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ABSTRACT

PRACTICING LIKE JESUS:

A STUDY OF CHRISTIAN SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES

by

Baxter S. Hurley

Frequently, persons engage loosely in the life of a local church for an extended time and witness little change in their knowledge or practice of the Christian faith. The purpose of the research was to evaluate the knowledge and practice of Christian spiritual disciplines of select members of Byron United Methodist Church in Byron, Georgia, resulting from a twenty-eight-day experience of connecting spiritual disciplines with daily life. This purpose was accomplished through pre- and post-intervention administrations of the researcher-designed spiritual vitality survey. Participants committed to reading through a twenty-eight-day workbook and practicing spiritual disciplines daily. The workbook contained information about eight spiritual disciplines exemplified in the life and ministry of Jesus. After participants completed the workbook and took the survey for the second time, they shared insights through focus groups. The qualitative data from the focus groups partially evaluated and explained the quantitative data from the two administrations of the survey. This study illuminates connections between copying the spiritual practices of Jesus and becoming more like him. The data gathered through the two administrations of the Spiritual Vitality Survey and the focus groups supported this connection and led to three major findings.

First, the differences between the pretest and posttest of the Spiritual Vitality Survey indicate that practicing the spiritual disciplines facilitates spiritual formation in

the image of Jesus. This connection was confirmed by the focus groups. Second, resistance to certain elements of spiritual formation through the practice of spiritual disciplines became evident from the research. Third, Byron United Methodist Church needs more concentration on and resources about the spiritual disciplines and spiritual formation.

DISSERTATION APPROVAL

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A STUDY OF CHRISTIAN SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES

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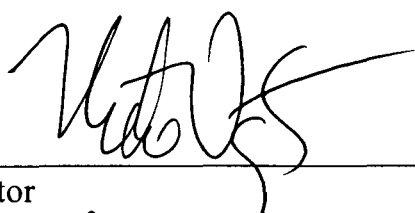
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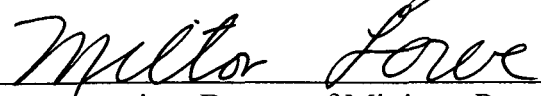
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Baxter S. Hurley

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CHAPTER 1

PROBLEM

Introduction

The greatest single theological challenge to my ministerial identity and ecclesiology has been the lack of spiritual transformation of church members. People now attend the church for years with little knowledge or practice of those disciplines that place them before God in such a way that they can receive his transforming grace. Christians are left sounding and behaving like non-Christians. Worse, they fail to impact the world with the gospel of Christ.

Meanwhile, the American church, still trying to breathe life into the corpse of Christendom, seems convinced of its ability to package Christianity in a one-size-fits-all approach with guaranteed results if it spends capital on advertising and electronic and technological wonders and includes the right dose of charismatic leadership. Dual, overlapping failures become evident. Christians are not being transformed into the image of Christ while churches believe the lie that they are successful. Driving this paradigm is a definition of success borrowed from the business world where the metrics used in the definition include increasing membership, attendance, and dollars. A successful or healthy church implies a fulfilled mission. This situation further implies that participants in that church are also spiritually healthy, which may, in fact, be an erroneous conclusion.

When churches focus on the prevailing metrics to define church health or ministerial success, the deeper spiritual formation of the congregants remains largely undone. They have no need to move beyond an elementary knowledge of Christian faith and practice when members understand that they are part of something tremendously

successful. Borrowing an analogy from archery, one can look back on the target and see a cluster of arrows in the center ring with a feeling of satisfaction, but that satisfaction sours when the archer realizes he or she was aiming at the wrong target.

Fortunately, to a relatively silent number, the prevailing definition of success on loan to the church from big business misses the mark and, worse, threatens to miss the still, small voice that would lead the church into its mission of making disciples and teaching obedience as defined in Scripture (Matt. 28:18-20). Those who recognize this fallacy experience a foreboding that the church is not fulfilling its mission of making and becoming disciples all while being told that it is doing a good job. Mistaken assumptions regarding spiritual formation are ill advised because the outcome of Christlikeness is the goal of every believer. The focus of this research was the spiritual formation of those who claim the name Christian.

Purpose

The purpose of the research was to evaluate the knowledge and practice of Christian spiritual disciplines of select members of Byron United Methodist Church, in Byron, Georgia, resulting from a twenty-eight-day experience of connecting spiritual disciplines with daily life.

Research Questions

The following research questions helped fulfill the stated purpose of this research.

Research Question #1

How did participants in the twenty-eight-day regimen implemented at Byron United Methodist Church (UMC) understand and practice spiritual disciplines before the intervention?

Research Question #2

How did participants in the twenty-eight-day regimen implemented at Byron UMC understand and practice spiritual disciplines after the intervention?

Research Question #3

What specific elements of the intervention led to the changes in the way participants understood and practiced spiritual disciplines?

Definition of Terms

The technical use of terms was necessary for the development, implementation, and analysis of this research.

Spiritual formation is a believer's goal of becoming like Christ in and with the community of believers. It includes a threefold call to be with Jesus in a personal, ongoing, intimate relationship, to be remade by the Holy Spirit into the image and likeness of Jesus, and to engage in the ministry of Jesus. This process occurs cognitively by having the mind of Christ and behaviorally by acting like Christ. Spiritual formation only comes through the work of the Holy Spirit.

Spiritual disciplines are those activities, habits, or behaviors that Scripture validates as the way believers create sacred space for the movement of the Holy Spirit. Through these disciplines, believers present themselves to God and yield to the transforming work of the Holy Spirit.

The *regimen* is a disciplined and structured daily workbook that includes readings on various spiritual disciplines and encourages participants to practice them throughout the twenty-eight-day intervention.

Practice refers to systematic engagement in a behavior.

Ministry Intervention

This intervention took place during October 2012. The research participants completed the posttest of the Spiritual Vitality Survey (SVS) within one week of concluding the twenty-eight-day process. The overall goal was to discern if cognitive and behavioral changes had occurred in the participants regarding spiritual formation. A secondary goal was to show from the research what specific element(s) of the intervention led to these changes.

Context

The context of this research is Byron UMC located in the Macon District, which is one of nine districts in the South Georgia Conference of the United Methodist Church. While some United Methodist churches in South Georgia are increasing in attendance, membership, and finances, which are the metrics typically employed to measure church health, the majority are struggling. Byron UMC is one of the churches that is increasing in a statistical evaluation but may not be accomplishing the greater mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ.

This research involved select members of Byron UMC. For over one hundred years, Byron had been a strong agricultural hub with deep family ties. Since the expansion of Robbins Air Force Base, Byron has rapidly grown. The former agrarian economy remains but has been bolstered by employment outside the family farm.

The members of Byron UMC are racially homogeneous. The church has 475 members, with an average Sunday morning worship attendance of 281. It is growing in membership, attendance, and finances.

Meanwhile, from 1969 to 2009, the UMC membership dropped from thirteen million to just under 7.7 million (“Annual Conference”). During this same time, the population of the United States grew from 203 million to 310 million (“National Censuses”). Simple math shows that 107 million more people called the United States home during these forty years, a 52.5 percent increase, yet over five million fewer Americans called the UMC home during these years, a 41 percent decrease. Another way of looking at these numbers is that in 1969, 6.4 percent of America was United Methodist. By 2009, only 2.5 percent of America was United Methodist.

The South Georgia Conference of the UMC is not trending much better than the national church. The vacant shells of formerly vibrant congregations litter towns as sad reminders of better times. Many churches fortunate enough to keep the doors open have more pews than regular attendees.

Byron UMC by most accounts is going against these regional and national trends. However, insofar as spiritual health and spiritual formation are concerned, some indications suggest that members from certain declining churches are more successful in their God-given call to discipleship and obedience. Metrics borrowed from the world of commerce do not adequately measure the health of a congregation. Numerical growth does not necessarily correlate to increased spiritual formation. This situation underscores the need for research.

The research began by establishing the pre-intervention levels of the participants’ spiritual health and spiritual formation practices using the researcher-designed SVS. Everyone received instructions concerning how to take the survey on Survey Monkey, an online survey facilitator. The participants in this research agreed to a regimen of daily

readings and practices that helped them focus their attention and energy on spiritual disciplines and incorporate these into their daily routine. All the participants used the same workbook. These workbooks covered eight spiritual disciplines and encouraged participants to practice the one under scrutiny for that particular day. The regimen included each of the eight disciplines in separate readings, which lasted for twenty-eight days.

Methodology

The purpose of the research was to evaluate the knowledge and practice of Christian spiritual disciplines resulting from a twenty-eight-day experience of connecting spiritual disciplines with daily life. The study employed an explanatory, mixed-method design with a self-selecting sampling of thirty-four persons. Participants took the spiritual vitality survey to determine a baseline of their knowledge and practice of the spiritual disciplines. They then began the twenty-eight-day regimen, consisting of a workbook on eight spiritual disciplines. Following this regimen, participants went through structured focus groups and retook the SVS. Journaling was part of the process but not subject to researcher scrutiny.

Participants

The population for this research was the membership of Byron UMC. After advertising the project and asking for volunteers, a pool of candidates emerged. Thirty-four participants agreed to be included in the self-selecting sample. These men and women participated in the daily regimen of reading about a specific spiritual discipline each day, then practicing that discipline for the remainder of the day. This purposive sampling was comprised of thirteen men and twenty-one women.

Instrumentation

In order to respond to the goal of this project, data collection consisted of three instruments. The first instrument was a demographic tool. The second instrument was the researcher-designed spiritual vitality survey, administered pretest and posttest online through Survey Monkey. The third instrument was two structured focus groups with nine participants in each group.

Variables

The research included one independent variable—the twenty-eight-day regimen of spiritual disciplines. This research project had one principal dependent variable consisting of the change itself, as measured by the summary of the data depicting the change between the pre- and post-regimen SVS. An intervening variable was the varied participation of respondents. Other intervening variables were anticipated by the demographic instrument, such as the age and education of participants, the duration and frequency of their church experience, and the denomination that had the most impact on their lives. The purposive sampling of the participants compensated for this variable.

Data Collection

Respondents completed the pretest SVS online through Survey Monkey one week before the start of the twenty-eight-day regimen. The data collected from the SVS formed the baseline of knowledge and practice of the spiritual disciplines. Participants took the posttest SVS in the week following the twenty-eight-day of the intervention, also online through Survey Monkey. The focus groups met four days after the completion of the twenty-eight-day workbook.

Data Analysis

This research used an explanatory, mixed-methods design that included a quantitative spiritual vitality survey administered twice. The qualitative data generated by the focus groups partially evaluated and explained the statistical data generated by the SVS. The combination of statistical analysis of the quantitative data and its evaluation through the qualitative data provided through the focus groups satisfied the purpose of the study.

Generalizability

This study intentionally limited the data collection to the voluntary participation of the members of Byron UMC in Byron, Georgia. This group is a rather homogeneous collection of Caucasian middle-class Christians. Moreover, given the pastoral leadership to which they have been exposed for the past two years, they were predisposed to participate in a spiritual exercise. These realities prevent easy application to other groups. The brief elapsed time between the two surveys also limits the effectiveness of the research. The purpose of the research was to measure the impact of a spiritual disciplines' regimen on the knowledge and practice of a purposive sample within a local church. The conclusions reached in this study therefore relate to Byron UMC. The findings may be generalizable and useful for other clergy attempting to increase the spiritual health and practices of their parishioners, mainline churches not interested in defining church health solely by increasing metrics, and superintendents or their equivalent that would like to improve the spiritual health and practices of churches in their area of responsibility.

The significance of the study for these select audiences is clear. Every believer has a stake in becoming the person God envisions. This study helps to improve the

practice of ministry by proving, through controlled research, the possibility of reclaiming a balanced expression of the mission of the church in the twenty-first century that includes spiritual disciplines. It has the potential to improve policy by convincing administrative church leaders to move beyond number crunching to different models of determining church health and success.

Theological Foundation

Like Martha in Luke 10:38-42, modern churches often engage in and commit to the work at hand—growing a church—when their first call is to her sister Mary’s disposition of sitting at the feet of the Master. Somehow, the secular American definition of *success* as *increasingly bigger* infiltrated ecclesiology. This misleading definition has removed attention from the primary goal of making disciples. Employing the categories developed by Susan Annette Muto and Adrian L. van Kaam, this pulsation from the sociohistorical dimension caused a normal striving to grow the church for the glory of God to become an unhealthy pastoral paradigm where the definition of ministry success and even personal worth is reduced to sheer numbers (Muto). Of course, Scripture itself helps give rise to the idea or expectation that numerical growth should be included in an understanding of church health. On the Day of Pentecost alone, the church saw an increase of about three thousand persons. However, the temptation for modern ministers is to avoid the difficulties of the Christian faith and life when visitors are present in the hope of securing return visits and eventual membership. David E. Fitch highlights this problem:

[B]y using numbers in this way, we may subtly displace the pursuit of being Christ’s church with the counterfeit goal of achieving success in the terms laid out by the American economy and capitalism. And so evangelicals may be building something akin to a Hollywood Western

movie set—its exterior looks real, big, and impressive, but what is actually there is a lot less than meets the eye. (28)

Following this drive for numerical increase fails the church's calling, audience, and even God. This paradigm may lead to success as defined by functional transcendence, but it is not success insofar as the gospel is concerned.

To the extent that each number represents a human being created in the image of God, numbers are important. However, numerical increase cannot be the metric of success because it too readily agrees with the fallacy of the American ethos that bigger is necessarily better and because success cannot be measured by something only the Holy Spirit can do. The church can and must do that which aligns with its calling, but its work of planting and watering is process oriented. The goal-oriented results of conviction, confession, and pardon belong to God. An example of the repercussions this failed paradigm has on ministry is that enlisting others to help in the church was simply that—recruiting assistance for tasks that the church felt compelled to accomplish so that its metrics were satisfied and its self-worth maintained. Research shows that using such a metric in ministry can lead to manipulating others to predetermined ends (Roxburgh and Romanuk 145). This approach is no way to do or lead others into the ministry of Christ. This system is, in fact, motivated by one of the deadly sins—greed or cupidity. This insatiable longing for more without the enjoyment of what is already obtained, when connected to evangelism, means that churches have been driven to increase their membership and attendance for reasons other than the salvation of those souls.

An increasingly popular metric is how many people are maturing in the faith (Hawkins and Parkinson 29). This metric avoids the error of putting primary emphasis on an increase in sheer numbers and instead focusing on discipleship. The limitation,

however, is that this metric still resides in the arena of numbers and sets leaders up for failure since they are not actually in control of the results.

A better metric is the faithfulness of each congregation or disciple to Christ's call. Jesus said, "Come follow me and I will make you a fisher of human beings" (Matt. 4:19, personal trans.). Embedded in this verse is a threefold call to be with Jesus in a personal, ongoing, intimate relationship, to be remade by Jesus through spiritual formation, and to engage in the ministry of Jesus.

Since persons were created for and called to enjoy a personal relationship with Christ, and since this relationship is the foundation of spiritual formation and ministry, the biblical example Mary set is preferable to that of her sister Martha (Luke 10:38-42). In fact, to place ministry ahead of relationship is to participate in the sin of functionalism and perhaps even pride, where what persons do for the Lord is so important that they cannot stop to be with the Lord (Muto). Scripture does not indicate that Mary was lazy or failed to engage in the work of her Lord at other times. Instead, Mary displays a depth of devotion not evident in her sister in this passage. When business metrics drive churches, they can be so caught up in engaging in working for the Lord that their relationship with him has not been marked by the devotion and passion that he deserves. Ironically, the passion for Christ that comes through attending to a relationship with him and the corresponding spiritual transformation through which he leads persons provides the essential ingredients necessary for ministerial success. When the church finally places devotion and spiritual formation ahead of ministry and service, accepts the biblical mandate to pursue holiness, and relies on the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit, it will be the salt and light envisioned in the Bible and the world will take notice.

Overview

Chapter 2 of this study reviews the literature and research pertinent to this topic.

The theological foundations are developed and the literature and research is reviewed.

Chapter 3 contains a detailed description of the spiritual vitality survey, the focus groups, and the specific design of the study. Chapter 4 is a presentation of the findings of the study. Chapter 5 shows the conclusions drawn from the study, practical applications that come from the research, and suggestions for further research.

Relationship

The God of the Hebrew and Christian canon is deeply concerned with relationship. God revealed through Scripture that a foundational aspect of the divine being is relationship with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The doctrine of *perichoresis* teaches that the three Persons of the Godhead relate to each other at the level of mutual indwelling, where to observe one Person is to observe the others as well. Jesus said as much through his claim to Philip that “whoever has seen me has seen the Father” (John 14:9, ESV). Jesus further argued that he and his Father were mutually indwelling each other: “I am in the Father, and the Father is in me. The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does his works” (John 14:10). God exists in an eternal, triune relationship.

While God is complete and whole in the three Persons of the Godhead, God chose to create and relate to that creation. God made humankind in the divine image and likeness, and while exploring the depths of the *imago Dei* is beyond the scope of this reflection, it certainly entails relationship and formation. From the opening chapter of the record of God’s relationship with humankind, the Bible records, “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them” (Gen. 1:27). Creating is a relational activity, especially so when creation reflects attributes of the Creator. God’s image in humankind, according to the New Testament, is the image of Christ, who himself is the image of God (2 Cor. 4:4; Heb. 1:3). As Christ perfectly related to the Father to the extent that Jesus claimed oneness with the Father, so too believers need to relate to God intimately.

The doctrine of the image of God touches many facets of theology, several of which have bearing on the present study, such as human sin and redemption and human formation through sanctification, culminating in the final glorification of redeemed humanity. Human sin negatively affected the image of God in humankind. Many have concluded that sin obliterated God's image in humankind, but the Bible does not warrant such a strong conclusion. While certainly marred through sin, humankind nevertheless still bears God's image. In the prelaw days of Noah, the Lord made certain behavioral demands, including the prohibition of murder. The rationale behind this prohibition was that God created humankind in God's image, implying that the image is still present even after the Fall (Gen. 9:6). James, presenting an argument about the moral use of the human tongue, similarly roots his teaching in the claim that God made humankind in his image (Jas. 3:9). Human sin corrupted human nature and left humankind in an impaired spiritual state. This impairment deeply affected the human-divine relationship, humanity's moral standing, and the ability to conform to God's will.

This sin was so severely experienced that the occupants of the garden retreated and attempted to hide from God's presence. This estrangement from the Creator initiated God's endless pursuit of love, reaching out to those who wandered away from him with an invitation to return. The thrust of holy writ contains God's efforts at restoring the relationship and the image of God spoiled by human sin (John.3:16; 1 Cor. 15:49). To that end, God revealed the plan of human salvation through such initiatives as the Mosaic Law, the sacrificial system, the prophetic witness, and ultimately the Incarnation, death, and resurrection of Jesus. God is presently transforming the Church into his likeness (2 Cor. 3:18). Paul likewise claims that the Church is being "conformed to the image of his

Son” (Rom. 8:29), showing that whatever was lost in the Fall is being or will be restored through justification, sanctification, and glorification.

The divine name God discloses in Scripture also reflects the promise of relationship. God disclosed the divine name Yahweh to Moses at Horeb. Moses wanted to know God’s name should the question arise in the minds of God’s people. The Lord declared, “I AM WHO I AM. Say this to the people of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you’” (Exod. 3:14). The self-disclosure of the divine name is a relational act. God told Moses the name he could share with God’s people and connected that name with a promise that the One who bore that name would also be with Moses during this adventure (Exod. 3:12). Moreover, Yahweh was sending Moses as an emissary to those men, women, and children he would deliver from Egyptian bondage into the land of promise, just as God had promised to their forebears. God would continue the relationship he forged with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and fulfill the promises he made.

Knowledge

The divine-human relationship demands knowledge, for persons cannot intelligently relate to that which is completely unknown. God provided for this condition through the divine self-revelation of the Bible. God’s interaction with humankind, unfolded through the centuries and with select persons, under the power of the Holy Spirit, recorded what God wanted to express to future generations. The Bible thus contains God’s Word to humankind as the record of salvation history culminating in the person and work of God’s only begotten Son (Eph. 1:7-10). However, it is more than a collection of fragmented thoughts collected in books diverse in time, language, authorship, audience, and genre. The Bible is the unified, overarching story of God’s

redeeming presence in the world and his gracious purposes for the world (Col. 1:25-27; Heb. 1:1-2).

Humankind is encouraged to know God. An early Hebrew confession of faith called the *Shema* reflects the importance of growing in knowledge of God (Deut. 6:4-9). Therein Moses talks about the unity of God's being, the need to love God entirely, and the importance of God's commandments in the daily life of God's people. The self-disclosure of God to the Israelites helped form their religious identity. Moses was, therefore, insistent that future generations learn this self-disclosure and, more importantly, know, fear, and follow the God behind it (Deut. 6:12-14).

Parents instructed children to know and serve God. David taught Solomon the value of knowing and serving God:

And you, Solomon my son, know the God of your father and serve him with a whole heart and with a willing mind, for the Lord searches all hearts and understands every plan and thought. If you seek him, he will be found by you. (1 Chron. 28:9)

Solomon, in turn, shared that the Lord gives knowledge, understanding, and wisdom to those who seek and fear him (Prov. 2:5-6).

Prophets rejoiced in the restoration that would occur as persons sought the Lord. Jeremiah records the Lord saying, "[L]et him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth" (Jer. 9:24). Isaiah entreats his people to "[s]eek the Lord while he may be found; call upon him while he is near" (Isa. 55:6). Hosea likewise assured his people that if they acknowledged the Lord, the Lord would appear with the certainty of the rising sun and the blessed rain (Hos. 6:3).

The entreaty to seek and know God does not change with the New Testament. In his most famous sermon, Jesus told the crowd to “seek first his kingdom and righteousness” with the promise that “he who seeks finds” (Matt. 6:33; 7:8). In Paul’s sermon at the Areopagus, he argued that God manifested himself through creation so that persons would seek him (Acts 17:27). On a different occasion, Paul told the believers in Ephesus that his prayer for them was to grow in their knowledge of God, to be enlightened about their future hope, to know their glorious inheritance, and to understand God’s power for them (Eph. 1:17-19). A consistent message of Scripture is the necessity of seeking God, learning about God, and growing in knowledge of God. This pursuit of God comes with the promise that God will honor human efforts with divine self-disclosure.

Practice

Knowledge alone is not what God envisions for his people, for knowledge will not necessarily deepen the human-divine relationship. Jesus argued that if his disciples loved him, they would obey his commands (John 14:15). He used the simile of constructing a house on solid foundation as a parallel to the person who practiced his words (Luke 6:46-48).

James forcefully argues the necessity of practice: “But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves” (Jas. 1:22). He employs a simile about how quickly persons forget certain facial features immediately after having looked in a mirror. Looking into God’s Word and forgetting does not lead to spiritual formation. However, combining knowledge with practice leads to growth in relationship with God.

In Romans 12:1-2, the apostle Paul connects cognitive renewal with spiritual transformation. However, the renewing of the mind is not the end in itself. Instead, it is part of the process of conformation, not to the world and to pre-grace patterns of living, but to Christ. Subsequent to this cognitive transformation is action—the testing, approving, and, assumedly, the practice of God’s will.

This line of reasoning reflects the balance between orthodoxy (right belief) and orthopraxy (right behavior or practice). Orthodoxy without orthopraxy does little good. Belief exists in the immaterial realm, while behavior exists in the material. The important intellectual and spiritual activity of believing the truth about God correlates to the important volitional activity of behavior. Good behavior without reference to God amounts to something akin to philanthropy or humanism. Good theology without reference to corresponding behavior amounts to hypocrisy. The Bible argues the importance of both orthodoxy and orthopraxy.

Presence

In addition to practicing right theology, relational health and growth demand time spent in God’s presence. God is simultaneously present everywhere, including indwelling believers. Paul writes, “Do you not know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you” (1 Cor. 3:16). On the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit filled the room where the disciples gathered, then subsequently filled and empowered each disciple (Acts 2:4). Since then, everyone who believes in Christ Jesus as Lord is “sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of [their] inheritance until [they] acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory” (Eph. 1:13-14). The presence of the Holy Spirit is the fulfillment of Jesus’ promise to his disciples before his ascension. He said,

“[I]t is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you” (John 16:7). During the time of Christ’s Incarnation, God was in the flesh living with men and women. While incarnate, Jesus argued that his disciples were better off if he departed because by leaving them, the Holy Spirit would come and indwell them spiritually. Jesus argued from the lesser—having God with them—to the greater—having God within them.

The indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit now empowers believers to produce fruit in keeping with their redeemed, transformed nature (Gal. 5:22-25). Paul further argues, “If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you” (Rom. 8:11). The present life of believers and the spiritual transformation they enjoy are deeply connected to and reliant on a relationship with God through his indwelling Spirit.

