believers as they circulate the gospel, but the gospel itself is also embedded with the power of the Holy Spirit as well. There is no specific mode of evangelizing. Evangelism happens whether the words of the gospel are spoken, written, or recorded; delivered to one person or to a crowd.

Note: The most powerful ongoing Christian witness has always been the speaking of God's Word by one who is living God's Word.

Assignment: Share the gospel with a minimum of two persons. Be aware that the communication can either be in person or on the phone. Journal your encounter if any.

Week 7

The Role of the Church (Erickson Ch. 50)

Functions of the Church

A Evangelism

B Edification

APPENDIX E
IRB APPROVAL LETTER
LIBERTY UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

September 28, 2022

Grace Nkenke
Jeffrey Cockrell

Re: IRB Application - IRB-FY22-23-282 The Effect of Theological Education on the Spiritual Formation of the Women in a Local Church

Dear Grace Nkenke and Jeffrey Cockrell,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds that your study does not meet the definition of human subjects research. This means you may begin your project with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your IRB application.

Decision: No Human Subjects Research

Explanation: Your study is not considered human subjects research because your project will consist of quality improvement activities, which are not "designed to develop or contribute to generalizable knowledge" according to 45 CFR 46. 102(l).

Please note that this decision only applies to your current application. Any modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification of continued non-human subjects research status. You may report these changes by completing a modification submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

Also, although you are welcome to use our recruitment and consent templates, you are not required to do so. **If you choose to use our documents, please replace the word *research* with the word *project* throughout both documents.**

If you have any questions about this determination or need assistance in determining whether possible modifications to your protocol would change your application's status, please email us at irb@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP
Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
Research Ethics Office