While the Holy Spirit indwells believers, they must also heed the biblical call to dwell in Christ and to remain in his presence. Jesus said, “Abide in me, and I in you” (John 15:4). The synergism of God’s indwelling presence in believers and human striving to remain in Christ through loving obedience is a key to Christian spiritual formation. Since the former is God’s work, which he promises never to undo (Heb. 13:5), believers must focus on the latter—remaining in Christ.

A Biblical Case Study

A study of Luke 10:38-42 shows the theological themes of relating, growing in knowledge, and abiding in God’s presence in the midst of cultural and social imperatives to conform. It is difficult for many people to turn off the noise and clamor of the world

and perceived expectations to sit and listen in quiet reflection. Living as a disciple in a frenetically multitasking society is not easy, but this passage helps persons understand the need to enter the process of transformation by slowing down and enjoying life with Christ. Luke shares a story of one such occasion from the life of Christ:

Now as they went on their way, Jesus entered a village. And a woman named Martha welcomed him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching. But Martha was distracted with much serving. And she went up to him and said, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me." But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her. (Luke 10:38-42)

Luke establishes this story in the larger narrative of Jesus' ministry. Chapter nine opens with Jesus sending out the twelve disciples to do ministry with specific instructions regarding the hospitality of the crowd. Shortly after their return, Jesus confronted a hungry crowd and ministered to their needs through a miraculous feeding. He then took Peter, James, and John up the mountain where he was transfigured before them. A voice from the cloud admonished the men to listen to Jesus. As Jesus and his disciples began their long march to Jerusalem, Jesus sent out seventy-two followers to teach and minister to needs. Again, Jesus focused on the twin topics of hospitality and listening. In a teaching moment Luke set just before the story of Mary and Martha, Jesus shared the famous story about the good Samaritan.

The story of Mary and Martha shows the interplay of hospitality and deeper devotion (LaGuardia 32). Martha defied convention in this story. She "welcomed him into her house" (Luke 10:38).

This hospitality is the first of three cultural abnormalities. The text says that Martha opened her home to Jesus and his disciples, although women usually did not own property. She did exactly what Jesus had been teaching—she showed hospitality to her guests. In showing hospitality to the Lord, Martha did more than merely provide shelter for weary travelers. She created an opportunity for sacred space where God's redeeming, transforming presence could be felt (LaGuardia 32.). However, Martha was so busy attending to her perceived role of hostess that she failed to engage in the opportunity her hospitality created. She experienced the chiding of her Lord for focusing on the lesser to the detriment of the greater.

Mary sat at Jesus' feet, the posture of a disciple to a rabbi. Women were not usually disciples, but Jesus apparently allowed it. The text highlights that she was not simply taking a break from her labors. She was listening to Jesus' teaching. This attentive disposition is what Jesus had been teaching. The divine voice from the cloud demanded that Jesus' disciples listen to him. Unlike her sister performing the conventional role of hostess, providing comfort and food for her guests, Mary took on the posture of a disciple. Sacred space was created and with it an opportunity that she did not ignore. Like Martha, Mary provided a welcome for her Lord. Unlike Martha, the welcome Mary extended goes deeper than physical food and shelter. Mary contemplatively welcomed Jesus' teaching into her life as she sat at his feet in the posture of a disciple (Bumpus 230; LaGuardia 33).

Jesus praised the contemplative, attentive disposition of Mary. Tension always exists between the pressing demands of labor and the necessity to be still before God for formation and renewal. The third and final cultural abnormality was that Martha invited

Jesus into a family dispute. Martha was not only guilty of bringing Jesus into her dispute with her sister, she instructed Jesus how to correct the discomfort and displacement she was feeling. She attempted to triangulate Jesus into her family battle with Mary.

An examination of this text yields several principles of spiritual formation. First, Luke purposefully highlighted the breaking of cultural norms, showing that Jesus challenged and transformed social conventions. Jesus was more important than perceived obligations. Regarding hospitality, the guest demanded full attention. The homeowner did not dictate the terms of hospitality to this guest. Once the door of the heart is open to him, persons become subservient to his Lordship.

Second, sometimes activity for the Lord must stop, allowing persons to be still in his presence. The contemplative spiritual disciplines lead persons into deeper knowledge of and relationship with Christ. Oswald Chambers and James G. Reimann write about being in the presence of God:

The most important aspect of Christianity is not the work we do, but the relationship we maintain and the surrounding influence and qualities produced by that relationship. That is all God asks us to give our attention to, and it is the one thing that is continually under attack. (10/4)

Christians fail in their relationship with Christ when they attempt to be busy for him but fail to receive from him or be formed by and in him. Richard J. Foster agrees:

Today the heart of God is an open wound of love. He aches over our distance and preoccupation. He mourns that we do not draw near to him. He grieves that we have forgotten him. He weeps over our obsession with muchness and manyness. He longs for our presence. (*Prayer 1*)

Muto and van Kaam advocate that persons “[j]oyfully relinquish whatever prevents [them] from making Christ the center of [their] life so that [they] may more freely serve God’s reign on earth” (151). Christians cannot serve without continual surrender.

Third, Mary's attention to Jesus' words is the better way. She freely chose to enter into a discipleship relationship with Jesus through contemplation. However, Jesus' use of the word *better* in the New International Version does not relegate Martha's service to the junk pile. As M. R. Bumpus observes, "Mary and Martha represent two dimensions of the one Christian life, and both are essential for discipleship and transformation" (230).

Spiritual formation depends on inwardly focused contemplative disciplines such as Scripture reading and fasting and outwardly focused active disciplines such as worship and service. Spiritual formation suffers when it becomes an either/or equation. Spiritual formation requires prioritizing the relationship with Jesus and maintaining an attitude of humility and surrender. The decision for Luke's readers is to choose the better way—to prioritize discipleship with Christ above everything else. Bumpus says of Martha, "In her distracted state, she is not able to be present and open to the person and word of Jesus" (233). Seeking first the kingdom of God is the only way the other concerns of life will find their proper place (Matt. 6:33).

Fourth, while Mary enjoyed a time of spiritual formation while sitting at Jesus' feet, Martha also had an opportunity for an epiphanic encounter with Christ. Jesus' gentle correction of Martha through the double vocative invokes his later call of Saul through the same means (Acts 22:7). In Saul's conversion story, Jesus doubling his name is an impassioned plea for Saul to stop his hostility toward Jesus and instead repent and enter into a contemplative relationship with him. Perhaps Martha received a similar invitation. In his final words to Martha in this pericope, "Jesus encourages Martha to see that active service bears fruit when it is grounded in attentive receptivity to the messenger of grace, when it is rooted in a relationship of discipleship which will not be taken away" (Bumpus

233). Through this encounter, Martha had the opportunity to rethink her priorities and reconsider her relationship with the Lord (233).

Spiritual Formation

The mission of the church is to make disciples. This process begins and ends when persons yield to the transforming work of the Holy Spirit. God has ordained certain aids in this process, including preaching, teaching, and emulating the example of Christ.

Because the goal of spiritual formation is becoming like Christ, the simple methodology post-conversion is yielding to the work of the Holy Spirit through engagement in the practices that Jesus did while ministering among humankind. Jesus himself invited his disciples into this relational paradigm. Shortly after the call to the disciples to follow him, Jesus began teaching his followers about stewardship, prayer, fasting—practices the church has recognized as essential in discipleship. These disciplines create space wherein God engages in the spiritual transformation of men and women into the likeness of his Son.

The phrase *spiritual formation* has become popular in Christian circles. For some, it is synonymous with discipleship and thus is little more than an old doctrine rebranded for a new generation. For others, the linguistic similarity in supporting terms such as meditation invites inevitable parallels to Roman Catholic and New Age practices. These parallels become such a threat to some Protestant observers that they pronounce rash judgments and castigate the entire movement as heresy. Spiritual formation is neither merely a synonym for discipleship, although they share many commonalities, nor a ploy of the devil to lure hapless Christians into the abyss.

Many authors combine elements of discipleship and progressive sanctification in their definition of spiritual formation. According to a popular evangelical Web site devoted to this topic, “Spiritual formation is God’s work of spiritual maturation in the life of a believer. Christians are called to become more like Jesus Christ through the process of the Spirit’s sanctifying work” (“What Is Spiritual Formation?”). James C. Wilhoit adds a Trinitarian dimension: “Christian spiritual formation refers to the intentional communal process of growing in our relationship with God and becoming conformed to Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit” (23). For Donald S. Whitney, “Spiritual formation is the biblical process of being conformed inwardly and outwardly to the character of Christ” (“Christian Life FAQ”). Gary A. Parrett and S. Steve Kang add a crucial element to this definition. The transmission of information alone is insufficient for the goal of spiritual formation. The information must be married to obedience (151). M. Robert Mulholland, Jr. defines spiritual formation as “a process of being conformed to the image of Christ for the sake of others” (12). Jeffrey P. Greenman and George Kalantzis define 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” (24). Dallas Willard and Don Simpson write, “[S]piritual formation is God’s grace-filled process by which a person moves from self-worship to Christ-centered self-denial as an increasingly steady disposition of the heart” (70). Elsewhere Willard gives flesh to this skeletal definition. He adds three dimensions to spiritual formation. The first is training in the spiritual disciplines or activities. The second dimension is the shaping of the inner, spiritual life of the human being. The third

dimension of spiritual formation is a shaping done by the Holy Spirit (“Spiritual Formation in Christ” 254).

A few things arise from these definitions. First, spiritual formation is an intentional process that does not end with salvation but glorification. Stops can be made along the way, but the journey will not conclude until time on earth is over. Second, it has both individual and communal aspects. Each believer is a work in progress, but the change does not occur in isolation from the community of faith. Third, spiritual formation deals with internal and external dimensions of human personality and activity. Fourth, the goal is formation into the image of Jesus. Finally, it is a synergistic process, with God calling, Christ exemplifying, human beings engaging, and the Holy Spirit transforming. Ultimately, while human agency is important, volition alone cannot account for the formation of a believer into the image of Christ. Spiritual formation is ultimately the work of the Holy Spirit.

Spiritual formation, then, is a believer’s intentional, lifelong goal of becoming like Christ in and with a community of believers. It occurs internally by having the mind of Christ and externally by acting like Christ. It only comes as the work of the Holy Spirit.

Spiritual Disciplines

The spiritual disciplines are the means by which a person creates space for the Holy Spirit’s work of conforming believers into the image of Jesus. Willard writes, “The disciplines are activities of mind and body purposefully undertaken, to bring our personality and total being into effective cooperation with the divine order” (*Spirit* 68). According to Ian Curran, “Christian spiritual disciplines are specific intentional actions

... that direct people toward the true God and away from their false selves and the false beliefs, attitudes, and practices of the world” (4). Foster claims they are the “door to liberation” (*Celebration* 1). Spiritual disciplines are essential elements of spiritual formation.

Defining spiritual disciplines is not as easy as simply appealing to a list of noble practices. First, spiritual disciplines are not ends in themselves. Christians do not become spiritually mature by becoming experts in the practice of any or all the spiritual disciplines. Second, the spiritual disciplines do not cause automatic or instantaneous change. Instead, they place believers in the stream of grace where the Holy Spirit can do the work of transformation (Calhoun 19). The spiritual disciplines help move believers from the surface to the depths of a relationship with God. Third, the spiritual disciplines do not replace faithful church attendance or participation in other church activities (Willard, *Spirit* 69). Fourth, Christians have practiced these disciplines personally and corporately since biblical times for the promotion of spiritual growth (Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines* 17).

John Wesley and the Means of Grace

John Wesley was the unwitting founder of several denominations that span the globe. His intent was to reform the Church from within, not to begin a new movement. He lived and died a cleric of the Church of England. A critical part of Wesley’s genius that helped solidify his place in history was his attention to detail, thus the nomenclature, Methodist. He was methodical in his approach to spiritual matters, especially growth in Christlikeness and progression in the means of grace.

In his sermon entitled, “The Means of Grace,” Wesley claims these means are “outward signs, words, or actions, ordained of God, and appointed for this end, to be the ordinary channels whereby he might convey to men, preventing, justifying, or sanctifying grace” (II.1). The three principal means for Wesley are “the way of prayer,” “searching the Scriptures,” and “partaking of the Lord’s Supper” (II.1). For Wesley, these means, entered into without God’s Spirit, are nothing more than a stench to God. To those who would argue that Wesley is either seeking salvation through rituals or expecting salvation because of his works, he retorts that participation in these means of grace is nothing more or less than waiting on God according to the means God has ordained and expecting God to appear because of God’s unfailing promise (IV.2). Wesley makes several things abundantly clear. The work of applying grace to a human heart is God’s. However, human volition must receive and accept God’s grace. Moreover, since God delineated these means and promised to meet persons through them, believers would be foolish to engage in any attempt to become like Christ without employing them faithfully and regularly.

Prayer. According to Wesley, persons wait for the grace of God through prayer (Means of Grace, III.2). Jesus exemplified waiting in prayer and taught his followers a great deal about prayer (Matt. 7:7; Luke 11:13). He taught that disciples should ask so that they might receive, to seek so that they might find, to knock so that the door might be opened. Jesus invited his followers to wait on God’s grace through prayer with the assurance that God will provide.

Scripture. Wesley loved the Word of God. He writes, “Oh give me that book! At any price, give me the book of God! I have it: here is knowledge enough for me. Let me

be a man of one book” (Sermons 3). Jesus invited his audience to search the Scriptures because they spoke about him (John 5:39). Wesley believes that through the Bible persons can receive grace and become “wise for salvation” (2 Tim. 3:15).

The Lord’s Supper. Wesley argues from Scripture that God conveyed grace to humankind through participation in the Lord’s Supper:

Is not the eating of that bread, and the drinking of that cup, the outward, visible means, whereby God conveys into our souls all that spiritual grace, that righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost, which were purchased by the body of Christ once broken and the blood of Christ once shed for us? (“Means of Grace” III.12)

Wesley believes believers have the duty of partaking in the Lord’s Supper as often as possible (“Duty of Constant Communion” I.1).

Other means. Wesley does not stop at three means of grace. He includes fasting and Christian conferencing as means by which God brings grace to human hearts. For Wesley, fasting meant abstaining from pleasant foods or from all foods for a time. Wesley had a weekly practice of going without food on Fridays. Fasting is an aid to discipline and prayer, brings personal sin and guilt into sharper relief, and helps express desire for God’s assistance and blessing. Wesley gives strong warnings against fasting for the praise of others. The second additional means of grace, Christian conferencing, highlights the importance of the communal or interpersonal side of growing in grace. Christians do not live in isolation but in community. Wesley recognizes the need for fellowship, nurture, and accountability. While Christian conferencing is not terminology used today, the ideas of fellowship or small group gatherings are very much in vogue.

Wesley believes that these are the instituted means of grace for the church. However, he does not close the door on the possibility of additional means:

And it is certain these are the ordinary channels which convey the grace of God to the souls of men. But are they the only means of grace? Are there no other means than these, whereby God is pleased, frequently, yea, ordinarily, to convey his grace to them that either love or fear him? Surely there are works of mercy, as well as works of piety, which are real means of grace. (“On Visiting the Sick”)

Wesley describes in detail how visiting the sick is one such work of mercy that is also a means of grace.

Evident in the life and teaching of Wesley is the process of spiritual formation unfolding over time through the grace of God, the power of the Holy Spirit, according to the example of Jesus. Throughout his writings, Wesley develops a methodology whereby persons could grow in grace through the faithful practice of biblically ordained spiritual disciplines. He taught that the duty of every believer is to use the means of grace and to grow and mature toward Christian perfection. Wesley clearly states that participation in these means of grace does not constitute works righteousness. Instead, believers use the means God established to allow God to perform the work of sanctification in their hearts.

Which Spiritual Disciplines

Since the Christianity practiced in this present age is often shallow and leaves adherents sounding, looking, and acting much like they did prior to their conversion, many advocates of spiritual formation suggest returning to the church of the past, arguing that the spiritual waters ran deeper than at present (Foster, *Celebration 3*; Willard, *Spirit* 16; Calhoun 17). Others see dangers lurking in these so-called deep waters. By stopping their trek through church history at the desert fathers and mothers, spiritual formation advocates have not gone back to the ultimate source of deepest, freshest water—the apostolic age (Gilley). The hair-shirt-clothed hermit’s claimed path to God may be nothing more than the fanciful delusions of a half-starved lunatic suffering from exposure

and depravation. The title of spiritual master should not be applied to a relatively unknown hermit when scrolling back through history just a few generations establishes modern Christians in the presence of true greatness. Peter, John, and Paul—these men are known. Their practice is commendable to all. Behind them stands Jesus, the One to whom all discipleship is addressed, from whom all receive the perfect example and sufficient strength, and into whose image all are being formed.

No believer is arguing against prayer or Bible intake as means of spiritual maturation. After all, these methods are encouraged in Scripture for this very purpose. The erroneous teaching comes when the church ignores the revealed truth and looks to extra-biblical sources for disciplines that will lead to God. Multiple dangers exist with this approach.

First, such a list may have no end. John Ortberg defines spiritual disciplines as anything that can help an individual live more like Jesus, which is up to the imagination of the practitioner (48). Adele Ahlberg Calhoun claims that the list of spiritual disciplines is both freeing and overwhelming (17). Willard advocates against even trying to formulate an exhaustive list in part because no single list will be applicable to all followers of Christ (*Spirit* 157).

Second, basic criteria need to be established for the formulation of such a list. Foster has no trouble appealing to practices developed after the close of the canon (*Celebration* 14). Calhoun looks to modern psychology, ecology, and technology to develop her list of spiritual disciplines (18). Willard leaves the decision up to efficacy of the discipline in the individual (*Spirit* 157) Ortberg likewise leaves the list open to the discretion of the individual (48). The lack of criteria for what constitutes a spiritual

discipline can quickly devolve into a theology of “everyone did what was right in his own eyes” (Judg. 17:6, KJV). Gary Gilley observes, “Once it is accepted that we can enhance the Christian life by augmenting the inspired words of Scripture there is no limit to where we might end up.” Without standards, the list of spiritual disciplines may become so diluted that it becomes meaningless.

An appeal to alleged spiritual masters may also be misguided. One person’s spiritual master is another’s charlatan. A careful look at Scripture makes this point obvious:

Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ. Let no one disqualify you, insisting on asceticism and worship of angels, going on in detail about visions, puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind, and not holding fast to the Head, from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God.

If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the world, why, as if you were still alive in the world, do you submit to regulations—“Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch” (referring to things that all perish as they are used)—according to human precepts and teachings? These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh. (Col. 2:16-23, ESV)

Paul clearly says that outward manifestations of religion or spirituality are insignificant compared to the reality of Christ. He even mentions an individual’s visions or dreams that inflate ego. Paul seems to be speaking of an alleged spiritual guide or master, fomenting discontent in the *ordinary* believers who lack such special revelation. Paul argues that such a person has lost connection with Jesus himself and is cut off from the growth God intends. The very thing the braggart claims is expressly what that person is lacking. Human commands, teachings, and regulations appear wise, but they may lack the

power to create space for God to form a believer into the image of Christ. This strong caution must guide the church's knowledge and experience of the spiritual disciplines and spiritual formation.

While tradition grants the church a deep well from which to draw spiritual disciplines, the deepest well is Scripture itself. If persons argue that the Bible must at least mention the practice in question, they can still quickly reach the absurd. Jesus mentioned taxes and encouraged their dutiful payment, but it strains credulity to suggest that Jesus advocated the payment of taxes as a spiritual discipline (Matt. 22:21). Jesus walked a great deal surrounded by and immersed in nature. However, Jesus' transportation habits do not constitute an endorsement of nature walks as a spiritual discipline. The critical component is the connection between a given practice and its value in forming the individual or community into the image of Jesus. The church makes a mistake when it confuses a potentially good practice with biblically inspired spiritual disciplines as modeled or taught by Jesus and the apostles (Carson).

Many of the techniques that find their way onto lists of spiritual disciplines are experiences of a different caliber. For example, some consider chastity or celibacy to be a spiritual discipline. However, sexual restraint is a calling and a gift, not a spiritual discipline for all believers. Celibacy is not universally approved as a means by which the Holy Spirit forms persons into the image of Jesus. Celibacy is not intrinsically holier than marriage (Carson). Meditation as a spiritual discipline is similarly ambiguous at best and depends greatly on the object examined. Moreover, if the subject derives unmediated, mystical knowledge about God or the Christian life from the object of meditation or contemplative prayer, the temptation is to place that knowledge on par with God's

revealed Word. The pursuit of mystical experiences and specially revealed knowledge through certain spiritual disciplines does little to solidify the sufficiency of Scripture for obedient Christian living (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

Third, the more disciplines employed in the process of spiritual formation, the less time persons can spend on those that Scripture advocates. God has revealed in his Word the means he designed to lead believers along the path of Spirit-driven progressive sanctification into the image of Jesus. Thus, the goal of spiritual formation as established in Scripture comes with corresponding means. While extra-biblical practices such as earth care, nature walks, or disconnecting from technology may be fruitful or even noble, these practices do not rise to the level of God-ordained spiritual disciplines that God uses to form persons into the image of Christ. Paul writes, “Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort?” (Gal. 3:3) The better way has become clear.

Sola Scriptura

A methodology emerges for the selection of spiritual disciplines for this research. Instead of focusing on anything that may assist a person in the path of spiritual formation, the biblical witness will be the guide. Jesus’ teaching and practice and the subsequent witness of his apostles delineate the spiritual disciplines that God may use for personal spiritual transformation. Thus, the following research is limited to the spiritual disciplines that the biblical record shows Jesus actually practicing or teaching his followers. While more can be read into Jesus’ activity than the eight disciplines examined in this research, and while his activities can be subdivided into numerous branches, the spiritual disciplines under review form the foundation of what Jesus expected his followers to

emulate. A clear connection exists between the practice of each biblically oriented discipline and Spirit-driven formation into the image of the Savior. Jesus said, “I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you” (John 13:15). Many additional practices and habits developed throughout the history of the Church may be conducive to the goal of yielding to God’s work of spiritually forming persons into the image of Christ, but this research was intentionally limited to those found in Jesus’ example and teaching.

Examining Jesus’ life shows that he practiced or taught at least eight spiritual disciplines, including Bible intake (Matt. 4:4; 5:17), prayer (Matt. 6:5-13; Mark 1:35), fasting (Matt. 4:2; 6:16-18), solitude (Matt. 4:1; 26:36-44; Mark 1:35), worship (Matt. 4:10), service (Matt. 20:25-28; John 13:1-5), submission/self-denial (Heb. 5:7-9; Matt. 16:24-25), and stewardship (Matt. 6:2-4). Journaling was included insofar as the workbook uses this practice as a helpful means of recording and reflecting.

Spiritual Formation in Scripture

The Bible does not use the terminology *spiritual formation* or *spiritual disciplines*, but the lack of such modern references in no way implies that these concepts are extra-biblical. The opening chapters of the biblical narrative record God’s forming humankind in his image. Creation in God’s image necessarily has a spiritual dimension because God is Spirit, so anything pertaining to the divine image must share that quality.

The apostle Paul writes extensively about formation in the image of Christ. In Ephesians 4:11-5:2, Paul uses spiritual formation terminology repeatedly. The church of Jesus Christ should be “built up,” “mature,” “attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ,” grown up into Christ, grown and built up in love, shedding the old

life, being made new and clothed in the new self, and imitating God in a life of love. The goal of everyone who is in Jesus Christ is to attain “the whole measure of the fullness of Christ” (Eph. 4:13, NIV). Christians already possess eternal life and enjoy the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, but the process of becoming has just begun at conversion. In Galatians 4:19, Paul expresses his desire that Christ be formed in the believers, clearly establishing that this goal has not yet been accomplished in the lives of his readers. Elsewhere Paul writes that believers “are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory” (2 Cor. 3:18). The modern goal of spiritual formation parallels the biblical goal of formation in the image of Jesus. The Bible also clearly shows that this goal unfolds in a process orchestrated by the Holy Spirit.

Spiritual formation as detailed in the Bible connotes both human effort and God’s ultimate ability. Paul encourages his readers to “train yoursel[ves] to be godly” (1 Tim. 4:7). Persons coming to faith in Christ do not instantly conform to the image of Christ. According to Paul, human agency had a role in the process of becoming all that God intends. Elsewhere, Paul encouraged believers to clothe themselves in Jesus Christ and regularly told believers to “put off” their old, sinful lifestyles and “put on” Christ and a new way of living (Rom. 13:14; Col. 3:9-10). In this lifelong, disciplined process, persons submit themselves to the loving hands of the Potter, who alone can transform and make people holy (Heb. 2:11). God does the transformation, but human volition plays an important role. Christians can place themselves in God’s hands through the spiritual disciplines and surrender to God’s work in their lives.

Spiritual Formation in Decline

Recent studies verify the concern of a lack of spiritual formation in the Church (Barna xviii). Part of the problem is a misunderstanding of spiritual maturity. According to the Barna Group, “most Christians equate spiritual maturity with following the rules.” Likewise, a majority of churchgoers were either unsure or unable to guess their church’s definition of spiritual maturity.

Willard claims that the church is mistaken regarding spiritual formation: “If the steady, longtime faithful devotees to our ministries are not transformed in the substance of their lives to the full range of Christlikeness, they are being failed by what we are teaching them” (*Spirit* 18). The solution, according to Willard, is a return to the historically proven spiritual disciplines.

The problem with the lack of spiritual formation in certain North American church members is not necessarily a lack of willingness but a void in theology, teaching, and practical direction (Willard, *Spirit* 18). The Christian faith has failed to transform Christians because of a lack of discipleship and a failure to emulate the practices of Christ (221). For Willard, all Christian ministers should take seriously the call to engage in, teach, and model these spiritual disciplines so they and their congregations reflect the image of Jesus (246). Christian leaders can stop worrying excessively about those who do not faithfully attend services and concentrate on understanding what is happening in the spiritual lives of those who do. The church can then become “a school of life” where the New Testament example of men and women formed in the image of Christ is practiced until it is mastered (247).

Modern Research of Spiritual Disciplines

Research shows that practicing godly habits plays an important role in an individual's spiritual, mental, and emotional health. Eric L. Johnson examined the attributes of God and showed how these attributes inform and can even correct dysfunctional states. Attaining true knowledge of God, defined as moving beyond intellectualism to experientially tasting God's goodness, can have deep and abiding effects on individuals. Modern believers can attain this experiential knowledge of God through reading, hearing, and reflecting on the Word of God. Through this process, the Holy Spirit reveals such knowledge to the soul. Johnson writes, "It would seem that whatever one's psychospiritual difficulties, they can be fundamentally improved by looking to God" (86). Experientially knowing God's love overcomes a personal sense of worthlessness. The self-centeredness of narcissism is recast and reformed by God's presence. God's sovereignty soothes anxiety and fear.

Howard L. Sacks examined changes to the self-integration of forty-six Jesuit novices over a four-month period. All Jesuit novices experience a thirty-day regimen of spiritual exercises. Sacks had these men fill out a questionnaire at three times during their stay at various novitiates across the United States and Canada. The men took the questionnaires two months before the regimen of spiritual exercises, two weeks before the regimen, and one month after the regimen. The changes between test one and two were negligible, and even in the wrong direction. However, the changes between the second administration of the questionnaire and the third, post-regimen questionnaire proved significant. The spiritual exercises had a notable impact on the overall integration of the self-systems of these men.

A caution and a hope arise from a comparison of the Jesuit research to the study at hand. First, persons need to ensure that the changes produced by the regimen endure beyond their intensive experience of the spiritual disciplines. Second, this study shows that thirty days is sufficient time to see marked changes in individuals as a result of spiritual exercises.

Peter J. Jankowski and Marsha Vaughn examined the empirical support for a theorized relationship between self-differentiation, spirituality, and select spiritual practices. The study consisted of a convenience sample of seventy-eight college students from two religiously affiliated schools. The results supported the hypothesis that greater participation in spiritual practices would lead to higher levels of spiritual development. Interestingly, an increased awareness in personal behavior corresponded to an increased reliance on God for assistance. Moreover, an increased awareness of personal need followed by prayer about that need resulted in increased differentiated functioning in emotionally close relationships. The authors imply from these findings that prayers for self may help self-regulation and improve differentiated functioning. Furthermore, prayer may serve as a means of finding comfort in distressing relationships and, if practiced over time, may improve the functioning of those relationships.

In a fascinating article that dances between psychology and theology, Diane Langberg connects the dots between bearing the image of God and being shaped by what grabs attention. The problem for Christian therapists is that the suffering and evil they habitually explore in their patients eventually impacts them. The issue becomes how they can endure the impact of the suffering and evil of their patients without experiencing the negative effects of personal deformation.

Langberg argues that as image bearers, human beings are at the very least malleable and capable of reflecting. They bear the image of God and can bear other images. They reflect in their being their personal history and the image of those forces that have shaped them. Langberg makes the next logical connection: Persons not only reflect an image, but they also have the capacity to bear, internally, that which is reflected. They assimilate, and over time, those things that they reflect eventually shape and inform their identities. The issue is not whether they will bear an image. God made human beings to be image bearers. The issue concerns whose image will be borne. Langberg writes, “What or who will it be that we reflect, that works its way down into our soul, that ultimately shapes us to look like itself” (260). Langberg rhetorically questioned the hope a therapist had of refusing to bear images of darkness and death after spending time listening to the shaping influences of violence, rape, alcoholism, brokenness, and neglect.

The solution for the therapist lies in the person of Jesus. Jesus too was an image bearer. Jesus reflected the Father as his exact representation (Heb. 1:4). Jesus also reflected and was shaped by the forces around him. The impact of evil on his life was so profound that he still bears the scars. Though the Man of Sorrows was acquainted with darkness and death, he is light and life. He so habitually reflected the Father that he presently bears the image of sin in a redemptive and transformative way. Disciples must learn to place themselves habitually under God’s influence so that they reflect and become reshaped in his image. Langberg concludes that God recreates her in his image through ongoing participation in the disciplines of worship, truth, study, prayer, and obedience.

Gordon S. Mikoski writes along a similar vein of theology. He argues that Christian “[p]ractices are bearers of belief” (272). As Christians engage in the spiritual disciplines, they contain and carry forward their beliefs about God, self, the church, and the world. He even argues that persons attain understanding of some Christian beliefs only through engagement in their corresponding practices. Thus, spiritual formation in the church demands helping believers engage in spiritual disciplines in order to teach the faith and equip the faithful to witness in the midst of the world (274).

O. Jane Thayer assumed a correlation between processes of Kolb’s learning theory and processes of spiritual growth to develop an instrument, the Christian Spiritual Participation Profile, to predict spiritual growth. The results of the profile measure varying levels of participation in four spiritual developmental modes. These spiritual developmental modes consist of ten popular spiritual disciplines: Bible reading, evangelism, fellowship, meditation, prayer, examination of conscience, repentance, service, stewardship, and worship. Because these disciplines involve more than one developmental mode, Thayer asked eight published educators familiar with Kolb’s learning theory to categorize each discipline in its primary developmental mode. The modes are the Transcendent Scale, which includes prayer, repentance, and worship; the Reflection Scale, which includes examination of conscience; the Vision Scale, which includes Bible reading and meditation; and, the New Life Scale, which includes evangelism, fellowship, and service. All four scales equally represent stewardship.

The participants were selected through a convenience sample of 899 students from ten Christian colleges of four evangelical varieties. The results proved interesting. They show high participation (67.9 percent strong versus 32.1 percent weak) in the

Transcendent Scale, followed by moderate participation in the Reflection Scale (40.6 percent strong versus 59.4 percent weak), and lower participation in the Vision Scale (32.2 percent strong versus 67.8 weak). Participation in the New Life Scale was paltry (14.5 percent strong versus 85.5 percent weak). In practical terms, college students in the survey derived significant spiritual benefit and actively engaged in prayer, repentance, and worship, derived modest spiritual benefit and less actively engaged in examination of conscience, Bible reading, and meditation, and derived very little spiritual benefit and rarely engaged in evangelism, fellowship, and service. Thayer included an interesting note in the details. The low participation in the New Life Scale may lie in the testing methodology as research suggests several of the items are “outside the scope of an Evangelical understanding and practice of faith or spirituality” (203). This scale explored such items as political concerns, economic justice, and social justice on a worldwide basis, which may be a more effective instrument for liberation theology advocates than evangelical students (203). An important conclusion of the research is that spiritual formation requires different types of learning obtained by participation in various disciplines.

Greg L. Hawkins and Cally Parkinson researched fundamental and important issues such as Christian spiritual growth, church participation, and church satisfaction. They emphasize two measures as they relate to spiritual life. The first is the spiritual continuum, which is a measurement of relational closeness to Jesus. Four categories emerged into which all persons fit, from not quite committed to Christ to Christ-centered. The second measure is spiritual growth, which includes spiritual disciplines and attitudes. The goal of the research was to discover what a church could do to increase the spiritual

formation of its members. One finding of the study was that only a weak correlation existed between involvement in church-related activities and spiritual growth and that the role of the church in the spiritual growth of members decreased as persons progressed along the continuum. One-quarter of respondents claimed that they were either spiritually stalled or dissatisfied. Pertinent to this study is that the members who reported feeling stalled had low scores on their participation in prayer and Bible reading. One obvious conclusion from this study is that people need different levels of support from their churches depending on variables such as their personal spiritual maturity or their present life experience.

While this research set significant wheels in motion within evangelical Christianity, significant flaws existed in the research itself. One error is the causal relationship drawn between feeling spiritually close to Christ and spiritual growth. In fact, Hawkins and Parkinson claim that “spiritual growth is all about increasing relational closeness to Christ” (38). However, emotions are an unreliable measurement of spiritual health. In a critical analysis of the research and conclusions in *Reveal*, Bradley R. E. Wright argues that the situation may be more complex than the authors assume: While “church activities should increase spiritual growth ... the reverse might be equally true. Maybe spiritually immature, new Christians are those people most attracted to the many activities of the church” (110). Wright hypothesizes that as members mature, they become more selective in their church participation, choosing only those activities that fit their personality; thus, “[c]hurch activities increase spiritual maturity and spiritual maturity decreases church activities” (original emphasis; 110). Furthermore, Wright claimed that the members who said they were stalled or dissatisfied are not necessarily in

a bad situation. To use the terminology of J. S. Sandage, P. J. Jankowski, and D. C. Link, these members may be in the temporary station between dwelling and questing (17).

Sally K. Gallagher and Chelsea Newton engaged in congregational observations and focus group interviews within four congregations in the Pacific Northwest (Eastern Orthodox, conservative Protestant, mainline Protestant, and an emerging church). They assessed three dimensions of spirituality: (1) how congregants express concepts of spiritual growth, (2) what practices contribute to their sense of growth, and (3) how a common definition of spiritual growth and its means contribute to congregational community.

The Presbyterian congregation had trouble expressing concepts of spiritual growth and was very reluctant to define it in a way that would undercut another faith tradition. This ambiguity was reflected in the personalization of spiritual growth as an individual phenomenon. They agreed that it was a process involving an overall life purpose. When describing the process, they suggested that it took place through ordinary means. The group agreed that Bible reading was a good idea but admitted that it was not something any of them regularly did. Prayer and church attendance were also spiritual practices that could lead to spiritual growth. Because they defined the process of spiritual growth as highly individualistic, congregational community was difficult to establish (Gallagher and Newton 240).

The Baptist congregation was much clearer in articulating the beginnings of spiritual growth. They argued it begins with belief in the person and work of Jesus Christ and a public confession of that faith. They further agreed that growth did not rely on sincere effort or intent but on the work of God. They appealed to the Bible to define

spiritual growth and relied on it as the main source of spiritual growth. Participants were unambiguous on the need for conversion and the centrality of the Bible as the authoritative guide. They also agreed on the goal of spiritual growth—to become like Jesus. Their struggle came when attempting to describe the process by which a convert grows into the image of Christ. They did, however agree that Bible reading, prayer, fellowship, immersion in Christian media such as television and radio, small groups, and volunteering were means of spiritual growth. The Baptist church viewed congregational community as solidarity in the process of becoming like Christ (Gallagher and Newton 241).

The Orthodox congregation rooted their understanding of spiritual growth in church teaching and tradition, which provided a fairly cohesive narrative. The key idea behind their understanding of spiritual growth was the process of union with God or the restoration of the image of God. From their tradition they recalled numerous and wide-ranging practices that facilitate spiritual growth on a daily basis. These included services, fellowship meals, Eucharist, icons, incense, fasting, daily Bible reading, confession, and prayer. Because the well-trodden path of spiritual growth entails many communal elements, the congregation had a strong sense of familial connection (Gallagher and Newton 242).

The emerging congregation, like the Baptist church, was clear that spiritual growth begins with being born again. They described the process of spiritual growth in relational terms, beginning with self-understanding, relational authenticity with others, and ultimately the cultivation of a relationship with God. They also saw the goal of spiritual growth as becoming like Christ. The means of accomplishing this goal have less

to do with Sunday morning experiences and more to do with everyday relationships. Sharing failures and frailties and compassion for others, serving together, and discussing spiritual ideas in small groups were the means of spiritual growth. In addition, congregants shared the importance of meditation, Bible study, prayer, and finding God in the wider world of the arts, science, and nature. Because they root both the definition and means of spiritual growth in relationships, the emerging congregation had a strong sense of togetherness and community (Gallagher and Newton 243).

The research presents interesting results. First, all the congregations agreed that spiritual growth was a process moving from lesser to greater degrees (Gallagher and Newton 258). Second, a clearly articulated message about spiritual growth, what it is and how it is achieved, is associated with a stronger sense of congregational coherence (259). Third, becoming proficient in the language and narrative of the church can lead to stronger spiritual formation (259). The more persons know about and can articulate Christian spiritual formation, the better positioned they are for success.

James Wellman researched religious practices in six Protestant, liberal, activist churches on the West Coast that had sustained numerical growth in finances and attendance over the previous three years. The interesting connection to this study is the use of spiritual disciplines as one of the four qualities in these growing churches. The other three qualities are focused leadership, justice lived out in the community, and relevant congregational activities. Wellman collected research through congregational visits, conversations with the ministers, examination of church histories, and two focus groups from each of the six congregations containing past and present leaders. The research points toward deep interest in spiritual practices, especially as these align with

social justice. Congregants shared their use of Scripture, worship, prayer, social activism, and the importance of loving enemies as activities that fostered spiritual development. Interestingly, they voiced concern that an overly internal spirituality would distract from justice concerns. Oddly, while a clear definition of spiritual maturity was not voiced, it seemed to equate to issues of inclusivism, egalitarianism, and relativism. Given the nebulous nature of the words that inform their knowledge of spiritual growth, measurement along this spectrum is difficult at best. A key conclusion of the research is that “the content of the message is *not* the deciding factor in vital religious organizations but it is the ability of the leadership to hone the message and to communicate clearly and forcefully to his or her constituency” (original emphasis; 197). This research speaks to the importance of leadership strongly articulating the goals and means of spiritual formation and the coherence of those messages.

In reference to evangelical distinctiveness, J. J. M. Roberts shared an interesting perspective. He rhetorically asked if a practice cultivated in the cloister could sustain an active Protestant minister (44). His underlying assumption was that certain devotional practices may actually erode the theological identity of the practitioner. The criteria for selecting spiritual disciplines have to be more than whimsy or the ability of a discipline to draw a crowd at a competing denomination. These market-driven selections lack theological integrity and can even be characterized as incoherent.

Wesley D. Tracy argues that the ideal spiritual life, in the Wesleyan tradition, is Christlikeness in relationship with God, neighbor, and creation. This process combines strenuous effort with vigorous discipline, both performed in cooperation with grace. However, every stage of the process is God’s gracious activity. He suggests that while

measuring Christlikeness in others is a perilous task, it becomes easier when several indicators are examined. He then names a host of spiritual disciplines, including seven that are the focus of this research—stewardship is absent from his list.

Eight Practices of Jesus

Many lists of spiritual disciplines have been developed for the church through the years. However, few of these have been solely rooted in Jesus' example and teaching. The following eight spiritual disciplines are either exemplified in the life of Christ or specifically taught by him.

Bible Intake

Substantiating one spiritual discipline as being more central to spiritual formation than another is a difficult proposition, but two rise to the top of most lists—Bible intake and prayer. God's Word is a means of encountering God because God chose Scripture as his principal means of self-disclosure. The Bible affirms that God has spoken to humanity through its pages (Heb. 1:1). According to Willard, "study is the main discipline of engagement" (*Spirit* 176). Through Bible intake, persons hear, read, study, meditate on, memorize, and are formed by the truth of God's Word. According to the apostle Paul, the renewing of the mind transforms individuals (Rom. 12:2). As disciples engage in the spiritual discipline of Bible intake, "the text becomes a means of grace through which we encounter the God who has spoken us forth into being and who continues to speak to us to shape us in the image of Christ for others" (Mulholland 111). Unlike usual reading to attain mastery of the written material, when disciples read the Bible, it masters them.

Jesus' use of the Bible is telling. First, in the temptation narratives, Jesus countered each temptation with a quotation from the biblical book of Deuteronomy

(Matt. 4; Luke 4). Second, when confronting the false teaching of the Sadducees, Jesus quoted the Bible to establish the truth (Mark 12:24-27). He regularly employed the formula, “You have heard that it was said ... but I tell you,” to correct the prevailing teaching about practical godliness (e.g., Matt. 5:21, 27, 33, 38, 43). Third, Jesus claimed that he was the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. When Jesus entered his hometown synagogue in Nazareth, he read from the prophet Isaiah then told his audience that he was the fulfillment of that prophecy (Luke 4:16-21). Fourth, Jesus said that those who heard the Word of God and obeyed it were blessed (Luke 11:28). Finally, Jesus used the Bible when he faced his own death (Matt. 27:46, a quotation of Psalm 22:1).

Spiritual formation is, to use Paul’s language, training in righteousness, and God’s word is efficacious for this goal:

The holy Scriptures ... are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. (2 Tim. 3:15-17)

Elsewhere Paul writes, “Devote yourselves to the public reading of Scripture” (1 Tim. 4:13). Reading and hearing the word of God is a valuable practice. In Colossians 3:17 Paul writes, “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly.” It cannot dwell in persons unless they open themselves to it through hearing, reading, and meditation. Scripture clearly proves its importance as a means to spiritual formation in Christ.

Prayer

Prayer is simply communication with God that involves both listening and speaking. While it often facilitates and accompanies other spiritual disciplines, it is one in its own right. If persons truly reach out to God with their words and listen to his reply in

their hearts or heads, the conversation can leave an indelible mark on their day, guiding their choices, empowering their wills, motivating their service, and inspiring their love. Prayer is so important to spiritual formation that the Bible encourages engagement in prayer “without ceasing” (1 Thess. 5:17).

Many persons think of prayer as functional—an activity that activates God’s power for personal benefit (Mulholland 105). This definition is not entirely off base. However, prayer is more than bringing a list of needs and desires to the One who can answer all requests. Prayer is also an invitation to and the means of deepening a relationship. True prayer is the selfless act of laying everything at the throne of grace, trusting that God’s will is best, even though God’s will may not necessarily align with personal desire. Prayer becomes the means whereby God graciously calls persons to engage the world for his glory. As Mulholland writes, “[P]rayer lifts us out of the narrow, limited perspective of our individual needs and desires and provides us with the broader, deeper vision of vital relationship with and sacrificial response to God in the midst of our life and world” (108). Prayer is a dangerous activity for persons comfortable in a hedonistic, narcissistic world.

Prayer formed a vital part of Jesus’ ministry. Jesus exemplified a life of prayer. Although he was God in the flesh, Scripture shows that prayer was a regular part of his routine. He prayed in the morning: “Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed” (Mark 1:35). Jesus prayed in the evening: “Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God” (Luke 6:12). He prayed for God’s will (Luke 22:41-42), for his

disciples (John 17:9), and for future disciples, specifically for their unity (John 17:20-21). Prayer was also his last act before his death on the cross (Luke 23:46).

Finally, Jesus taught his followers how to pray and the importance of prayer. The obvious example is when the disciples approached Jesus and asked him to teach them to pray. The result of that request is the Lord's Prayer (Luke 11:1-4; Matt. 6:9-13).

According to Luke, a while later, "Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up" (Luke 18:1). Jesus expected his followers to pray. Four times in Matthew 6, Jesus instructed his disciples with words such as, "when you pray," and, "this is how you should pray" (Matt. 6:5, 6, 7, 9).

Fasting

Fasting is perhaps the most misunderstood spiritual discipline. Many Christians approach fasting as an exchange bargain with God to get what they want. Others view it as a sanctified bodily cleansing mechanism or weight-loss program. Fasting as a spiritual discipline is none of the above.

Jesus fasted for forty days prior to his temptation in the wilderness (Matt. 4:2). Shortly thereafter, Jesus gave what is likely his most memorable instruction on the topic as part of his Sermon on the Mount:

When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show men they are fasting. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to men that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. (Matt 6:16-18)

Several conclusions can be reached about fasting as a spiritual discipline by an examination of this text. First, Jesus opened the topic with the words, "when you fast," implying that the time would come when his followers would engage in this spiritual

activity. Second, Jesus cautioned against ostentatious fasting as hypocrites where their act of piety was nothing more than a show for the crowd. Jesus highlighted differing motivations behind fasting. Third, Jesus mentioned a reward from fasting. The pretentious fasting of the hypocrites garnered them the reward of the accolades of their peers. Conversely, Jesus said that fasting done correctly would receive the reward of the heavenly Father. Jesus did not elaborate on the nature of the reward or the timing of its reception, here or in eternity, but the context reveals a great deal. In the prayer Jesus taught his disciples, the three requests included daily bread, the forgiveness of debts, and deliverance from evil (6:11-13). Furthermore, immediately after this teaching on fasting, Jesus taught about the folly of storing up treasures on earth as opposed to eternity (Matt. 6:19-21), the impossibility of serving both God and mammon (v. 24), and the imperative of replacing worry about material needs with trust in God's providence (vv. 25-34). Thus, to add a prosperity message to the fasting/reward dynamic would be highly incongruent. The reward should be seen as a spiritual gift from the Father. Fourth, Jesus advocated a secret fast, going as far as masking the evidence of the fast to onlookers.

Jesus further noted that the time for fasting was approaching. The Pharisees questioned Jesus and his disciples for their lack of fasting, a spiritual practice that was both important to them and obvious to all observers when they did. Jesus answered that the time for his disciples to fast would be after he, the bridegroom, was gone (Matt. 9:15). That time for followers of Christ is now (Foster, *Celebration* 47).

Fasting as a spiritual discipline is the voluntary abstention from food or drink for a limited period for spiritual reasons. The only fast that qualifies as a spiritual discipline is the one focused on God. Wesley writes that fasting must be directed to God:

First, let it be done unto the Lord, with our eye singly fixed on Him. Let our intention herein be this, and this alone, to glorify our Father which is in heaven; to express our sorrow and shame for our manifold transgressions of his holy law; to wait for an increase of purifying grace, drawing our affections to things above; to add seriousness and earnestness to our prayers; to avert the wrath of God, and to obtain all the great and precious promises which he hath made to us in Jesus Christ. (“Sermon on the Mount” 27)

As such, fasting contains elements of worship and devotion as well as surrender and petition. Foster claims that fasting helps believers balance their lives in that nonessentials are shown for what they are (*Celebration* 48-49). Through giving up things that are important for life, persons begin to see the tenacious hold such things actually had on them.

Whitney examined fasting as a spiritual discipline and discovered ten purposes revealed in Scripture:

to strengthen prayer, to seek God’s guidance, to express grief, to seek deliverance or protection, to express repentance and the return to God, to humble oneself before God, to express concern for the work of God, to minister to the needs of others, to overcome temptation and dedicate yourself to God, and to express love and worship to God. (*Spiritual Disciplines* 164-77)

Most authors agree that fasting can include abstaining from more than just food or liquids. Calhoun artfully calls fasting “an opportunity to lay down an appetite—an appetite for food, for media, for shopping” (220). In this way, the spiritual discipline of fasting dovetails with the practice of self-denial.

Solitude

The spiritual discipline of solitude is inseparable from silence in that if persons retreat into physical isolation but maintain a media connection with the outside world, they have simply changed the location and means of their communal living. Solitude,

then, involves temporary purposeful retreat from company, both physical and electronic, for the purpose of spiritual growth. The time of intentional privacy can be brief or extended. It is an opportunity to reorient life toward God or toward God-given goals (Foster, *Celebration* 94). It involves liberation from the patterns and habits of a world geared against God (Willard, *Spirit* 160). The accompanying silence shocks many modern Americans because the lack of noise gives the impression that nothing is accomplished. The combination of silence and solitude is an artificial death, cutting persons off from the world they know and leaving them alone with their thoughts and God (163). Paradoxically, time alone in God's presence restores life. Being alone with God is an unmasking experience where false selves are laid aside, true selves emerge, and God is able to transform and make new (Calhoun 113). Thus, solitude is more than simply being alone with God. It is being real, transparent, and accountable to self and God (Mulholland 138).

Jesus experienced regular occasions of solitude. At the beginning of his ministry, he withdrew to a desert (Matt. 4:1). After hearing of his cousin John's beheading, Jesus withdrew to a solitary place (Matt. 14:13). The crowds heard where he was and followed. After Jesus took time to minister to them, he dismissed the disciples and the crowd and went up a mountain alone to pray (Matt. 14:23). On yet another occasion, Jesus withdrew to a solitary place and the crowd went looking for him (Luke 4:42). Clearly, Jesus valued his time alone even though he was a man full of compassion and power sufficient to minister to the crowds. The spiritual discipline of solitude and its companion, silence, is a rich and promising opportunity to be located alone in the arms of love and to hush the noise of the world to hear the loving, shaping words of the heavenly Father.

Worship

The spiritual discipline of worship flows out of the other spiritual disciplines. As persons engage in solitude, as they commune with God through prayer, as they forgo appetites for the things of this world, they connect with God and worship. Moreover, the more persons learn about God through his self-revelation in Scripture, the more reasons they have to worship. Finally, and as they carry on Christ's work of spreading the good news to the world through service and monetarily participate in God's generous blessing of others, their obedience is an act of worship.

Worship is not a monolithic activity. It involves words and music, lifestyle and obedience, gifts and service, ritual and spontaneity, head and heart, and is both public and private. Persons are formed and informed through the spiritual discipline of worship. As Foster says, "[W]orship is to experience reality, to touch Life" (*Celebration* 138). Worship is an inward recognition of the worthiness of God and an outpouring of the self in holistic response. Worship is a result of and inspired by the Holy Spirit residing within the human heart.

In reference to worship, Jesus quoted Deuteronomy 6:13: "Worship the Lord your God and serve him only." However, Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman provides a better foundation for his teaching on worship:

Jesus declared, "Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth." (John 4:21-24)

Simply put, Jesus shared that persons would worship but not in their special location or on their terms. The worship of God transcends physical location. The Samaritan woman wanted to argue about the proper location for worship, but Jesus reoriented the conversation away from the proper location to the proper manner of worship. Since God is the One who is worshipped, God has the right to determine the nature of that worship. Worship will be in spirit and truth, that is, reflecting the character and nature of God. Spiritual worship is not about externals but the inward condition of the human spirit recognizing and ascribing worth to God as Spirit. Worship done in truth corresponds to the ultimate reality found in the person of God.

Service

The spiritual discipline of service is using time, talent, and treasure on behalf of others in the name of Christ. It begins with love—loving neighbor as much as self. Without love, persons will never view their neighbors' needs equal to their own. They may engage in philanthropy or good deeds, but their actions will not rise to the level of a spiritual discipline that God uses to shape them in Christ's image (Calhoun 145; Willard, *Spirit* 182). Engaging in the spiritual discipline of service while enjoying the luxuries that come with a life of privilege and status is an enormous challenge (Willard 183). However, this discipline is essential for such blessed persons. For Whitney, the spiritual discipline of service is a key means of overcoming two of the deadliest sins—sloth and pride (117). Because motives matter, Whitney highlights six biblical motives for serving: obedience, gratitude, gladness, forgiveness, humility, and love (*Spiritual Disciplines* 118-23).

Jesus was the greatest servant the world has ever known. On one of the occasions where Jesus' disciples were jostling for position and recognition, Jesus taught them a lesson about service. He said, "[W]hoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave" (Matt. 20:26-27). If they wanted to outdo each other, they should begin by humbling themselves into servitude. Jesus continued the lesson by appealing to his own example, saying, "[T]he Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (v. 28). On a different occasion, Jesus said, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work" (John 4:34). Service to God was so meaningful to Jesus that it was like food—nourishing, satisfying, and strengthening (Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines* 126).

On another occasion, Jesus embodied servanthood. The apostle John frames the narrative, situating this event just prior to the Passover celebration that would constitute Jesus' last meal before his crucifixion. Jesus removed his outer clothes, wrapped a towel around his waist, and washed his disciples' feet. After he negated Peter's objection, Jesus said, "I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you" (John 13:15). Jesus came to serve and in serving established a model he expected his disciples to follow.

In the story of the sheep and the goats, Jesus highlighted the dire importance of service (Matt. 25:31-46). At the time of judgment, the Son of Man will separate people as a shepherd separates sheep and goats. The difference between these two groups is how they lived in relation to others. The blessed sheep are those who saw a need such as hunger, thirst, loneliness, nakedness, illness, or imprisonment and ministered to that need. Jesus said that when they served the needs of the least of his siblings, he counted their

service as being done for Jesus himself. The goats are, of course, the exact opposite in that they saw the need and refused to get involved. The imperative of the parable is to live with eyes, hearts, calendars, and wallets wide open to the needs of humanity in the name of Christ.

Stewardship

Stewardship is a topic about which Jesus spoke a great deal. The Bible highlights the relationship between faith in God and trust in the things of this world such as time and money. The spiritual and material lives of believers are inseparable, and Jesus taught his followers to emphasize that which will endure. Much of his teaching is about avoiding the trap of material things and, conversely, using the things of this world for an eternal impact.

The spiritual discipline of stewardship is the recognition of God's ownership of all life's resources and his entrusting those resources to humankind for responsible use, employing kingdom values. By using resources in this way, disciples are open to the transforming power of God in their lives. In today's affluent, materialistic society, stewardship as a spiritual discipline is an important and sometimes obvious way of marking oneself as a follower of Christ. In a self-absorbed world, the sacrificial use of resources is an enormous witness to spiritual formation in Christ.

The psalmist writes, "The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it" (Ps. 24:1). Things persons consider their private property actually belong to God. Moreover, life itself is a gift from God. The Christian life on one level is, therefore, the unfolding process of stewardship of time, talent, and treasure.

While confronting the hypocrisy of the Pharisees, Jesus made an important point about stewardship:

Woe to you Pharisees, because you give God a tenth of your mint, rue and all other kinds of garden herbs, but you neglect justice and the love of God. You should have practiced the latter without leaving the former undone. (Luke 11:42)

The Pharisees were attempting to prove their righteousness by their faithfulness to the Law. They even divided the smallest of their crops and garden herbs, careful to give a tenth to God. Meanwhile they failed the more important elements of a godly life. Jesus told them that they should have loved God and acted justly toward their neighbors while not neglecting the practice of tithing.

Stewardship is a subset of worship and obedience. Jesus said, “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Matt. 6:21). He went on to argue the impossibility of serving both God and worldly things (Matt. 6:24). Stewardship assists believers to follow the biblical mandate to act with justice and compassionate love toward others while remaining humble before God (Mic. 6:8). Stewardship of earthly treasures opens the door to true blessings. Jesus said that if persons fail to handle worldly wealth wisely, they would not be entrusted with true riches (Luke 16:11). The Bible also teaches that giving will result in a return on the gift and employs metaphors of investing and farming to illustrate this truth (Luke 6:38; 2 Cor. 9:6-8; Mal. 3:10-11).

Fellowship

Jesus retreated into solitude. He also spent considerable time in the company of others. The spiritual discipline of fellowship is the recognition that the Christian life is not lived in isolation but community. Humankind was created for relationships by the God who is three coequal persons in one being.

John claimed that one of the reasons he preached the gospel was for fellowship: “We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ” (1 John 1:3). The good news of the Bible is that, subsequent to human sin and the spoiling of the relationship with God, God reached out to restore this fellowship through Jesus Christ.

Jesus called his disciples into fellowship with himself and one another. He said that when persons gather in his name, he would be with them (Matt. 18:20). His prayer for his disciples before enduring the cross was for unity, both with God and with one another (John 17:20-23).

The early Church was devoted to fellowship (Acts 2:42). They gathered for worship (1 Cor. 14:26), edification (1 Cor. 14:26), instruction (Acts 5:42), and the Lord’s Supper (1 Cor. 11:18-34). Willard argues, “[F]ellowship is required to allow realization of a joyous and sustained level of life in Christ that is normally impossible to attain by all our individual effort” (*Spirit* 187). The regular gathering together of the saints was so important that the writer of the book of Hebrews encouraged the believers not to give it up (Heb. 10:25).

Research Design

This research explored the correlation between spiritual formation and the practice of eight spiritual disciplines exemplified in Christ’s life. Specifically, one spiritual discipline was examined each day, then practiced throughout that day. This process unfolded through the twenty-eight-day regimen. The research included the collection of quantitative data through pre- and post-intervention administrations of the spiritual vitality survey to determine changes in the knowledge and practice of spiritual

disciplines. After the second administration of the SVS, participants took part in focus groups. The focus groups yielded qualitative data that helped explain the results of the two surveys. As John W. Creswell argues, this research design does not involve collecting two distinct data streams but “consists of merging, integrating, linking, or embedding” the quantitative and qualitative data (552). This design was an appropriate choice for the project at hand because the numeric data needed the interpretation provided by the textual data.

This study used an explanatory, mixed-methods design, with data collected in two phases. The two administrations of the SVS yielded quantitative data that was analyzed to show trends and frequency. The qualitative data from the focus groups lent perspective on the statistical data and helped uncover and refine the fuller picture. The best way to use the data, according to Ellen Taylor-Powell and Marcus Renner, is to categorize the qualitative data through themes and key words. This categorization forms the crux of qualitative analysis (2). This research design helps capture the best of both types of data (Creswell 560).

The types of data collected were numeric scores from the SVS and text transcribed from the focus groups. Both types of data, quantitative and qualitative, had equal weight in this research. The two methods of data collection were sequential, with the quantitative from the first administration of the SVS establishing a baseline while the second administration showed changes. The qualitative data explored the reasons for the variance (Creed et al. 5). These two collection methods provide different ways of conceptualizing both the changes and the corresponding rationale (6).

Charlotte Creed et al. write about the nature of educational research. They argue that such evaluation “concerns itself with making judgments about how curricula meet identified outcomes and contributes to desirable graduate attributes as well as assessing the value and effectiveness of teaching and learning approaches” (33). This evaluation is precisely what the project at hand is attempting to do in uncovering the relationship between a regimen of spiritual disciplines (curriculum) and spiritual formation (desirable attributes). They note that in the past such research heavily relied on quantitative data (33). However, the contemporary acceptance of qualitative approaches has led to the rise of mixed-methods, which “ought to go some way towards obviating the often problematic methods ‘dualism’ which hitherto limited our design choice in evaluation to either one method (qualitative) or the other (quantitative)” (34). The nature of this research guided and substantiated the selection of the mixed-methods design.

Summary

The theological and literature review shows the need and the basis for this study. Being formed in the image of Christ is a key component of discipleship. Formation is the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of those who create space and surrender to this process. Formation begins with a relationship with God, deepens through knowledge of God, and necessitates practicing what is known. All of this formation is lived out in God’s presence.

The goal of spiritual formation is conformity to the image of Christ. Spiritual formation is the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of a believer. However, means are available to believers to create space for God’s transforming grace to work in their lives. These means are the spiritual disciplines. While many practices are available, at least

eight are exemplified in the life and teaching of Jesus. The literature review shows a correlation between the spiritual disciplines and a deepening relationship with God. Believers who participate in these disciplines open themselves to the work of God in their lives.

The reviewed literature shows the importance of volition in personal spiritual formation. While the relationship between the spiritual disciplines and spiritual formation is not directly causal, engagement in these disciplines is the means whereby persons surrender to the work of the Holy Spirit in their lives. The more believers understand and practice the example of Jesus, the more room the Holy Spirit has to transform them by God's grace. The findings support the connection between spiritual practices and a deepening relationship with God.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Problem and Purpose

Vast numbers of persons attend church services regularly but fail to engage faithfully in a process of spiritual transformation. This problem leaves Christians very unlike Christ. Even more, countless Christians are unaware of the biblical mandate for spiritual transformation or the means available to accomplish this end. With little knowledge about spiritual disciplines and ignorant of Christ's call for his followers to be transformed, the church has floundered. When Christians cease to be imitators of Christ, they taint their influence in the world and derail their God-given mission.

The purpose of the research was to evaluate the knowledge and practice of Christian spiritual disciplines of select members of Byron UMC resulting from a twenty-eight-day experience of connecting spiritual disciplines with daily life. Put simply, persons learned about the spiritual disciplines of Jesus and practiced those disciplines in the hope of submitting to the transforming work of the Holy Spirit. The project breaks down into two parts—increasing in knowledge and appreciation of the practices of Jesus and daily performing those practices. The latter, while not directly causal, placed participants in the position where spiritual transformation was more likely to occur. The result is Christians being conformed to the image of Christ through God's gracious activity.

Research Questions

To accomplish the purpose and goals of this project, three research questions guided the entire endeavor. The first research question focused on the knowledge and

practice of church members regarding spiritual disciplines prior to the intervention. This step established a baseline. The second research question noted the changes in church members' knowledge and practice because of the intervention. The third research question sought to discover exactly what elements of the intervention led to the changes.

Research Question #1

How did participants in the twenty-eight-day regimen implemented at Byron UMC understand and practice spiritual disciplines before the intervention?

All participants came to the intervention with preconceived ideas and assumptions about spiritual disciplines. Participants had also practiced such disciplines as worship and prayer with varying faithfulness and efficacy. Other disciplines from the intervention were foreign or at least personally untested. Assumedly, the overall idea of spiritual transformation as a goal of every believer was weak at best.

The spiritual vitality survey was the instrument used to uncover the pre-implementation knowledge and practice of the spiritual disciplines. Two presuppositions undergirded this approach. First, not every believer has an adequate knowledge of spiritual formation or the spiritual disciplines. Second, not all believers behave according to what they believe.

The SVS contains nine components. Each component contains four questions. The first component established a general baseline of spiritual fitness. Specifically, questions one through four invited participants to reflect on the vitality of their current relationship with God, the nature of and progression in that relationship, and evidence of the same.

The eight remaining components of the SVS contained questions specific to the spiritual practices that were the foci of this study. The first question under each component (5, 9, 13, 17, 21, 25, 29, 33) asked the participants to rate their frequency of engagement in that particular spiritual discipline. The remainder of the questions sought to clarify participants' knowledge of the spiritual disciplines. The first administration of the SVS provided a baseline against which the results of the second administration were read.

In addition to the baseline provided by the spiritual vitality survey, the structured focus groups also helped establish the pre-implementation knowledge and practice of spiritual disciplines. Question one, "Before this study, how would you have described the connection between spiritual formation and spiritual disciplines" was intended to help participants reflect on how they understood and practiced the spiritual disciplines before they began the twenty-eight-day regimen. The qualitative data from the focus groups clarified the changes in the two administrations of the SVS.

Research Question #2

How did participants in the twenty-eight-day regimen implemented at Byron UMC understand and practice spiritual disciplines after the intervention?

The clear assumption in this project was that the knowledge and practice of the spiritual disciplines would change as a result of the intervention. Through focused reading and daily practice, the question is less about if change would occur and more about what levels of change are evident. The posttest administration of the spiritual vitality survey secured this data.

The first component measured the participants' self-assessed general spiritual fitness. The eight other components measured the participants' knowledge and practice of the spiritual disciplines specific to this study. The first question under each of these eight spiritual disciplines measured the frequency of participation in the spiritual disciplines. The three remaining questions in each section pertained to their knowledge of the disciplines and the connection between practicing the disciplines and allowing God to form them in the image of Christ. The Likert scale employed by the SVS is an accurate predictor of change from one administration of the SVS to the other.

Additionally, the focus groups highlighted the changes that took place. Question two asked participants to rate their "current knowledge and practice of the spiritual disciplines." Question three asked them to rate their "current knowledge of spiritual formation." The qualitative data yielded by these two questions helped answer the concerns of the second research question.

Research Question #3

What specific elements of the intervention led to the changes in the way participants understood and practiced spiritual disciplines?

The hypothesis of the study was that daily readings about and practice of spiritual disciplines would create space for God to transform participants into the image of Christ. After the pre- and post-intervention administration of the SVS, the raw data collected showed both a baseline and the self-acknowledged changes that resulted from the twenty-eight-day regimen. However, this data did not highlight what specific elements of the intervention led to specific changes. The structured focus group uncovered the answers to the third research question.

Population and Participants

The population for this research was the membership and constituents of Byron United Methodist Church. I advertised the project one Sunday morning after highlighting it with members of the Administrative Council. The Upper Room Sunday school class and a Bible study group I led were also familiar with the project. I asked for volunteers and had a total of thirty-four participants for this project. Participants were encouraged to complete the two administrations of the SVS, go through all twenty-eight days of the regimen, and participate in a focus group.

Design of the Study

The basic design of the study was quite simple. Participants engaged in a pretest administration of the spiritual vitality survey between 26 September and 30 September 2012. The online survey was hosted by Survey Monkey. The last four digits of each participant's social security number was used to identify individual surveys. On Sunday, 30 September, participants received printed workbooks. They began the spiritual regiment on Monday, 1 October and finished twenty-eight days later on 28 October. Participants took the posttest administration of the SVS over the next three days online at their leisure. The collection of data was completed when the last structured focus group met on Sunday, 4 November.

This explanatory, mixed-methods design was perfectly suited to the goal of this project. The pre- and posttest administrations of the spiritual vitality survey supplied quantitative data. The structured focus groups supplied qualitative data. Changes were evident by the first two sets of data. The third set of data helped explain the reasons for the changes.

Several careful controls enhanced the reliability of this research. First, the covenant participants signed prior to their acceptance ensured a lower percentage of dropouts. Second, the use of Survey Monkey contributed to the reliability of the study through the uniformity and accuracy of scoring. Third, the focus groups gave each participant an opportunity to draw personal conclusions about the connection between the workbook and changes on his or her two spiritual vitality surveys.

Instrumentation

The collection of data was necessary to explore the correlation between spiritual formation and the spiritual disciplines. The instruments collected three types of data. The spiritual vitality survey collected quantitative data. The structured focus groups collected qualitative data. The demographic instrument collected personal data. Additionally, a workbook was used for a twenty-eight-day period to guide participants' knowledge and practice of eight spiritual disciplines.

Demographic instrument. The demographic, researcher-designed instrument gathered background information pertinent to the scope and purpose of this study. It contained ten questions based on both nominal and interval scales. The answers reflected such information as the age, gender, educational level, and church participation of the respondents. This instrument disaggregated the data and allowed for trends and other important information to be uncovered from the research results of the whole population. For example, this instrument highlighted the different levels of changes between male and female participants.

This instrument was set up online through Survey Monkey. Respondents entered their demographic information as the first part of the spiritual vitality survey. The last

four numbers of their social security number was the means of connecting the first and second administrations of the SVS to the individual taking the questionnaire.

Spiritual vitality survey instrument. As this work progressed, the search for a measurement tool that was easy to understand, tailored to the eight spiritual disciplines highlighted in this research, and valid for gathering, analyzing, and interpreting self-assessed answers came up lacking. The spiritual vitality survey was thus a researcher-designed instrument tailored to the needs of this project.

It begins with an introductory paragraph explaining its intent, the fact that it will be administered twice, a word about the anonymity of the data, and instructions on how to take it so that it generates the best results. It contains nine components. The first component measures general spiritual health. The other eight components measure respondents' knowledge of and participation in the eight spiritual disciplines. These are Bible intake, prayer, fasting/self-denial, solitude, worship, service, stewardship, and fellowship. The SVS was the second part of the questionnaire set up on Survey Monkey.

The SVS uses a five-point Likert frequency scale. The scale offers a choice between strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, and strongly agree. The neutral category allows respondents an opportunity to opt out of a particular question. However, for questions five and nine, the five-point scale switches to an interval scale, attempting to discover how often each week respondents read the Bible and pray. Similarly, question twenty-nine switches to a five-point interval scale, attempting to discover the percentage of income respondents give to the work of God. The assumption behind the creation of this instrument was a correlation between self-assessed increases in the knowledge and practice of spiritual disciplines and realized or unrealized changes in spiritual formation.

Structured focus group. The structured focus group was researcher-designed. Participants could use the material from their journaling throughout the twenty-eight-day regimen to facilitate this conversation. Four focus groups met between 1 November and 4 November. Participants had the option of selecting a time that worked best for their schedule. The instrument consisted of five questions. The first question correlated to the first research question. The second and third questions correlated to the second research question. The fourth question correlated to the third research question. The final question attempted to discern the lasting effects of spiritual disciplines and the likelihood of participants continuing a similar process.

A digital voice recorder captured the dialogue of the structured focus groups and verbatim transcriptions made of each session. Microsoft Word's search function identified and counted key words. This tool provided narrative qualitative data that helped clarify and interpret the quantitative data from the SVS.

Expert Review

Experts reviewed each of the instruments. Introductory letters attached to the instruments reoriented the experts to the problem, the purpose, and the research questions. I included instructions concerning what I needed from the reviewers and provided a form for their responses.

I did not select expert reviewers at random. The first was my longtime mentor and a district superintendent in the South Georgia Conference of the United Methodist Church. The second expert reviewer was my dissertation mentor. The final group of expert reviewers were the members of my dissertation reflection team. This last group is a self-selecting sample from Byron United Methodist Church that responded to an e-mail

and a personal appeal to assist me in the design and implementation of this project. They are from the same demographic as those who would later participate in the study and therefore provided excellent analysis, giving the instruments a measure of authenticity.

The expert reviewers specifically examined the demographic instrument, the spiritual vitality survey, the structured focus group introductory remarks and questions, and the workbook. Included in their packet was a chart wherein the reviewers could assess and comment on each item. The chart was divided into the categories needed/not needed, clear/unclear, additional question needed, and suggestion to clarify. Moreover, I asked each reviewer to check the clarity of the introductory paragraphs and to ensure that the questions asked correlated with the problem, purpose, and research questions.

The first two reviewers returned the information via e-mail. The research reflection team took the time to walk through each item, giving their rationale for points under consideration and suggested solutions. Based on the collected feedback, I implemented numerous changes. These ranged from simple improvements to the wording to produce greater clarity to the scrapping of questions entirely.

The demographic instrument changed based on reviewer input. The age categories were expanded from “20s to 30s” to “up to 39” to include those who were under age twenty and from “60s to 70s” to “60 plus” to include those over age 79. Likewise, I changed the first category of duration of time spent at Byron UMC from “18 months or less” to “12 months or less” with a corresponding change made in the second category. The reviewers thought twelve months or less was a better category for differentiating newer attendees from those with a longer relationship with the church. In the question about the frequency of Sunday school, weekly Bible study, and accountability or prayer

group participation, the consensus was that these categories needed to be separated into distinct classes, leading to a threefold division of the question (a. Sunday school, b. Weekly Bible study, c. Accountability/Prayer group).

In the spiritual vitality survey, the reviewers challenged the generic word *regularly* as it related to Bible intake and prayer. They likewise challenged the word *generous* as it related to financial stewardship. These concerns led to a change in the five-point Likert scale for these three questions. It was replaced with a five-point interval scale showing frequency for Bible intake and prayer and percentage for financial stewardship. Another helpful clarification was the removal of specific references to Byron UMC in the SVS, particularly in the questions related to service. Several of the reviewers noted that the intent of the questions was not to discern how much service was rendered to God through Byron UMC but how faithfully respondents served God, which could be done independently of the local church in question.

The expert review of the structured focus group instrument helped clarify the five questions. The reviewers argued that the inclusion of examples in question four would prejudice the answers. Furthermore, the fifth question was reworded to focus on what disciplines participants would practice in the future.

Variables

This study contained one independent variable, the twenty-eight-day practice of the disciplines. Participants engaged in the process of reading about an individual spiritual discipline, practicing that discipline throughout the day, and optionally recording their thoughts, questions, and progress in a journal. This study had one principal

dependent variable consisting of the change itself, as measured by the summary of the data depicting the change between the pre- and post-regimen SVS.

Question number one from the structured focus group, which dealt with the participants' knowledge of the connection between spiritual disciplines and spiritual formation before the twenty-eight-day regimen could have been tainted. Persons could easily forget what they knew or did not know before an intentional effort such as the implementation would provide. Participants may also have experienced social desirability effects to provide a good showing—that the regimen did for them what it intended to do. While failing the SVS was not possible, a feeling that no growth equates to failure may have driven some participants to record higher scores.

The demographic instrument anticipated certain intervening variables. These factors include the age of participants, the duration and frequency of their church experience, their educational level, and the denomination that led to their earlier spiritual formation. These variables were controlled by the purposive sampling from as wide a range as possible given the population.

Reliability and Validity

According to Nahid Golafshani, the issues of reliability and validity in quantitative research deal with replicability and the accuracy of measuring what is intended (599). However, reliability and validity in qualitative research mean something quite different. For qualitative research, reliability and validity deal more with precision, credibility, and transferability (600). Since this project is a mixed-methods, explanatory design, the two quantitative goals of replicability and the accurate measurement of what

needs to be measured and the three qualitative goals of precision, credibility, and transferability are in place.

Reliability. The expert reviewers carefully analyzed each instrument used in this design for content, clarity, and alignment with the purpose and research questions. One reviewer was a personal mentor and district superintendent in the United Methodist Church. One expert reviewer was my dissertation mentor, assigned by the seminary. The final expert reviewers were members of my dissertation reflection team who came from the same demographic as those who would later participate in the surveys, workbooks, and focus groups. Their careful reading and thoughtful changes enhanced the reliability of each instrument.

Validity. Validity concerns the causal relationship between the independent variable and the measured changes between the two administrations of the spiritual vitality survey. The five-point Likert scale is a proven method of measuring changes in spiritual knowledge and practice. This scale answers the quantitative concern with validity. The factors that could potentially undermine the qualitative validity of this study, particularly the transferability, are a different matter. However, given the purposive sample's reflection of the population, the diversity of age and educational background, the different levels of commitment to and experience of the church, these concerns were mitigated. The research of this study is valid within its population, but that validity may not extend too far beyond the proximal similarity of Byron UMC (Trochim).

The validity is also supported by the alignment of the instruments to the purpose. Moreover, the research questions are directly tied to the workbook and easily measured by the SVS. This careful alignment between the instruments and the purpose is a control

that positively affects the validity of the research. Finally, the lack of dropouts on the part of the participants adds to the validity of the conclusions.

Data Collection

Once the participants were selected, I created a distribution list and e-mailed a timeline and instructions about the process to each participant. The data collection began with the first administration of the spiritual vitality survey between 26 September and 30 September. This survey was done online through Survey Monkey. Each respondent entered the last four numbers of their social security numbers, which were used as identification for the first and second administrations of the SVS. The first eleven questions on the survey constituted the demographic instrument. The last response requested from participants was an agreement to release the information contained in the survey for the purposes of this research. Once all the respondents completed the pretest survey, I closed the sign-in option through Survey Monkey. I exported the aggregate data to Excel and saved PDFs of all completed questionnaires.

On Sunday, 30 September, I distributed bound workbooks to all participants. As they received their workbooks, participants signed a covenant agreement that they would continue the process through to completion. The first pages of the workbooks thanked the participants for their time and gave instructions on how to complete each lesson. I informed each participant that they would begin the work the next day, Monday, 1 October and continue daily for twenty-eight days. I also explained the journaling option built into each daily lesson and shared that comments would be private and could, at their discretion, be shared in the focus groups. The last day of the workbook was 28 October 2012.

The second administration of the spiritual vitality survey occurred between 29 October and 31 October. I e-mailed the group to remind them that the second survey was online and due and thanked them for their faithfulness to this process. Once the surveys were completed, I exported the aggregate data to Excel, saved PDFs of all posttest surveys, and closed access to the survey.

When the participants completed the second administration of the survey, I e-mailed the group and thanked them for their work. I included in the e-mail four time slots for the structured focus groups that would take place between 1 November and 4 November 2012. The participants signed up for the times that worked best for them. I also reminded participants that they had the option of bringing their workbooks and using the journals to help them in their responses. I informed them of the five questions in the focus group and assured them that each session would be no more than one hour and fifteen minutes. In the e-mail, I also included the five focus group questions. My goal was to empower respondents and remove any mystery surrounding the process. I asked them not to discuss their answers with anyone until their appointed time arrived.

The focus groups took place in the conference room of the church. I had a voice recorder in the middle of the table. Adjacent to the conference room is a waiting room where participants who arrived early for their time could gather. After an introduction of the focus group process, I used a flip chart to remind participants of the five questions. I used a timer and limited responses to twelve minutes for the first three questions and fifteen minutes for the last two. Before I closed the time in prayer, I allotted five minutes for additional remarks.

Data Analysis

I collected the data as described to answer the four research questions. The main data came from two administrations of the SVS, including the demographic instrument. The focus groups also provided data.

Spiritual Vitality Survey

Using the last four digits of the social security numbers, participants helped me match the pre- and post-intervention administrations of the SVS of each respondent. I transferred the scores of these two tests to a scoring sheet. I color-coded the changes for easy visual reference with red for decreases in scores and blue for increases. I calculated each participant's mean score in all nine categories.

I created a chart to analyze the aggregate data. The chart contained nine categories, representing general spiritual fitness and the eight spiritual disciplines. It plotted strong and weak knowledge of and participation in these categories for the group of participants. This visual aid helped me reference the aggregate data to draw conclusions concerning what effects the regimen had on the group.

I created a second chart to analyze the disaggregated data according to the categories of the demographic instrument. This chart plotted strong and weak knowledge of and participation in each category as examined through the lens of the demographic data. This data showed interesting correlations such as the age and gender that changed the most and the least between administrations of the SVS, how length of time associated with the church affected growth, and other similar findings.

Structured Focus Groups

I took the recorded data from the two focus groups and typed verbatim manuscripts. I used Microsoft Word's search feature to color-code responses according to keywords and themes. This process enabled me to quantify the qualitative data by assigning numerical values to each theme.

Ethical Procedures

This study arose from an interest in spiritual formation in the local church. To ensure that the goals of this study were met while simultaneously protecting the well-being of participants, I implemented certain procedures. These procedures related to data collection, analysis, and security.

Informed Consent

The privacy and protection of those who volunteered for this study was paramount. The measures taken to this end began with an informed consent document (see Appendix D). Every participant signed this document as part of the sampling process. In addition, prior to the submission of each administration of the SVS, the following message was posted onscreen: "By completing this survey, you are giving informed consent to the researcher to use this data. This information will be kept confidential."

Confidentiality

Participants were repeatedly told that their identities would be kept confidential throughout this process. While the wording differed in each of the instruments, all of them included a note about the confidentiality of this process and the anonymity of any published responses. To ensure that these promises were not empty words, I was the only

person to see the demographic instrument and the results of the two administrations of the SVS for each participant. The aggregate data was made public but could in no way be associated with individual participants. Furthermore, the data was shredded six months after the successful defense of the dissertation.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

Problem and Purpose

Some church attendees nominally participate in the life of a local congregation with little discernible change in their knowledge or practice of the Christian faith. Other attendees in the same ministerial context give evidence of discernible spiritual growth. This observation gave rise to two assumptions. First, church attendees are often deficient in their understanding of the practices that can lead persons into deeper spiritual formation. Second, congruent with the lack of understanding is a lack of practice of these disciplines that place persons before God for the work of spiritual formation. The purpose of the research was to evaluate the knowledge and practice of Christian spiritual disciplines of select members of Byron United Methodist Church, in Byron, Georgia, resulting from a twenty-eight-day experience of connecting spiritual disciplines with daily life.

Participants

The population for this research was the membership of Byron UMC. The average attendance is 281. Through various advertisements and announcements at Byron UMC, thirteen men and twenty-one women volunteered to participate in this study (see Table 4.1). These thirty-four persons agreed to take the SVS twice (see Appendixes E and F), faithfully engage in the daily readings from the workbook, and attend a focus group.

Table 4.1. Self-Selecting Sample

Participant	n	%	Gender	Age Range
1-3	3	9	M	20s-30s
4-7	4	12	M	40s-50s
8-13	6	18	M	60s-70s
14-15	2	6	F	20s-30s
16-27	12	35	F	40s-50s
28-34	7	20	F	60s-70s

All the participants graduated from high school or the equivalent. However, 88 percent had some post-high school education. Fully 50 percent finished college degrees (see Table 4.2).

Table 4.2. Education (N=34)

Education Completed	n	%
High school/GED	4	11.8
Some college/tech school	8	23.5
College graduate	17	50.0
Post-graduate studies	5	14.7

The demographic instrument showed that three denominations had the strongest influence in participants early spiritual formation. Of the denominations represented, 38 percent of participants were raised Methodist, 29 percent were raised Baptist, and 15 percent were raised Roman Catholic. Four other denominations were represented (see Figure 4.1).

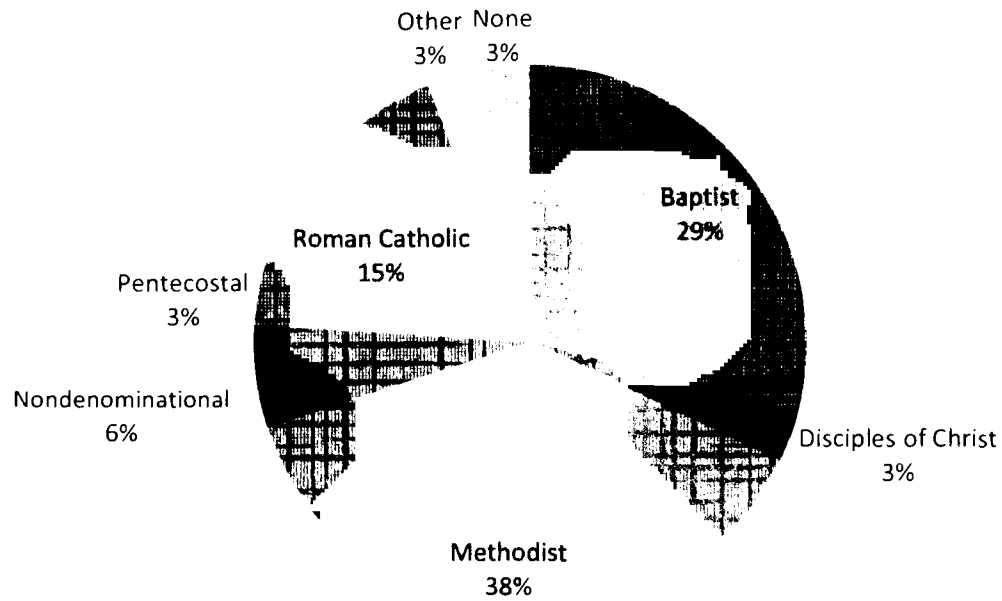


Figure 4.1. Formative denomination.

The demographic instrument identified attendance habits at Byron UMC. Participants listed the frequency of their Sunday morning worship attendance during the previous twelve months. They also noted the frequency of their attendance at Sunday school, weekly Bible studies, or accountability or prayer groups (see Figure 4.2).

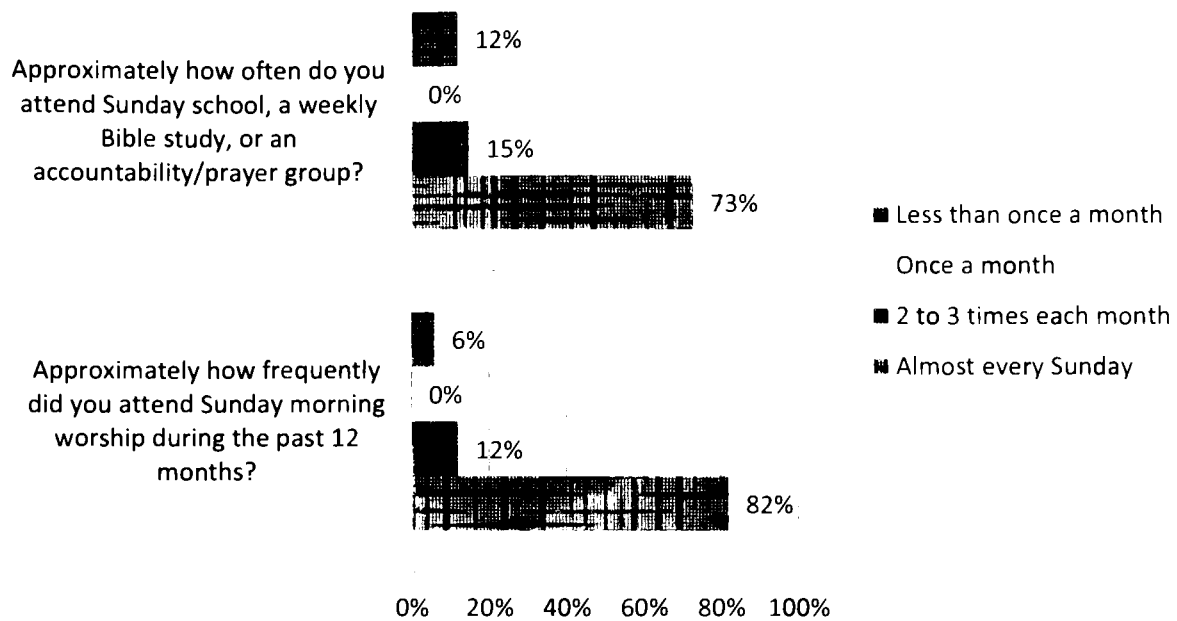


Figure 4.2. Church participation.

Half of the participants attended the 8:45 a.m. service, and the others attended the 11:00 a.m. service. Participants noted how long they had been members or attendees of Byron UMC. One-half of the participants have been attending Byron UMC for seven years or less. Surprisingly, 44 percent have been attending Byron UMC for more than eleven years (see Figure 4.3).

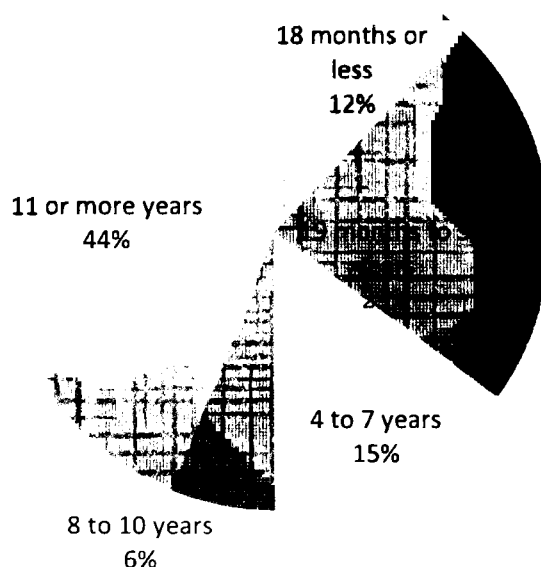


Figure 4.3. Length of church membership/attendance.

Finally, participants revealed how frequently they invited others to join them at church activities in the previous year. Only 18 percent extended an invitation once or less. Almost two-thirds, 61 percent, invited two or three individuals or families to participate in church activities, while 21 percent extended four or more such invitations.

Research Question #1

How did participants in the twenty-eight-day regimen implemented at Byron UMC understand and practice spiritual disciplines before the intervention? The first administration of the Spiritual Vitality Survey helped answer this research question. The SVS gave a baseline of participant's self-assessed spiritual health. This health is reflected in the snapshot of the first four questions (see Table 4.3).

Table 4.3. Spiritual Health Baseline Pre-Implementation

Question	Strongly Disagree %	Disagree %	Neutral %	Agree %	Strongly Agree %
I am in a loving, growing, vital relationship with God.	—	3	9	53	35
My Christian faith is more than a set of beliefs—it deeply affects my daily life.	—	3	3	50	44
I believe that I am moving forward in my Christian discipleship and, through the Holy Spirit, I am becoming more like Jesus.	—	3	23	62	12
The fruit of the Spirit is evident in my life.	—	3	21	64	12

The first administration of the SVS gave insight into participants knowledge and practice of eight spiritual disciplines. The SVS posed four questions about each of the eight spiritual disciplines covered by this research. Figure 4.4 shows the mean of each of the four questions in each category and the standard deviation of variability in the distribution of scores.

Prior to implementation, participants had the least knowledge and practice in the area of fasting. Participants had the most knowledge and practice in the area of worship. The four questions about service presented the least variability from the mean. The four questions about fasting presented the most variability from the mean (see Figure 4.4).

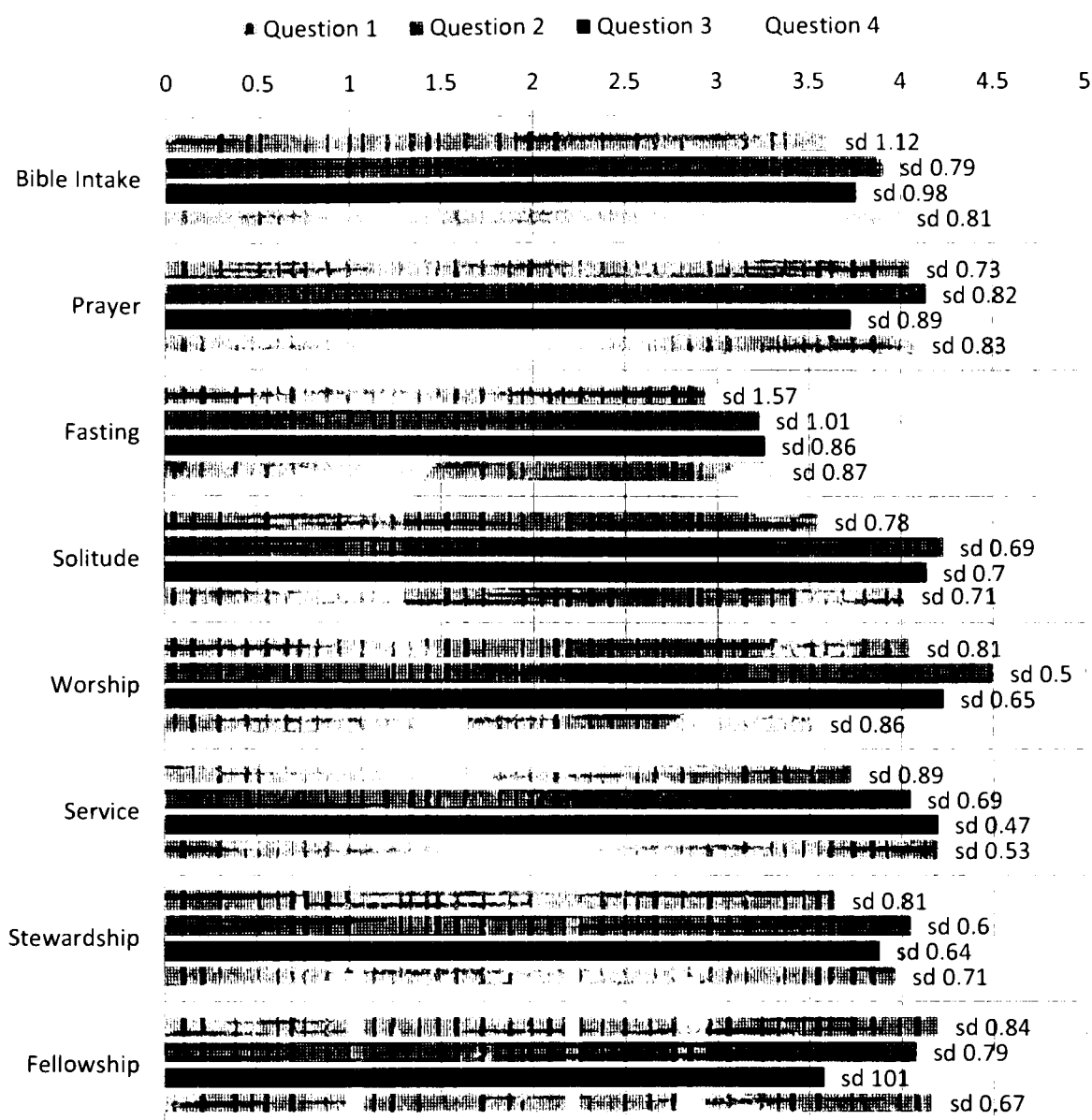


Figure 4.4. Pre-intervention implementation spiritual disciplines.

Research Question #2

How did participants in the twenty-eight-day regimen implemented at Byron UMC understand and practice spiritual disciplines after the intervention? Using the results from the first administration of the SVS as a baseline, the changes in the second administration of the SVS reflect progression or regression. An overview emerged

through a comparison of the first four questions of the SVS. A clear progression is evident in the percentiles from neutral and agree responses in the first SVS to strongly agree in the second (see Table 4.8).

Table 4.4. Spiritual Health Baseline Post-Implementation

Question	Survey	Strongly Disagree %	Disagree %	Neutral %	Agree %	Strongly Agree %
I am in a loving, growing, vital relationship with God.	SVS 1	—	3	9	53	35
	SVS 2	3	—	—	38	59
My Christian faith is more than a set of beliefs—it deeply affects my daily life.	SVS 1	—	3	3	50	44
	SVS 2	3	—	—	21	76
I believe that I am moving forward in my Christian discipleship and, through the Holy Spirit, I am becoming more like Jesus.	SVS 1	—	3	23	62	12
	SVS 2	—	3	—	44	53
The fruit of the Spirit is evident in my life.	SVS 1	—	3	20	65	12
	SVS 2	—	—	3	65	32

An examination of the data mined from the eight questions shows similar results. The mean scores were up in all thirty-two questions. Likewise, the standard deviations were generally lower (see Figure 4.5).

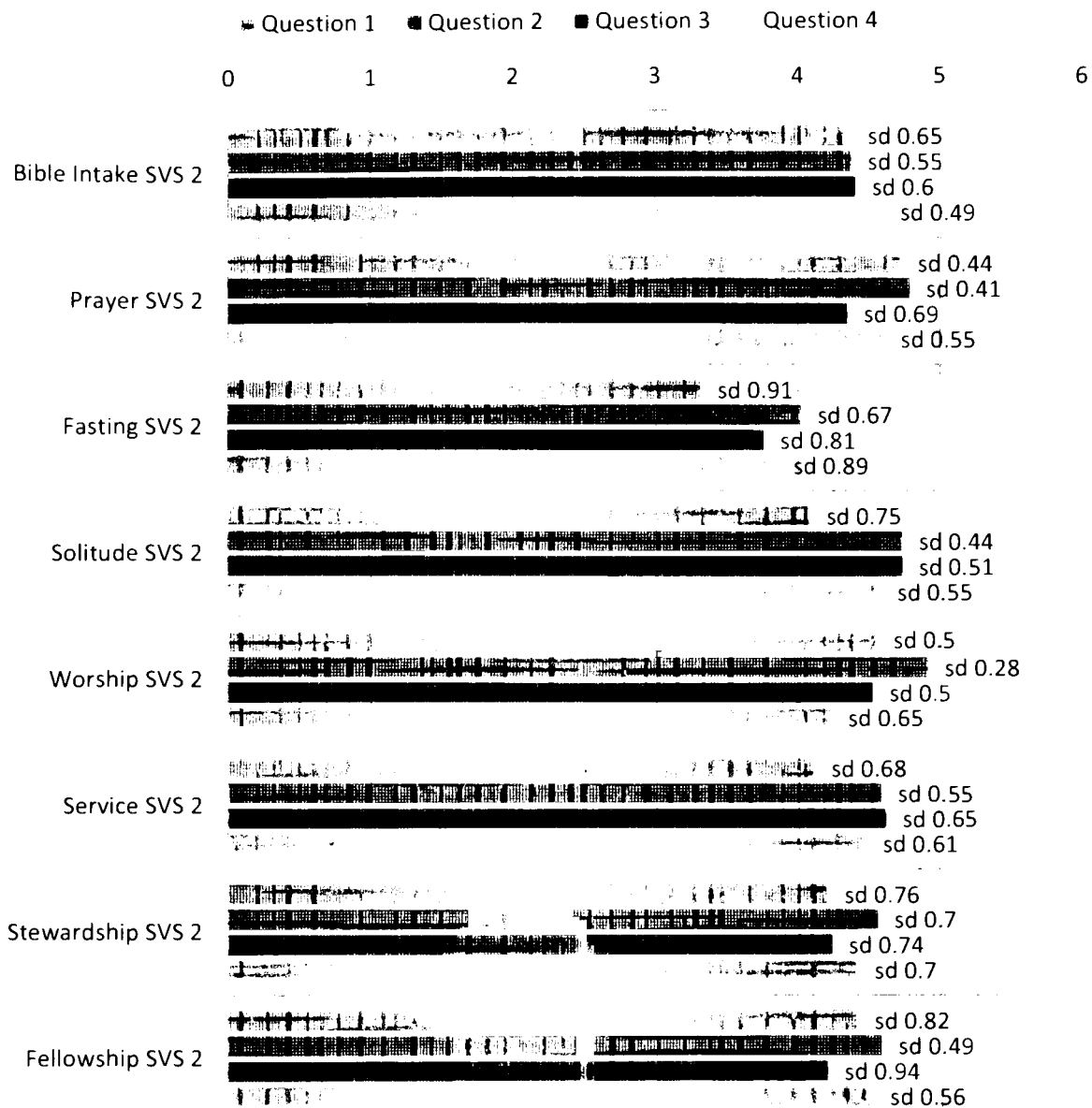


Figure 4.5. Post-intervention implementation spiritual disciplines.

Overlaying Figures 4.4 and 4.5 gives a visual of the changes between the two administrations of the SVS. Taking the mean of each category of questions shows that participants experienced the least increase in the category of service and the most in the category of Bible intake. The average increase across the thirty-two questions was 0.509 (see Figure 4.6).

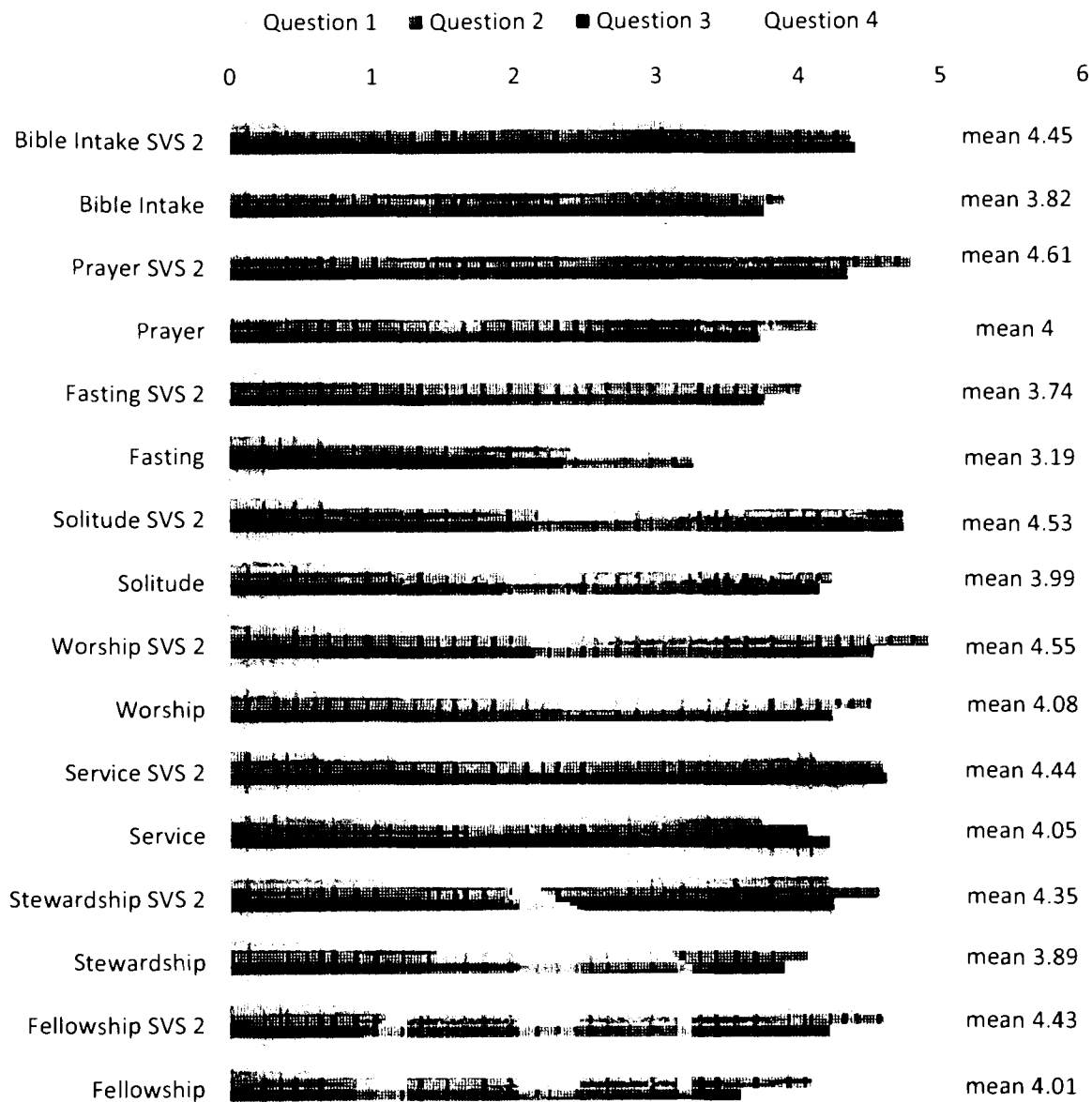


Figure 4.6. Overlay of pre- and post-implementation of SVS.

Applying demographic filters to the data also proved interesting. Women scored lower on knowledge and practice of six of the eight spiritual disciplines in the first administration of the SVS, but ended up higher than men in five of the six on the second administration of the survey. Women in the first survey had a mean score of 3.90, which increased to 4.46 in the second. Men in the first survey had a mean score of 3.96, which

increased to 4.31. Women increased 11.2 percent between the two administrations of the survey. Men also increased but at the smaller rate of 7 percent (see Figure 4.7).

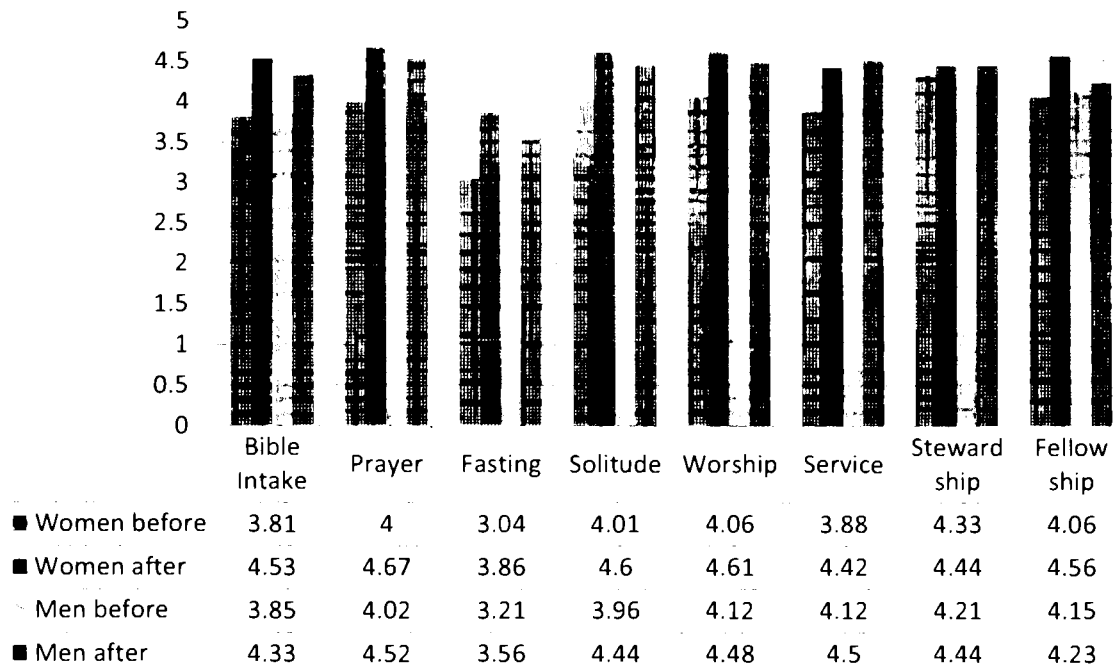


Figure 4.7. Different mean scores between men and women.

The data showed similarity in the mean distributions and percentiles of growth between those who were raised in the United Methodist denomination and those who were not. However, those who were raised in the United Methodist Church scored higher in all eight categories of knowledge and practice of spiritual disciplines prior to the implementation. In Bible intake and stewardship, those from non-Methodist denominations scored lower in the first administration of the SVS but surpassed those raised Methodist after the implementation (see Figure 4.8).

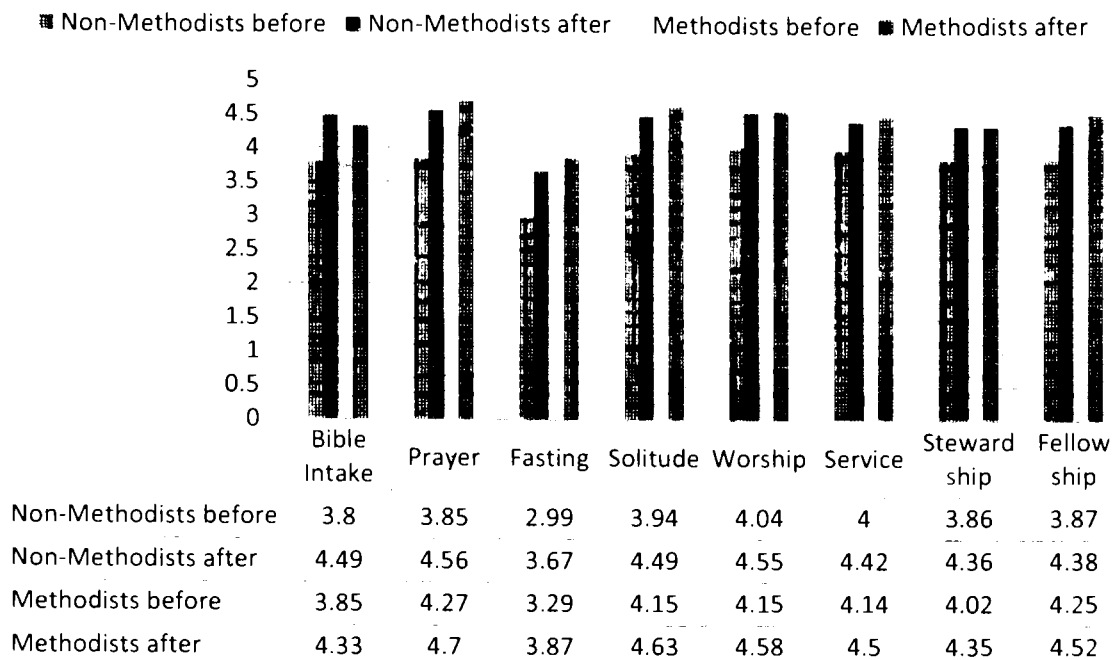


Figure 4.8. Different mean scores between UMC and other denominations.

Research Question #3

What specific elements of the intervention led to the changes in the way participants understood and practiced spiritual disciplines? The data shows that participants changed in their knowledge and practice of the spiritual disciplines between the two administrations of the SVS. The goal of research question three was to determine the causes of these changes. To this end, participants answered five questions in a structured focus group after the second administration of the SVS.

The first question was, “Before this study, how would you have described the connection between spiritual formation and spiritual disciplines?” Responses varied, but a clear theme emerged. Respondents in each of the four focus groups agreed that prior to engaging in the workbook, they saw little obvious connection between practicing the spiritual disciplines and spiritual formation. One respondent equated spiritual formation

with physical maturity and claimed that “growing in Christ is like a continuum. After salvation you mature as you get older, just like you do physically.” Similarly, nine respondents from three of the focus groups addressed deep concern about their ignorance of steps beyond conversion that Christians should take to deepen or advance their spiritual formation. One respondent said her former churches focused on the spiritual gifts to the exclusion of the spiritual disciplines, which they treated like “redheaded step-children.” Participants were unanimous that Bible intake and prayer were important to spiritual formation. However, the consensus of each focus group was that the other six spiritual disciplines outlined in this work were haphazardly practiced at best.

The second question was, “What is your current understanding and practice of spiritual formation?” Responses to the first part of that question included, “becoming like Christ,” “yielding to the transformation the Holy Spirit wants to do in us,” and “being made like Christ.” Participants defined the goal of spiritual formation in line with the definitions included in the workbook. One respondent shared insights about spiritual formation:

This process shows what kind of sinner I am. I am told to think and act like Jesus. This resource helps me see Jesus more clearly and exposes how far away I am from the standard he set. I am inspired to pursue this goal because God gives me the grace I need to succeed.

The responses showed increased understanding of spiritual formation.

Regarding their current practice of spiritual formation, respondents shared that the workbook made them intentional about their spiritual formation. One participant said she was “engaged in the process of spiritual formation through giving, serving, and reading the Bible, without calling it spiritual formation.” Instead, for her and others in the focus groups, things such as giving and serving were expectations of followers of Christ.

The third question was, “What is your current understanding and practice of the spiritual disciplines?” The consensus of the four focus groups was that they were at the height of their understanding and practice of the spiritual disciplines at the conclusion of the workbook. The time and effort they put forward completing the twenty-eight days of the workbook were, in their words, “spiritually intense” and “the most concerted effort” they had put into their discipleship. One respondent shared a growth moment during the process. In the beginning of the workbook, she would do the discipline assigned for that day while carrying on with her other responsibilities. However, part of the way through the workbook, she stopped multitasking and attempted to listen to God in and through the discipline she was practicing. This intentional listening on her part transformed the practices from assignments to gracious blessings. Another respondent said the variety of means God gave to draw people nearer to him confirms the notion that God wants an intimate relationship with his children and puts the onus on them to pursue that relationship.

Participants used words synonymous with enjoy when referencing four of the spiritual disciplines, namely worship, prayer, solitude, and Bible intake. Three participants in one focus group disagreed that stewardship was a spiritual discipline and made no connection between its practice and being formed in the image of Christ. In each of the focus groups, fasting was “least practiced,” “avoided,” “failed to do it,” and “completely ignored.” Fasting was also the discipline that generated the most conversation and confusion. One respondent claimed, “Fasting was completely foreign to me. I had never done it or read about it.” The other three focus groups echoed her sentiment.

The fourth focus group question was, “What specific elements of this process facilitated changes in your understanding and practice of spiritual formation?” This question generated the most response. The fourth question directly answers research question three.

Seven respondents highlighted individual days from the workbook as specific elements that led to changes. Six respondents said that the practice of solitude helped them either in their understanding or practice of spiritual formation. Twelve said discovering new disciplines was critical for them. Nine persons commented on the interplay between the disciplines and their spiritual formation. Five respondents said they discovered they could utilize the spiritual disciplines to discern God’s voice in the midst of their busy lives. One person specifically mentioned the biblical passages showing Jesus practicing the spiritual disciplines helping her the most.

Thirteen participants used words synonymous with “routine,” “habitual,” and “schedule” as character traits of the workbook that helped them better understand or practice spiritual formation. Five respondents used the words “commitment,” “obligation,” and “promise,” referring to their dedication to complete the twenty-eight day process, regardless of what that entailed:

Part of this workbook was giving control over to Christ and allowing him, during these twenty-eight days, to guide me. I no longer had the right to say what I would do that day for my spiritual edification. I gave that right over to Baxter and through the workbook, the Holy Spirit led me into new territory. Something like fasting I would have never done, but because I committed myself to this program, I took the fasting lessons as opportunities for obedience and growth.

Seven respondents agreed that the structure of the workbook was helpful. Specifically, the way the spiritual disciplines were interspersed throughout the workbook, rather than

being sequentially organized, led to two observations. First, this arrangement kept participants from turning the process into a routine. One person said, “Never knowing what was next kept me both off balance and looking forward to what was coming tomorrow. It never became rote.” Another compared the workbook with an exercise program:

It was like P90X—the muscle confusion. If I read my Bible and prayed for so many days exclusively, I would grow used to it. This format—a new spiritual discipline each day—kept me guessing and kept me growing.

Second, several agreed that spiritual formation was not facilitated by selecting the spiritual disciplines they liked and focusing on those to the exclusion of others. One person wrote, “The format helped me feel that spiritual formation was a unified thing.” Another used the language of muscle loss, writing, “We must decide to exercise our spiritual muscles. The spiritual disciplines help us do this. Without these exercises, part of our spiritual life will atrophy.” One respondent said that he began to notice the number of spiritual disciplines he practiced each day besides the one that was mandated by the workbook.

The final question asked of the focus groups was, “Now that this process is over, what do you intend to do to continue your spiritual formation?” The assumption embedded in this question was confirmed by a unanimous response that participants intended to do something to continue their spiritual formation. Their responses verified a key premise of this study.

Five participants either intended to or had already started the workbook for the second time: “I feel as if I know what I need to do to grow in Christ. I have direction. I have actually started the workbook over.” The remainder at least verbally bought into the

premise that as Christians practiced the spiritual disciplines they made themselves available for transformational encounters with God. They therefore determined to continue practicing the spiritual disciplines: “I have been continuing the spiritual disciplines from the book. When I get stuck or feel spiritually dry in the future, I’ll return to the workbook or something similar and find refreshment.” The majority sought direction concerning where to turn for their particular needs. One person wanted a book to take him deeper into the theology behind prayer. Five wanted information or studies on fasting as a spiritual discipline. Sixteen asked for specific resources for continued study. Seven asked me to write more daily lessons for the workbook. Three wanted me to start an in-depth Bible study or Sunday school series on the spiritual disciplines.

Summary of Major Findings

The main premise of this research is the beneficial connection between the spiritual disciplines practiced by Jesus and spiritual formation in his image. The data gathered through the two administrations of the SVS and the focus groups support that premise. The interpretation of the data led to three major findings.

1. Significant differences between the pretest and posttest of the SVS indicate that practicing the spiritual disciplines facilitates spiritual formation in the image of Jesus. This positive connection between practicing spiritual disciplines and formation in the image of Jesus was confirmed by the focus groups.

2. Resistance to certain elements of spiritual formation through the practice of spiritual disciplines, especially fasting, became evident from the research. Where people were uncomfortable (physically with fasting, emotionally with solitude, financially with

stewardship), they resisted and did not demonstrate the same level of participation as they did the five other disciplines.

3. More concentration on and resources about the spiritual disciplines and spiritual formation in Byron United Methodist Church is needed. The lack of knowledge about the spiritual disciplines and the goal of spiritual formation and dearth of organized activities to learn about and practice the spiritual disciplines is part of the reason for the lower scores in the first SVS. The data mined from the focus groups suggests that scheduled opportunities for spiritual formation through spiritual disciplines will bring positive results.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

Major Findings

After serving the United Methodist Church in South Georgia for two decades, a dichotomy became evident. Some believers experience and demonstrate significant changes in their thinking and acting, conforming to the image of Christ, while others reveal very little change in their thinking and acting and do not conform well to the image of Christ. The reasons for this variance are many, but this research focused on two assumptions. The first dealt with a lack of knowledge. Persons were not being transformed in part because they did not know the biblical expectation of spiritual formation or the means God made available for this transformation. The second dealt with a void in the behavior of many Christians. Since many believers lack knowledge of the expectations, goals, and opportunities for spiritual transformation, they simply do not participate in these endeavors with any regularity. The purpose of the research was to evaluate the knowledge and practice of Christian spiritual disciplines of select members of Byron UMC resulting from a twenty-eight-day experience of connecting spiritual disciplines with daily life.

Practicing the Spiritual Disciplines and Spiritual Formation in the Image of Jesus

By the conclusion of the research project, participants expressed significant changes in their knowledge of spiritual formation and the spiritual disciplines. Question three of the SVS asked participants to reflect on the statement, “I believe that I am moving forward in my Christian discipleship and, through the Holy Spirit, becoming more like Jesus.” Thirty-three of the thirty-four participants, or 97 percent, *agreed* or

strongly agreed with this statement, which represented an increase of 23.5 percent from the first SVS where twenty-five persons so answered. As a group, the first four questions of the SVS dealt with participants' general understanding of the vitality of their relationship with God and the depth of the spiritual formation. The average increase in those answering *strongly agree* to these four questions was just over 30 percent.

Application of the right knowledge is a path to transformation. Paul encouraged the Romans to be transformed through cognitive renewal (Rom. 12:2). The time participants spent studying the example of Jesus paid dividends in their renewal in his image through the Holy Spirit. Jesus had promised that those who seek him would find him (Matt. 7:8), and the twenty-eight-day spiritual journey proved Jesus good to his word.

The increased knowledge about spiritual formation through following the example of Jesus is insufficient to explain the self-assessed changes in the participants. The knowledge must be combined with practice. James argued that hearing the word alone would lead to self-deception. The hearer must put the word into practice (Jas. 2:22). This practice is precisely the experience of the thirty-four participants in this study. They expanded their mind with knowledge about spiritual formation and the spiritual disciplines, then applied this knowledge through daily practice. Throughout this process, the Holy Spirit was working grace like leaven through their lives to form spiritually eager participants according to his goals.

For twenty-eight days, participants placed themselves at the feet of Jesus in a teacher/student, Lord/servant dynamic. They intentionally studied the example and teaching of Jesus and covenanted to practice, with the empowerment of the Holy Spirit,

that which they learned. Their self-assessed conclusion that this intentional engagement in the spiritual disciplines helped them in their desire to become like Christ is not surprising.

The literature review substantiates this conclusion. Sacks' examination of initiates after a thirty-day regimen of spiritual exercises proved to have a significant impact on the individuals (46). The spiritual exercises included increasing their knowledge of Christ and putting that knowledge to practice, very similar to the structure of this research.

Johnson argues that "knowledge of God is good for the soul" (79). For Johnson, this healthful knowledge of the divine is not merely cognitive exercise. Instead, knowledge of God is psychologically transformative. True knowledge of God includes experiencing God and produces formative change beyond what factual learning alone can accomplish. The participants in this research who devoted twenty-eight days to learning about God and practicing the spiritual disciplines of Christ attest to the truth of Johnson's claims.

Jankowski and Vaughn claim that spiritual practices "are the primary means by which individuals participate in the life of the divine and thereby experience transformation, change, or growth" (84). Arguing that spiritual practices are mechanisms of change does not eliminate God from the process or turn the practices themselves into humanistic achievement devices. Instead, it shows that God provided the seeker with the means to draw near to God for the transformation that he alone can produce in the human life. The participants in the twenty-eight-day regimen took hold of these means and God, honoring their efforts, produced change in their lives.

Langberg argues that as image bearers, “we become like that which we habitually reflect” (259). The things people focus on eventually shape them. As they reflect the image of Jesus through the disciplines he practiced, they more accurately bear that image on their souls. Specifically, Langberg included worship, truth, study, prayer, and obedience as the disciplines by which image bearers are shaped and formed by God. During the twenty-eight-day regimen, participants engaged in forms of these disciplines and confessed to significant spiritual formation as a result.

Resistance to Certain Elements of Spiritual Formation through the Practice of Spiritual Disciplines, Especially Fasting

In the beginning of this process, I introduced the opportunity to the congregation at Byron UMC in spoken announcements and written bulletin inserts. In conversations with persons who were considering participating in this research, the main concerns related to fasting. Two men mentioned their diabetes and questioned if they would be eligible. Three women shared their doubts about fasting and their struggles with this discipline.

The research reflected these concerns. As a group, participants scored lowest on their knowledge and practice of the spiritual discipline of fasting prior to this research. Questions twenty-five through twenty-eight had a mean score of 3.19 on the first SVS (see Figure 5.1).

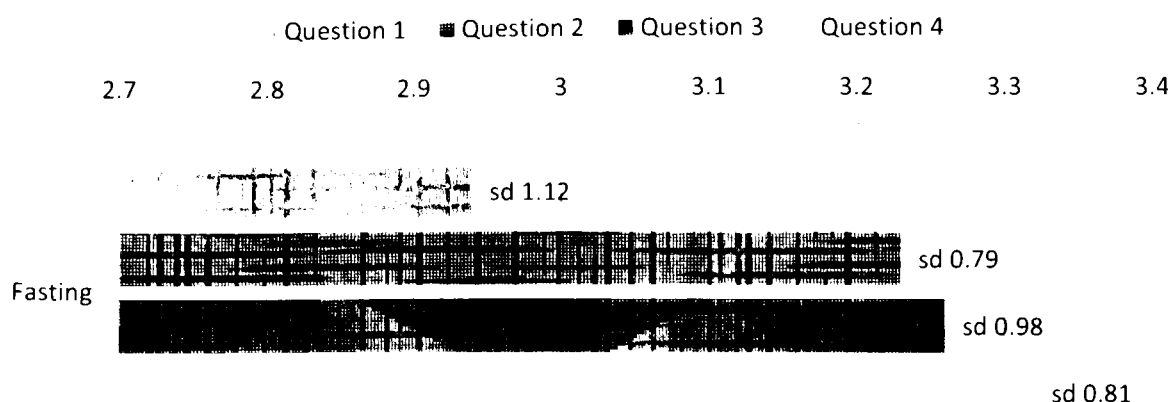


Figure 5.1. Pre-implementation knowledge and practice of fasting.

The implementation of the workbook had the desired effect of increasing participants' knowledge and practice of fasting as a spiritual discipline. The mean of the four questions pertaining to this spiritual discipline rose to 3.74, an increase of 0.55. The largest mean increase was question twenty-six, "I understand how fasting and self-denial help me become more like Christ." The mean score of the first SVS was 3.23, which increased to 4.02. This difference represents an increase of 0.79 (see Figure 5.2).

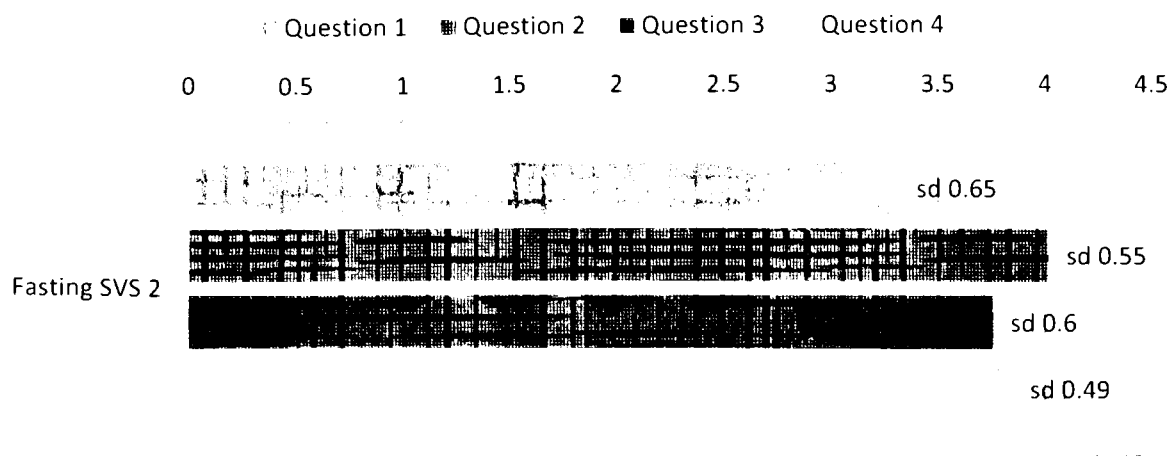


Figure 5.2. Post-implementation knowledge and practice of fasting.

These changes were made clear during the focus groups. Twenty-one participants shared negative comments about fasting. Most of these were about their ignorance or failure to engage in this discipline. One person said, “I have been inspired to study fasting more because I’m so ignorant about it. It is the spiritual discipline that I have the most difficulty with.” He was not alone in his confusion. Another person said, “I appreciate the way the workbook laid out that I could fast more than just food because as a diabetic, I have trouble when I don’t eat at regular intervals. This one simple idea made fasting a discipline I could now do.” One participant remained confused about fasting until she connected it with stewardship:

It came through to me that everything I have belongs to God. That made me start thinking about the things in my life that I was unwilling to give up. I decided I needed to try to fast some of these things.

Another participant persisted through her confusion and was rewarded with a clearer understanding and deeper experience of fasting:

I initially gave myself an F minus on fasting. My first two attempts failed. But on the third lesson, my family had left the home, so I combined

fasting and solitude and would argue that I actually experienced fasting as a spiritual discipline for the first time.

The group consensus was that as persons learned more about fasting, their reluctance diminished. However, they still expressed concerns about their ability or willingness to engage in this spiritual discipline.

Ignorance about fasting is not a revelation of this research. Foster, in researching fasting as a spiritual discipline, failed to discover a single resource in almost one hundred years of publishing (*Celebration* 41). Part of the problem, according to Foster, is the misguided belief that virtue is found in satisfying every human appetite. Another problem is the issue of control. Appetites for food, power, pleasure and the like easily control intentions. Fasting helps uncover these appetites and surrender them to God.

The apostle Paul argued that while all things are lawful in Christ, he would not be controlled by anything (1 Cor. 6:12). Part of the human condition is to allow appetites to run amuck. The resistance of the participants in this area shows how men and women who are striving for a deeper relationship with God can be blind to their own ailments and those things that hold them back. Intentional denial of these appetites while focusing on God through worship, surrender, and prayer can bring freedom to those who are blindly enslaved.

Ignorance is often dispelled through education and experience. Responses from focus groups showed that the church has not adequately disseminated biblical ideas about fasting. Participants were unaware of the connections between fasting, self-denial, and stewardship. They bought the lie that surrendering to human appetites is perfectly normal. They had the perspective that fasting was for weight loss and religious ascetics. The handful of participants who had participated in fasting prior to this research had only

done so as part of their Roman Catholic upbringing or Lenten experience. In a gluttonous and self-centered world, fasting can take on new significance and lead God's people into the transformed lives God intends.

Need for More Concentration on and Resources about the Spiritual Disciplines and Spiritual Formation at Byron UMC

After completing the workbook, participants were eager to continue studying and practicing the spiritual disciplines. This simple taste was enough to create or increase their appetite for the practices of Christ. However, while participants unanimously expressed a desire to continue learning about and practicing the spiritual disciplines, they were confused as to how to make this desire a reality.

Part of the problem on how to continue practicing the spiritual disciplines deals with ignorance of the biblical mandate of spiritual formation. Prior to this experience, participants commented on how little they knew about spiritual formation and how surprised they were that spiritual formation in the image of Christ was a biblical expectation. One person shared, "I have been a Christian for a long time and felt I had almost arrived at where I needed to be in Christ. This process opened me up to the reality that I was far away from the goal of my faith." The majority of participants were unclear of the goals of spiritual formation prior to this research.

Disseminating this knowledge is part of the church's job. Paul writes about various ministerial offices to which believers are called:

And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. (Eph. 4:11-13)

The writer of Hebrews lamented the state of the church that was still suckling on the milk of basic principles while he longed for them to feast on the solid food of God's word (Heb. 5:12-14). Participants in this study similarly lamented the state of their spiritual formation and longed for more opportunities to pursue this goal.

A subtle but important undercurrent of the research was the expressed need for structure. When left to their own schedules, everyday life seemed to derail their best intentions and participants shared a strikingly haphazard approach to their life with Christ. Without a commitment to a structured process, participants shared that they simply failed to make time for God. One person shared, "The routine of the workbook definitely gave me a better understanding of how to apply the spiritual disciplines to everyday life. It is not always easy to bring my faith to the soccer field or grocery store or work." Another participant shared a lifelong frustration:

I spent my life working in the secular world. While I considered myself a man of strong faith, the issue of conforming to Christ in the world never really came up. I was too busy. I had an idea of what a Christian should or shouldn't be, but I didn't weigh my actions against this knowledge. My perception has changed through this experience. I am now interested and attuned to who Christ was and how his example fits with every facet of my life.

The consensus was that the change in routine, specifically the concentration on the spiritual disciplines and example of Christ, made people aware of the goals of their faith and their need to pursue these goals intentionally.

The definition of spiritual disciplines highlights the need for structure. The spiritual disciplines are those activities, habits, or behaviors that Scripture validates as the way believers create sacred space for the movement of the Holy Spirit. Practicing these disciplines involves systematic engagement. Faithfully and habitually, participants placed

themselves before God for twenty-eight days and experienced God's faithful and loving response.

The Bible shares the need for discipline in the spiritual life. Paul encouraged his readers to discipline themselves in godliness (1 Tim. 4:7). Whitney argues the need for discipline in pursuit of spiritual formation:

Those who are not *trying* to learn will only get spiritual and biblical knowledge by accident or convenience. Occasionally they will hear a biblical fact or principle from someone else and profit from it. Once in a while they will get a brief burst of interest in a subject. But this is not the way to Godliness. The Discipline of learning helps us to be *intentional* learners, not accidental learners. (original emphasis; 229)

This need for discipline in no way suggests that human beings control their spiritual formation in the image of Christ. Men and women are spiritually formed only as the Holy Spirit works in their lives. However, God has revealed certain means whereby persons yield to his work, and the habitual practice of these means is their responsibility.

As a result of this regimen, ten participants wanted me either to write additional lessons for the workbook or to begin a class where they could explore the spiritual disciplines in greater depth. Another sixteen asked for specific suggestions about resources they could purchase to continue their study and practice. Still more said they would use the workbook again at some point in the future.

The focus groups showed that people need different levels of support from their churches depending on present life experience and personal spiritual maturity. Hawkins and Parkinson researched the role of the church in spiritual formation and discovered that the role of the church decreased as persons spiritually matured. However, the data from the SVS showed that spiritual maturity is not connected with chronological age. A comparison of the second SVS of participants thirty-nine years old and younger with

those sixty and older showed that of the thirty-six questions, the younger group had higher mean scores on six questions, tied on four, and scored lower on twenty-six. However, a comparison of the participants thirty-nine years old and younger with those between forty and fifty-nine years old showed different results. These two groups tied on four questions while each had higher scores on sixteen questions (see Table 5.1).

Table 5.1. Age-Group Comparison of SVS 2

Age Groups Compared	Higher Scores	Tied Scores	Lower Scores
39 or younger vs. 60 or older	6	4	26
39 or younger vs. 40 to 59	16	4	16

The need for church support carried over to the area of leadership and teaching. Although most people wanted some sort of continued study, none of the participants felt equipped or inspired to lead. This awareness puts the responsibility on church leadership to train and equip teachers who are being formed in the image of Christ and have experiential knowledge of the spiritual disciplines.

Implications of the Findings

Every believer has a stake in becoming the person God envisions. Every church has a role in facilitating this spiritual formation. The major implication of this research is that Byron UMC needs to present opportunities for believers to increase in their knowledge and practice of the spiritual disciplines. That participants in this research were disappointed in the efforts of their church in this regard is clear.

Another implication of the findings is that this research has the potential to improve the ways pastors, districts, and conferences measure the health of those in their care. Some metrics used to measure church health and individual spiritual vitality are convenient and easy. This research shows that a healthy church such as Byron UMC that surpasses district standards has a sizeable representative sample that was not as healthy as its leaders presumed. The spiritual health of believers and congregations deserves to be measured by an effective standard regardless of the difficulty of administering such a standard.

Limitations of the Study

The purpose of the research was accomplished through the design of the study. The pretest of the SVS established a baseline for participants. The posttest highlighted changes in participants' self-assessed knowledge and practice of the spiritual disciplines. The focus groups were essential in adding a qualitative measure to the quantitative data. The heart of the project was the twenty-eight-day workbook. It was well received and proved an effective means of educating persons in the spiritual disciplines practiced by Jesus and encouraging them to engage in these disciplines in an experiential way.

The five specific questions asked in each of the four focus groups were not effective. The questions overlapped considerably. Fortunately for the research, the participants had a strong desire to communicate the effectiveness and limitations of the workbook and the entire process beyond the specific questions they were asked. This extra information was invaluable in correlating the changes in the two administrations of the SVS and the workbook.

The participants were a homogeneous collection of Caucasian middle-class Christians. The study did not have enough participants in the youngest group, those aged up to thirty-nine years old. Although it included more women than men, the number of men was sufficient to disaggregate the data according to gender. The level of education of the participants may limit the generalizability of the research, as the participants were a rather educated group. In addition, all of the participants had a favorable connection to me as their pastor. This pastoral connection may have skewed their willingness to participate in the research and their faithfulness at doing the daily work. Nobody who participated in the first administration of the SVS failed to take the second. Moreover, I noted the high frequency of attendance at Sunday morning worship services of participants. The unusually high level of commitment of the participants prevents easy application to other groups.

The research measured the impact of an intentional approach to the spiritual disciplines on the knowledge and practice of a sample within a local church. The conclusions reached in this study therefore relate to Bryon UMC. However, the findings may be generalizable and extend to other clergy attempting to lead their congregants to increased knowledge and practice of the spiritual disciplines. The research shows a connection between practicing like Jesus and being formed by the Holy Spirit into his image, which should be transferable to most contexts. The SVS may operate as a tool for others in the future, specifically mainline churches not interested in defining church health solely by increasing metrics, and superintendents or their equivalent who would like to improve the spiritual health and practices of churches in their area of responsibility.

Unexpected Observations

I would not have guessed that participants from the United Methodist Church would have scored higher on knowledge and practice of the spiritual disciplines prior to implementation. These higher scores for United Methodists covered all eight spiritual disciplines. I in no way expected a mean increase between the pretest and posttest administrations of the SVS of all thirty-four participants. I was also pleasantly surprised by the commitment of participants. They all persevered to the conclusion of the research. Furthermore, only a handful of individuals admitted to giving up on fasting and solitude.

I was encouraged that so many participants wanted to continue to learn about and practice the spiritual disciplines. I was also delighted that they agreed in principle and confirmed in practice the connection between practicing like Jesus and conforming to his example. I feel empowered to continue this focus on the spiritual disciplines as a means of placing ourselves before God for his transforming work to take effect in our lives. However, although the majority wanted to continue studying and practicing the spiritual disciplines, they did not feel led or equipped to continue on their own. They wanted resources, guidance, classes, and opportunities where someone led them in this regard. The church has a significant role in the spiritual formation of adherents.

The level of sharing in each of the four focus groups was remarkable. Although the five questions were less than ideal, the willingness of participants to engage openly and honestly in dialogue was refreshing. This time of reflection and sharing is something I will incorporate in future studies because it proved invaluable for participants to hear others share common thoughts, joys, and frustrations. As fellowship was one of the

spiritual disciplines, these focus groups gave participants an opportunity to fellowship at the conclusion of the research.

I was surprised by the differences between men and women regarding their approach to the spiritual disciplines. During the focus groups, three men questioned or in some way expressed resistance to the spiritual discipline of stewardship. No woman shared any level of difficulty with stewardship as a spiritual discipline. Several women, conversely, resisted the spiritual discipline of fasting. This difference was surprising.

Recommendations

More studies are needed, both individual and corporate, that include spiritual disciplines beyond the staples of Bible intake and prayer. At the beginning of this research, participants had a loose understanding that prayer and Bible intake helped them become more like Christ. However, many who were in the church for considerable time made no connections between such activities as stewardship, worship, service, and solitude, and spiritual formation in Christ.

Teaching and preaching on the stages of grace are necessary additions to many churches. Folks have a clear grasp of the initial stage of salvation but are unclear about expectations and opportunities God has for them as redeemed children. From the data mined from this research, church attendees understand that they are saved but are confused concerning what they are saved to do and become.

Participants demonstrated an intriguing confusion about and reluctance to practice the spiritual disciplines of solitude and fasting. Discerning the underlying attitudes, beliefs, and practices that block the reception of these important gifts to the church is an important goal. At minimum, this area deserves exploration as a local pastor.

Several participants were confused regarding the nature, purpose, and outcome of prayer. Some believed and expected prayer to change souls and circumstances in real and sometimes tangible ways. Others thought that due to God's sovereignty, prayer could not change things that God established in his will. Prayer, for these believers, changed them according to God's will. This confusion about the spiritual discipline of prayer would make an intriguing study.

Postscript

Throughout this process I have learned that people have incredible aptitude for spiritual change if given the right motivation and opportunities. God longs for the church to experience the full measure of his grace and provides ample opportunities for this grace to become transformational in the hearts and minds of his redeemed children. The church is desperate for exactly this transformation, but is largely ignorant of the goals and means of spiritual formation.

APPENDIX A**DEMOGRAPHIC INSTRUMENT**

The purpose of this instrument is to gather demographic data to understand the results of the spiritual vitality survey better. Please know that none of the information gathered will be publicized beyond the scope of the dissertation.

1. How long have you been a member/attendee of Byron United Methodist Church?

☐ 18 months or less ☐ 18 months-3 years ☐ 4-7 years ☐ 8-10 years ☐ 11 or more years

2. Approximately how frequently did you attend Sunday morning worship at Byron UMC during the past year?

☐ Almost every Sunday ☐ Two or three times a month ☐ Once a month ☐ Less than once a month

3. I most often attend the

☐ 8:45 a.m. service ☐ 11:00 a.m. service

4. Approximately how often do you attend Sunday school, a weekly Bible study, or an accountability/prayer group that meets at Byron UMC?

☐ Almost every week ☐ Two or three times a month ☐ Once a month ☐ Less than once a month ☐ Never

5. How many individuals or families have you personally invited to visit an activity, class, or worship service at Byron UMC in the past year?

☐ None ☐ One ☐ Two ☐ Three ☐ Four ☐ Five or more

6. What is the highest level of education you have completed?

☐ Less than high school graduate ☐ High school/GED ☐ Some college, trade or vocational school ☐ College degree ☐ Post-graduate studies

7. What is your current age?

☐ 39 or younger ☐ 40s-50s ☐ 60 and older

8. What is your gender?

☐ Male ☐ Female

9. What is your marital status?

☐ Single ☐ Divorced ☐ Widowed ☐ Married

10. What is your employment status?

☐ Retired ☐ Employed part-time ☐ Employed full-time ☐ Full-time homemaker or student ☐ Not currently employed

11. In what denomination were you raised? If you experienced more than one denomination, with which did you most identify?

☐ Baptist ☐ Disciples of Christ ☐ Episcopalian ☐ Lutheran ☐ Methodist
☐ Nondenominational ☐ Pentecostal ☐ Presbyterian ☐ Roman Catholic
☐ United Church of Christ ☐ Other ☐ None

APPENDIX B

SPIRITUAL VITALITY SURVEY

This instrument is intended to measure your knowledge and practice of spiritual disciplines and spiritual transformation. You will take this survey twice—once before you begin the twenty-eight-day spiritual regimen to provide a baseline, and once after the regimen to assess self-identified changes. Baxter will use the data to determine if the spiritual regimen you agreed to follow faithfully for twenty-eight days produced any spiritual growth. We will have time for open dialogue about the process and any perceived changes/challenges during our structured focus groups at the end of this process.

PLEASE NOTE: It is typically best to record your first impression. Avoid over-analyzing your answers. There are no right or wrong answers. This is an electronic test. Just use your mouse to click on the number (1 through 5) that best answers the question. The scale is:

1. Strongly disagree 2. Disagree 3. Neutral 4. Agree 5. Strongly agree

When you have completed the survey, just click the submit button.

General Spiritual Fitness

1. I am in a loving, growing, vital relationship with God.

1. Strongly disagree 2. Disagree 3. Neutral 4. Agree 5. Strongly agree

2. My Christian faith is more than a set a beliefs—it deeply affects my daily life.

1. Strongly disagree 2. Disagree 3. Neutral 4. Agree 5. Strongly agree

3. I believe that I am moving forward in my Christian discipleship and, through the Holy Spirit, becoming more like Jesus.

1. Strongly disagree 2. Disagree 3. Neutral 4. Agree 5. Strongly agree

4. The fruit of the Spirit (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control) is evident in my life.

1. Strongly disagree 2. Disagree 3. Neutral 4. Agree 5. Strongly agree

Bible Intake Questions

5. I read my Bible regularly.

1. Strongly disagree 2. Disagree 3. Neutral 4. Agree 5. Strongly agree

6. When I read the Bible, I understand how it relates to my life.

1. Strongly disagree 2. Disagree 3. Neutral 4. Agree 5. Strongly agree

7. I regularly relate God's Word to everyday activities.

1. Strongly disagree 2. Disagree 3. Neutral 4. Agree 5. Strongly agree

8. I allow God's Word to challenge my thoughts, attitudes, and practice.

1. Strongly disagree 2. Disagree 3. Neutral 4. Agree 5. Strongly agree

Prayer Questions

9. I pray regularly, not including blessings before meals.

1. Strongly disagree 2. Disagree 3. Neutral 4. Agree 5. Strongly agree

10. I understand the value of prayer as it relates to my daily discipleship.

1. Strongly disagree 2. Disagree 3. Neutral 4. Agree 5. Strongly agree

11. I quickly confess anything in my life once I recognize that it doesn't align with the character of Christ.

1. Strongly disagree 2. Disagree 3. Neutral 4. Agree 5. Strongly agree

12. When I pray, I believe God hears and brings results—by changing the outward things I'm praying about and/or by changing me according to his will.

1. Strongly disagree 2. Disagree 3. Neutral 4. Agree 5. Strongly agree

Fasting/Self-Denial Questions

13. I fast or practice self-denial as part of my spiritual discipline.

1. Strongly disagree 2. Disagree 3. Neutral 4. Agree 5. Strongly agree

14. I understand how fasting and self-denial help me become more like Jesus.

1. Strongly disagree 2. Disagree 3. Neutral 4. Agree 5. Strongly agree

15. When I fast or engage in self-denial, my love for God increases.

1. Strongly disagree 2. Disagree 3. Neutral 4. Agree 5. Strongly agree

16. When I fast or engage in self-denial, I see things more clearly and find myself more readily in God's presence.

1. Strongly disagree 2. Disagree 3. Neutral 4. Agree 5. Strongly agree

Solitude Questions

17. I regularly withdraw from the noise and companionship of the world to be alone with God.

1. Strongly disagree 2. Disagree 3. Neutral 4. Agree 5. Strongly agree

18. I understand the importance of spending time alone with God and how this time affects my spiritual development.

1. Strongly disagree 2. Disagree 3. Neutral 4. Agree 5. Strongly agree

19. The time I spend alone with God leads to a deeper awareness/knowledge of God and a clearer picture of myself.

1. Strongly disagree 2. Disagree 3. Neutral 4. Agree 5. Strongly agree

20. I see my time alone with God as opportunities for deep spiritual transformation.

1. Strongly disagree 2. Disagree 3. Neutral 4. Agree 5. Strongly agree

Worship Questions

21. My life is marked by regular, heartfelt, informed worship of God.

1. Strongly disagree 2. Disagree 3. Neutral 4. Agree 5. Strongly agree

22. I understand that worship is more than what we do at church on Sunday mornings.

1. Strongly disagree 2. Disagree 3. Neutral 4. Agree 5. Strongly agree

23. I am able to praise God even during the difficult experiences of life.

1. Strongly disagree 2. Disagree 3. Neutral 4. Agree 5. Strongly agree

24. How I live my life shows that God is my highest priority.

1. Strongly disagree 2. Disagree 3. Neutral 4. Agree 5. Strongly agree

Service Questions

25. I give my time and talents to Byron UMC through regular service.

1. Strongly disagree 2. Disagree 3. Neutral 4. Agree 5. Strongly agree

26. I understand the connection between serving the church and growing in Christlikeness.

1. Strongly disagree 2. Disagree 3. Neutral 4. Agree 5. Strongly agree

27. When I serve through the church, I feel connected to God and others.

1. Strongly disagree 2. Disagree 3. Neutral 4. Agree 5. Strongly agree

28. I discover a sense of purpose and fulfillment when I work in the church.

1. Strongly disagree 2. Disagree 3. Neutral 4. Agree 5. Strongly agree

Stewardship Questions

29. I give a generous portion of my income to the work of God.

1. Strongly disagree 2. Disagree 3. Neutral 4. Agree 5. Strongly agree

30. I understand the connections the Bible makes between stewardship and discipleship.

1. Strongly disagree 2. Disagree 3. Neutral 4. Agree 5. Strongly agree

31. When I am aware of persons in harder life situations than mine, I respond generously.

1. Strongly disagree 2. Disagree 3. Neutral 4. Agree 5. Strongly agree

32. I am more concerned about my spiritual welfare than my financial/material welfare.

1. Strongly disagree 2. Disagree 3. Neutral 4. Agree 5. Strongly agree

Fellowship Questions

33. I have a community of Christian friends with whom I enjoy regular fellowship.

1. Strongly disagree 2. Disagree 3. Neutral 4. Agree 5. Strongly agree

34. I understand the connection between Christian fellowship and discipleship.

1. Strongly disagree 2. Disagree 3. Neutral 4. Agree 5. Strongly agree

35. I feel truly known by and accountable to a small group of loving Christians.

1. Strongly disagree 2. Disagree 3. Neutral 4. Agree 5. Strongly agree

36. I strive to love others as much as I love myself.

1. Strongly disagree 2. Disagree 3. Neutral 4. Agree 5. Strongly agree

By completing this survey, you are giving informed consent to the researcher to use this data. This information will be kept confidential.

APPENDIX C**WORKBOOK****Workbook: A Twenty-Eight-Day Regimen of Spiritual Disciplines****Introduction and Thanks:**

This workbook is for daily use. For the next twenty-eight days, you have committed yourself to reading each day's entry and attempting to practice the spiritual discipline for that day. If you are not in the habit of daily "devotions," this might become a chore. If you are in the habit, this might seem lightweight. In any case, I want to express my heartfelt gratitude for your willingness to participate in this venture and encourage your perseverance.

Let me share a personal life example. I love golf, but I am not a good golfer. On the tee, I can smack the ball and watch it sail 250 yards, even 280 yards. I can open or close the face of the club on impact and shape the flight of the ball around obstacles or in line with the flow of the green. And I can accurately read the greens and putt true. Sometimes. The reason I'm not a good golfer is not for a lack of knowledge. My head is full of the theory of golf. My deficiency is not in the area of knowledge. My deficiency is a total lack of consistency. And the only way I know of to fix problems of consistency is through a great deal of practice. I'm not certain if practice will make for perfection in my golf game, but it will doubtlessly help. I can't expect to be a good golfer when I show up for my tee-time after leaving my clubs untouched for four months. I may hit a few good shots, but the scorecard tells the real story. One good shot out of five is a good reason why I don't wear a Nike swoosh on my clerical robe and why Tiger hasn't asked me to fix his game.

While there is no direct cause-and-effect relationship between doing the spiritual disciplines and formation in the image of Christ, there is a clearly defined process. We can discern from Jesus' life the types of activities he regularly did and surmise that, in practicing as Jesus practiced, the Holy Spirit may transform us into his image. It is my goal over the next four weeks that the Holy Spirit will work in your life, that God will honor your sincere effort and desire, and that Christ will make himself known in and through you more evidently than he ever has before.

While there are many practices that may lead to spiritual formation, I have only included eight spiritual disciplines that I believe are clearly reflected in Christ's teaching and example. They are prayer, Bible intake, fasting, solitude, worship, service, stewardship, and fellowship. After this study you may discover other practices that the Holy Spirit will use to effect positive changes in your life. And without a doubt, participation in Communion is a means God uses to form us into the image of his Son. However, Communion is a sacrament, not a spiritual discipline, so while it is essential, it is not included in this regimen.

Each day you will notice an opportunity for reflection in a journal. This is optional, but may assist you as you progress daily. Moreover, these personal journal entries may help you reflect on this process during our focus group after the conclusion of this regimen.

Again, thank you for your willingness to participate in this process. May God richly bless you and form you in the image of his Son, our Lord.

Definitions:

Spiritual formation is a believer's intentional, lifelong quest to become like Christ in and with a community of believers. This occurs internally by having the mind of Christ and externally by acting like Christ. It only comes as the work of the Holy Spirit.

Spiritual disciplines are the means by which a person is formed in the image of Jesus. Four points must be kept in balance:

1. They are not ends in themselves. Christians do not become spiritually mature by becoming experts in the practice of any or all the spiritual disciplines.
2. They do not cause automatic or instantaneous change. Instead, they place believers in the stream of grace where the Holy Spirit can do the work of transformation. The spiritual disciplines help move believers from the surface to the depths of a relationship with God.
3. They do not replace faithful church attendance or participation in other church activities.
4. They are old. Christians have practiced these disciplines personally and corporately since biblical times for the promotion of spiritual growth.

Sample Lesson

“Start by doing what’s necessary; then do what’s possible; and suddenly you are doing the impossible.” (Francis of Assisi)

What comes to mind when you ponder the words Christian service?

Jesus’ Example. Jesus was the greatest servant the world has ever known. On one of the occasions where Jesus’ disciples were jostling for position and recognition, Jesus taught them a lesson about service. He said, “Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave” (Matt. 20:26-27). If they wanted to outdo each other, they should begin by humbling themselves into servitude. Jesus continued the lesson by appealing to his own example saying, “The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (v. 28). That should be a stark reminder to all who want to follow in Jesus’ footsteps. On a different occasion, Jesus said, “My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work” (John 4:34). Serving God was so meaningful to Jesus that it was like food—nourishing, satisfying, and strengthening.

Read the story of the Good Samaritan from Luke 10:25-37.

Spiritual Discipline. The spiritual discipline of service is using time, talent, and treasure on behalf of others in the name of Christ. It begins with love—loving our neighbor as much as ourselves. Without love, we will never view our neighbors’ needs as equal to our own. We may engage in philanthropy or good deeds, but our actions will not rise to the level of a spiritual discipline that God uses to shape us in Christ’s image. Without love for others, we won’t take our eyes off ourselves long enough to notice those in need all around us.

It is an enormous challenge to engage in the spiritual discipline of service while enjoying the luxuries that come with a life of privilege and status. Yet this discipline is essential for such blessed persons. Pause and reflect on the following two questions:

1. Why do you think the spiritual discipline of service is so difficult for wealthy, comfortable believers?
2. Why do you think this discipline is so important for these same people?

Practice. I don’t know the level at which you enjoy life’s luxuries. However, compared to so many, it is fair to say that the majority of us are tremendously blessed.

Think about the last two questions from the previous paragraph. How closely do those answers about “wealthy, comfortable believers” reflect your own situation? In other words, were you stretching to place yourself in someone else’s shoes, or did the answers come from your personal experience?

After I wrote those questions, I realized that I wasn’t talking about someone else, someone whose experience was vastly different from my own. I was talking about me. I’m the wealthy, comfortable believer. Giving my life for others after the example of Jesus does not come naturally or easily for me. I’m the one who expects to be served. Being a servant takes the opposite perspective. A servant looks for and anticipates opportunities to help and bless others. A servant, therefore, has his or her attention on others, not self. Ouch! I hate it when what I type convicts me.

Today, as you go through your day, do all you can to notice others. Look for opportunities to serve and bless someone, particularly someone who cannot reciprocate. Be the Good Samaritan for someone in your community.

Journal. Did you find opportunities to practice the spiritual discipline of service? What happened? How did you feel before, during, and after your expression of Christian love?

APPENDIX D

INFORMED CONSENT

You are being asked to participate in a research study conducted by Rev. Baxter S. Hurley, a student from Asbury Theological Seminary. The study is called, *Practicing like Jesus: A Study of Christian Spiritual Disciplines*. The results of this research will contribute to his doctoral dissertation. You were selected as a participant because you meet the eligibility requirements.

The study will investigate the correlation between knowledge and practice of eight spiritual disciplines and spiritual formation in the image of Jesus. Specifically, this research includes (1) a demographic questionnaire, (2) a spiritual vitality survey taken on two occasions approximately five weeks apart, (3) a workbook consisting of twenty-eight days of readings about and practice of eight spiritual disciplines, and (4) a structured focus group that will be voice-recorded and transcribed verbatim. The results will be used to understand the ways in which individual spiritual formation is enhanced by participation in spiritual disciplines. Your participation will be anonymous. Any information that is obtained in connection with this study that could potentially be identified with an individual participant will be kept confidential through numeric coding, safeguarding the online data through password protection, and only permitting the researcher (and any assistant called in for expertise) to view the data. Six months after the successful defense of the dissertation, the data will be destroyed.

Your participation is voluntary. If you choose to participate, the timeline is as follows.

26 September to 30 September—Take online survey and fill out demographic questionnaire.

30 September—Receive workbook.

1 October to 28 October—Complete daily readings/practices from the workbook.

29 October to 31 October—Retake online survey.

1 November to 4 November—Participate in focus group.

No perceived risks are associated with this research study. However, as persons place themselves humbly before God as faithful disciples, God often produces change, which can be both beneficial and unsettling. There is no monetary benefit for participation in this research. You may experience the benefit of growing in your faith. The research may benefit the work of the church insofar as pastors and churches may be better informed about the connections between biblical spiritual disciplines and formation in the image of Christ.

Participation in this study is by choice. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequence. You may also refuse to answer any question and still remain part of this study. If you have questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact Baxter Hurley at 478-704-0000 or through e-mail at bhurley99@zzz.net. Thank you for considering participating in this study.

I understand the procedures described above. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

Printed Name of Participant

Signature of Participant

Date

APPENDIX E**SPIRITUAL VITALITY SURVEY 1**

1. What are the last four digits of your social security number, or any four digit number that you wish to use? Please remember this number for the next survey.

Response Count	Response %
34	100.0

2. How long have you been a member or attendee of Byron United Methodist Church?

	Response Count	Response %
18 months or less	2	5.9
1 to 3 years	10	29.4
4 to 7 years	4	11.8
8 to 10 years	3	8.8
11 or more years	15	44.1

3. Approximately how frequently did you attend Sunday morning worship at Byron UMC during the past 12 months?

	Response Count	Response %
Almost every Sunday	28	82.4
2 to 3 times per month	4	11.8
Once a month	1	2.9
Less than once a month	1	2.9

4. I most often attend the:

	Response Count	Response %
8:45 a.m. service	17	50.0
11:00 a.m. service	17	50.0

5. Approximately how often do you attend Sunday school, a weekly Bible study, or an accountability/prayer group?

	Response Count	Response %
Almost every week	25	73.5
2 or 3 times a month	4	11.8
Once a month	1	2.9
Less than once a month	1	2.9
Almost never	3	8.8

6. How many individuals or families have you personally invited to visit an activity, class, or worship service at Byron UMC in the past 12 months?

	Response Count	Response %
None	1	2.9
One	2	5.9
Two	13	38.2
Three	5	14.7
Four	4	11.8
Five or more	9	26.5

7. What is the highest level of education you have completed?

	Response Count	Response %
Less than high school graduate	0	—
High School/GED	3	8.8%
Some college, trade or vocational school	9	26.5
College degree	17	50.0
Post-graduate studies	5	14.7

8. Which category below includes your age?

	Response Count	Response %
39 or under	5	14.7
40s-50s	16	47.1
60 and older	13	38.2

9. What is your gender?

	Response Count	Response %
Male	13	38.2
Female	21	61.8

10. What is your marital status?

	Response Count	Response %
Single	0	—
Divorced	3	8.8
Widowed	3	8.8
Married	28	82.4

11. Which of the following categories best describes your employment status?

	Response Count	Response %
Retired	11	32.4
Employed part-time	2	5.9
Employed full-time	18	52.9
Full-time homemaker or student	1	2.9
Not currently employed	2	5.9

12. In what denomination were you raised? If you experienced more than one denomination, with which did you most identify?

	Response Count	Response %
Baptist	10	29.4
Disciples of Christ	1	2.9
Episcopalian	0	—
Lutheran	0	—
Methodist	13	38.2
Non-denominational	2	5.9
Pentecostal	1	2.9
Roman Catholic	5	14.7
United Church of Christ	0	—
Other	1	2.9
None	1	2.9

Other, non-Christian religion 0 —

13. I am in a loving, growing, vital relationship with God.

1. Strongly disagree	2. Disagree	3. Neutral	4. Agree	5. Strongly agree
— (0)	2.9% (1)	8.8% (3)	52.9% (18)	35.3% (12)

14. My Christian faith is more than a set of beliefs—it deeply affects my daily life.

1. Strongly disagree	2. Disagree	3. Neutral	4. Agree	5. Strongly agree
— (0)	2.9% (1)	2.9% (1)	50.0% (17)	44.1% (15)

15. I believe that I am moving forward in my Christian discipleship and, through the Holy Spirit, becoming more like Jesus.

1. Strongly disagree	2. Disagree	3. Neutral	4. Agree	5. Strongly agree
— (0)	2.9% (1)	23.5% (8)	61.8% (21)	11.8% (4)

16. The fruit of the Spirit (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control) is evident in my life.

1. Strongly disagree	2. Disagree	3. Neutral	4. Agree	5. Strongly agree
— (0)	2.9% (1)	20.6% (7)	64.7% (22)	11.8% (4)

17. I read my Bible regularly.

1. Strongly disagree	2. Disagree	3. Neutral	4. Agree	5. Strongly agree
2.9% (1)	17.6% (6)	17.6% (6)	38.2% (13)	23.5% (8)

18. When I read the Bible, I understand how it relates to my life.

1. Strongly disagree	2. Disagree	3. Neutral	4. Agree	5. Strongly agree
2.9% (1)	2.9% (1)	8.8% (3)	70.6% (24)	14.7% (5)

19. I regularly relate God's Word to everyday activities.

1. Strongly disagree	2. Disagree	3. Neutral	4. Agree	5. Strongly agree
— (0)	14.7% (5)	17.6% (6)	44.1% (15)	23.5% (8)

20. I allow God's Word to challenge my thoughts, attitudes, and practice.

1. Strongly disagree	2. Disagree	3. Neutral	4. Agree	5. Strongly agree
— (0)	5.9% (2)	14.7% (5)	52.9% (18)	26.5% (9)

21. I pray regularly, not including blessings before meals.

1. Strongly disagree	2. Disagree	3. Neutral	4. Agree	5. Strongly agree
— (0)	2.9% (1)	14.7% (5)	55.9% (19)	26.5% (9)

22. I understand the value of prayer as it relates to my daily discipleship.

1. Strongly disagree	2. Disagree	3. Neutral	4. Agree	5. Strongly agree
— (0)	2.9% (1)	17.6% (6)	41.2% (14)	38.2% (13)

23. I quickly confess anything in my life once I recognize that it doesn't align with the character of Christ.

1. Strongly disagree	2. Disagree	3. Neutral	4. Agree	5. Strongly agree
— (0)	8.8% (3)	29.4% (10)	41.2% (14)	20.6% (7)

24. When I pray, I believe God hears and brings results—by changing the outward things I'm praying about and/or by changing me according to his will.

1. Strongly disagree	2. Disagree	3. Neutral	4. Agree	5. Strongly agree
— (0)	2.9% (1)	20.6% (7)	41.2% (14)	35.3% (12)

25. I fast or practice self-denial as part of my spiritual discipline.

1. Strongly disagree	2. Disagree	3. Neutral	4. Agree	5. Strongly agree
11.8% (4)	35.3% (12)	35.3% (12)	17.6% (6)	— (0)

26. I understand how fasting and self-denial help me become more like Jesus.

1. Strongly disagree	2. Disagree	3. Neutral	4. Agree	5. Strongly agree
8.8% (3)	11.8% (4)	29.4% (10)	47.1% (16)	2.9% (1)

27. When I fast or engage in self-denial, my love for God increases.

1. Strongly disagree	2. Disagree	3. Neutral	4. Agree	5. Strongly agree
2.9% (1)	8.8% (3)	55.9% (19)	23.5% (8)	8.8% (3)

28. When I fast or engage in self-denial, I see things more clearly and find myself more readily in God's presence.

1. Strongly disagree	2. Disagree	3. Neutral	4. Agree	5. Strongly agree
2.9% (1)	8.8% (3)	50.0% (17)	29.4% (10)	8.8% (3)

29. I regularly withdraw from the noise and companionship of the world to be alone with God.

1. Strongly disagree	2. Disagree	3. Neutral	4. Agree	5. Strongly agree
— (0)	8.8% (3)	35.3% (12)	47.1% (16)	8.8% (3)

30. I understand the importance of spending time alone with God and how this time affects my spiritual development.

1. Strongly disagree	2. Disagree	3. Neutral	4. Agree	5. Strongly agree
— (0)	2.9% (1)	5.9% (2)	55.9% (19)	35.3% (12)

31. The time I spend alone with God leads to a deeper awareness/understanding of God and a clearer picture of myself.

1. Strongly disagree	2. Disagree	3. Neutral	4. Agree	5. Strongly agree
— (0)	— (0)	17.6% (6)	50.0% (17)	32.4% (11)

32. I see my time alone with God as opportunities for deep spiritual transformation.

1. Strongly disagree	2. Disagree	3. Neutral	4. Agree	5. Strongly agree
— (0)	— (0)	23.5% (8)	50.0% (17)	26.5% (9)

33. My life is marked by regular, heartfelt, informed worship of God.

1. Strongly disagree	2. Disagree	3. Neutral	4. Agree	5. Strongly agree
— (0)	5.9% (2)	1.8% (4)	52.9% (18)	29.4% (10)

34. I understand that worship is more than what we do at church on Sunday mornings.

1. Strongly disagree	2. Disagree	3. Neutral	4. Agree	5. Strongly agree
— (0)	— (0)	— (0)	50.0% (17)	50.0% (17)

35. I am able to praise God even during the difficult experiences of life.

1. Strongly disagree	2. Disagree	3. Neutral	4. Agree	5. Strongly agree
— (0)	2.9% (1)	2.9% (1)	61.8% (21)	32.4% (11)

36. How I live my life shows that God is my highest priority.

1. Strongly disagree	2. Disagree	3. Neutral	4. Agree	5. Strongly agree
— (0)	11.8% (4)	35.3% (12)	41.2% (14)	11.8% (4)

37. I give my time and talents to my church through regular service.

1. Strongly disagree	2. Disagree	3. Neutral	4. Agree	5. Strongly agree
2.9% (1)	5.9% (2)	20.6% (7)	55.9% (19)	14.7% (5)

38. I understand the connection between serving the church and growing in Christlikeness.

1. Strongly disagree	2. Disagree	3. Neutral	4. Agree	5. Strongly agree
— (0)	2.9% (1)	11.8% (4)	61.8% (21)	23.5% (8)

39. When I serve through the church, I feel connected to God and others.

1. Strongly disagree	2. Disagree	3. Neutral	4. Agree	5. Strongly agree
— (0)	— (0)	2.9% (1)	73.5% (25)	23.5% (8)

40. I discover a sense of purpose and fulfillment when I work in the church.

1. Strongly disagree	2. Disagree	3. Neutral	4. Agree	5. Strongly agree
— (0)	— (0)	5.9% (2)	67.6% (23)	26.5% (9)

41. I give a generous portion of my income to the work of God.

1. Strongly disagree	2. Disagree	3. Neutral	4. Agree	5. Strongly agree
— (0)	14.7% (5)	11.8% (4)	67.6% (23)	5.9% (2)

42. I understand the connections the Bible makes between stewardship and discipleship.

1. Strongly disagree	2. Disagree	3. Neutral	4. Agree	5. Strongly agree
— (0)	— (0)	14.7% (5)	64.7% (22)	20.6% (7)

43. When I am aware of persons in harder life situations than mine, I respond generously.

1. Strongly disagree	2. Disagree	3. Neutral	4. Agree	5. Strongly agree
— (0)	— (0)	26.5% (9)	58.8% (20)	14.7% (5)

44. I am more concerned about my spiritual welfare than my financial/material welfare.

1. Strongly disagree	2. Disagree	3. Neutral	4. Agree	5. Strongly agree
— (0)	— (0)	26.5% (9)	50.0% (17)	23.5% (8)

45. I have a community of Christian friends with whom I enjoy regular fellowship.

1. Strongly disagree	2. Disagree	3. Neutral	4. Agree	5. Strongly agree
— (0)	5.9% (2)	8.8% (3)	44.1% (15)	41.2% (14)

46. I understand the connection between Christian fellowship and discipleship.

1. Strongly disagree	2. Disagree	3. Neutral	4. Agree	5. Strongly agree
— (0)	5.9% (2)	.8% (3)	55.9% (19)	29.4% (10)

47. I feel truly known by and accountable to a small group of loving Christians.

1. Strongly disagree	2. Disagree	3. Neutral	4. Agree	5. Strongly agree
— (0)	23.5% (8)	17.6% (6)	35.3% (12)	23.5% (8)

48. I strive to love others as much as I love myself.

1. Strongly disagree	2. Disagree	3. Neutral	4. Agree	5. Strongly agree
— (0)	— (0)	14.7% (5)	52.9% (18)	32.4% (11)

APPENDIX F

SPIRITUAL VITALITY SURVEY 2

13. I am in a loving, growing, vital relationship with God.

1. Strongly disagree	2. Disagree	3. Neutral	4. Agree	5. Strongly agree
2.9% (1)	— (0)	— (0)	38.2% (13)	58.8% (20)

14. My Christian faith is more than a set of beliefs—it deeply affects my daily life.

1. Strongly disagree	2. Disagree	3. Neutral	4. Agree	5. Strongly agree
2.9% (1)	— (0)	— (0)	20.6% (7)	76.5% (26)

15. I believe that I am moving forward in my Christian discipleship and, through the Holy Spirit, becoming more like Jesus.

1. Strongly disagree	2. Disagree	3. Neutral	4. Agree	5. Strongly agree
— (0)	2.9% (1)	— (0)	44.1% (15)	52.9% (18)

16. The fruit of the Spirit (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control) is evident in my life.

1. Strongly disagree	2. Disagree	3. Neutral	4. Agree	5. Strongly agree
— (0)	— (0)	2.9% (1)	64.7% (22)	32.4% (11)

17. I read my Bible regularly.

1. Strongly disagree	2. Disagree	3. Neutral	4. Agree	5. Strongly agree
— (0)	— (0)	8.8% (3)	44.1% (15)	47.1% (16)

18. When I read the Bible, I understand how it relates to my life.

1. Strongly disagree	2. Disagree	3. Neutral	4. Agree	5. Strongly agree
— (0)	— (0)	2.9% (1)	55.9% (19)	41.2% (14)

19. I regularly relate God's Word to everyday activities.

1. Strongly disagree	2. Disagree	3. Neutral	4. Agree	5. Strongly agree
— (0)	— (0)	5.9% (2)	47.1% (16)	47.1% (16)

20. I allow God's Word to challenge my thoughts, attitudes, and practice.

1. Strongly disagree	2. Disagree	3. Neutral	4. Agree	5. Strongly agree
— (0)	— (0)	— (0)	38.2% (13)	61.8% (21)

21. I pray regularly, not including blessings before meals.

1. Strongly disagree	2. Disagree	3. Neutral	4. Agree	5. Strongly agree
— (0)	— (0)	— (0)	26.5% (9)	73.5% (25)

22. I understand the value of prayer as it relates to my daily discipleship.

1. Strongly disagree	2. Disagree	3. Neutral	4. Agree	5. Strongly agree
— (0)	— (0)	2.9% (1)	20.6% (7)	76.5% (26)

23. I quickly confess anything in my life once I recognize that it doesn't align with the character of Christ.

1. Strongly disagree	2. Disagree	3. Neutral	4. Agree	5. Strongly agree
— (0)	— (0)	11.8% (4)	41.2% (14)	47.1% (16)

24. When I pray, I believe God hears and brings results—by changing the outward things I'm praying about and/or by changing me according to his will.

1. Strongly disagree	2. Disagree	3. Neutral	4. Agree	5. Strongly agree
— (0)	— (0)	2.9% (1)	32.4% (11)	64.7% (22)

25. I fast or practice self-denial as part of my spiritual discipline.

1. Strongly disagree	2. Disagree	3. Neutral	4. Agree	5. Strongly agree
— (0)	20.6% (7)	35.3% (12)	35.3% (12)	8.8% (3)

26. I understand how fasting and self-denial help me become more like Jesus.

1. Strongly disagree	2. Disagree	3. Neutral	4. Agree	5. Strongly agree
— (0)	— (0)	20.6% (7)	55.9% (19)	23.5% (8)

27. When I fast or engage in self-denial, my love for God increases.

1. Strongly disagree	2. Disagree	3. Neutral	4. Agree	5. Strongly agree
— (0)	2.9% (1)	38.2% (13)	38.2% (13)	20.6% (7)

28. When I fast or engage in self-denial, I see things more clearly and find myself more readily in God's presence.

1. Strongly disagree	2. Disagree	3. Neutral	4. Agree	5. Strongly agree
— (0)	2.9% (1)	38.2% (13)	29.4% (10)	29.4% (10)

29. I regularly withdraw from the noise and companionship of the world to be alone with God.

1. Strongly disagree	2. Disagree	3. Neutral	4. Agree	5. Strongly agree
— (0)	— (0)	23.5% (8)	44.1% (15)	32.4% (11)

30. I understand the importance of spending time alone with God and how this time affects my spiritual development.

1. Strongly disagree	2. Disagree	3. Neutral	4. Agree	5. Strongly agree
— (0)	— (0)	— (0)	26.5% (9)	73.5% (25)

31. The time I spend alone with God leads to a deeper awareness/understanding of God and a clearer picture of myself.

1. Strongly disagree	2. Disagree	3. Neutral	4. Agree	5. Strongly agree
— (0)	— (0)	2.9% (1)	20.6% (7)	76.5% (26)

32. I see my time alone with God as opportunities for deep spiritual transformation.

1. Strongly disagree	2. Disagree	3. Neutral	4. Agree	5. Strongly agree
— (0)	— (0)	2.9% (1)	35.3% (12)	61.8% (21)

33. My life is marked by regular, heartfelt, informed worship of God.

1. Strongly disagree	2. Disagree	3. Neutral	4. Agree	5. Strongly agree
— (0)	— (0)	— (0)	44.1% (15)	55.9% (19)

34. I understand that worship is more than what we do at church on Sunday mornings.

1. Strongly disagree	2. Disagree	3. Neutral	4. Agree	5. Strongly agree
— (0)	— (0)	— (0)	8.8% (3)	91.2% (31)

35. I am able to praise God even during the difficult experiences of life.

1. Strongly disagree	2. Disagree	3. Neutral	4. Agree	5. Strongly agree
— (0)	— (0)	— (0)	47.1% (16)	52.9% (18)

36. How I live my life shows that God is my highest priority.

1. Strongly disagree	2. Disagree	3. Neutral	4. Agree	5. Strongly agree
— (0)	— (0)	11.8% (4)	52.9% (18)	35.3% (12)

37. I give my time and talents to my church through regular service.

1. Strongly disagree	2. Disagree	3. Neutral	4. Agree	5. Strongly agree
— (0)	— (0)	17.6% (6)	52.9% (18)	29.4% (10)

38. I understand the connection between serving the church and growing in Christlikeness.

1. Strongly disagree	2. Disagree	3. Neutral	4. Agree	5. Strongly agree
— (0)	— (0)	2.9% (1)	35.3% (12)	61.8% (21)

39. When I serve through the church, I feel connected to God and others.

1. Strongly disagree	2. Disagree	3. Neutral	4. Agree	5. Strongly agree
— (0)	— (0)	8.8% (3)	20.6% (7)	70.6% (24)

40. I discover a sense of purpose and fulfillment when I work in the church.

1. Strongly disagree	2. Disagree	3. Neutral	4. Agree	5. Strongly agree
— (0)	— (0)	5.9% (2)	41.2% (14)	52.9% (18)

41. I give a generous portion of my income to the work of God.

1. Strongly disagree	2. Disagree	3. Neutral	4. Agree	5. Strongly agree
— (0)	5.9% (2)	2.9% (1)	55.9% (19)	35.3% (12)

42. I understand the connections the Bible makes between stewardship and discipleship.

1. Strongly disagree	2. Disagree	3. Neutral	4. Agree	5. Strongly agree
— (0)	2.9% (1)	2.9% (1)	29.4% (10)	64.7% (22)

43. When I am aware of persons in harder life situations than mine, I respond generously.

1. Strongly disagree	2. Disagree	3. Neutral	4. Agree	5. Strongly agree
— (0)	— (0)	17.6% (6)	41.2% (14)	41.2% (14)

44. I am more concerned about my spiritual welfare than my financial/material welfare.

1. Strongly disagree	2. Disagree	3. Neutral	4. Agree	5. Strongly agree
— (0)	— (0)	11.8% (4)	35.3% (12)	52.9% (18)

45. I have a community of Christian friends with whom I enjoy regular fellowship.

1. Strongly disagree	2. Disagree	3. Neutral	4. Agree	5. Strongly agree
— (0)	5.9% (2)	2.9% (1)	35.3% (12)	55.9% (19)

46. I understand the connection between Christian fellowship and discipleship.

1. Strongly disagree	2. Disagree	3. Neutral	4. Agree	5. Strongly agree
— (0)	— (0)	— (0)	41.2% (14)	58.8% (20)

47. I feel truly known by and accountable to a small group of loving Christians.

1. Strongly disagree	2. Disagree	3. Neutral	4. Agree	5. Strongly agree
— (0)	8.8% (3)	8.8% (3)	35.3% (12)	47.1% (16)

48. I strive to love others as much as I love myself.

1. Strongly disagree	2. Disagree	3. Neutral	4. Agree	5. Strongly agree
— (0)	— (0)	2.9% (1)	41.2% (14)	55.9% (19)

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