

ABSTRACT

KNOWING AND LOVING GOD: A SPIRITUAL FORMATION JOURNEY

by

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Many contemporary Christians do not know Scripture well. They also have a limited understanding of the biblical mandate for Christians to be transformed into the image of Christ and the role spiritual disciplines have in spiritual transformation. Consequently, many Christians remain spiritually stagnant. They do not experience relational intimacy with the Trinity or grow spiritually and thus, fail to enter into God's mission for the church.

This research addresses spiritual formation to bridge the discrepancy between Christians' expressed desire to have a closer relationship with God and be spiritually more mature and their understanding of God-ordained spiritual practices. I gathered data from sixteen participants to measure spiritual formation in relation to biblical theology, holy love, and dispositional living before and after the intervention. I subsequently presented the elements that emerged from the literature review in a twelve-weekend-long spiritual formation workshop.

The findings suggest that many Christians recognize the importance of biblical knowledge in spiritual formation, but by their own admission are not content with their personal interaction with Scripture. A lack of understanding exists regarding the role of spiritual disciplines and the need for intentionally engaging in them on a Christian's journey toward Christlikeness. The intervention focusing on spiritual formation seemed to provoke the intention to be more diligent in both of these areas for the purpose of

personal spiritual growth and to be better equipped to share in God's mission for the church.

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A Spiritual Formation Journey

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by

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CHAPTER 1

Overview of the Chapter

Chapter 1 provides the framework for investigating spiritual formation in the life of practicing Christians who have expressed a desire to grow spiritually and develop a deeper relationship with God. The Autobiographical Introduction describes how I gained valuable insight into the spiritual lives of members of her congregation because of the intimacy and transparency she experienced serving as a prayer minister. While Scripture abounds with promises of a personal relationship with the Trinity and a transformed life for those who are in Christ, many believers do not know Scripture and remain spiritually immature. Consequently, they do not experience such intimacy. This observation inspired me to design a spiritual formation experience focusing on knowing and loving God while creating an environment in which to experience God's presence intimately through prayer.

I provided the rationale for the project evolving from personal experience supported by research. Included in Chapter 1 is a description of the research project, purpose statement, research questions, participants, and how I collected and analyzed the results. To further support my research, I identified themes in the literature review as well as contextual factors. Further discussion of the anticipated project results established the significance for impact on the practice of ministry.

Personal Introduction

For six years, I served as the full-time prayer coordinator of a United Methodist church with a large congregation. While I was mature in my faith with a strong personal prayer life, I had no previous experience in ministry and did not know what to expect

when I stepped into this role. The church had a well-established prayer ministry, naming “fervent prayer” as its number-one core value. I followed in the footsteps of several prayer warriors whom I respected and admired.

During the first few months, my time was spent familiarizing myself with the role of the prayer ministry, reflecting on the prayer needs of the individuals within the congregation, and evaluating to what extent those needs were being met. Multiple ways of receiving prayer existed, including in person and remotely during the week and on Sundays.

About four thousand people attended Sunday services. Despite the presence of two designated prayer partners in the sanctuary immediately after each service, typically no more than five or six people requested personal prayer on any given Sunday. The church received approximately two hundred additional written prayer requests per week by way of prayer cards from the bulletin, the online prayer wall, and via email. After assimilating the written prayer requests into a spreadsheet, a team of dedicated prayer partners and I prayed over them. Trusting the prompting of the Holy Spirit, I responded to some by phone or email throughout the week. As time passed, I became concerned by what I observed. Firstly, while many people were experiencing some hardship, life crises, or struggling with a deep emotional wound, as was evident from their written prayer requests, few availed themselves of the opportunity to receive prayer in person. Secondly, through their prayer requests and conversations with them during prayer times, it was apparent that many professing Christians felt inadequate about their own ability to pray and had minimal knowledge of the scriptural foundation for prayer and our position in Christ. Within six months, I concluded that the corporate practice of prayer in our church

as well as that of the majority of individuals whom I prayed with was anything but fervent. I was, however, encouraged that the leadership and many individuals with whom I spoke expressed a sincere desire to have a more intimate and fulfilling prayer life corporately as well as individually.

Ignorantly, I thought that this problem could be fixed simply by offering classes and workshops on prayer and by intentionally creating more time for corporate and altar prayer during Sunday services. I shared these thoughts with our leadership, who concurred with my observations. They committed to incorporating a greater emphasis on prayer during services, preaching on prayer more frequently, and encouraged me to proceed with training. Over the next two years the church scheduled quarterly nights of prayer and worship, multiple one-off classes on weeknights, and two eight-week studies on prayer. Much to my disappointment, all of these events were poorly attended by the target group, namely, prayer novices. With the odd exception, the only people who attended these events were the seasoned, faithful intercessors who needed no instruction but had an earnest desire to see the prayer ministry at our church restored to its former prominence. They never let an opportunity pass to support and encourage me in my efforts to create an environment where such growth could take place.

As prayer coordinator, I was given a unique opportunity to see into the lives of practicing Christians by being privy to the most intimate sharing of their struggles, pain, insecurities, fears, and needs during prayer. In time, I made a few observations that were deeply troubling and debunked any illusion I had about the spiritual resilience and scriptural knowledge of the average believer, if one could use such a term. While most Christians say they believe in prayer, they have a very limited understanding of the nature

and place of prayer and other spiritual disciplines in their Christian walk. Many feel inadequate in their own ability to pray and only pray occasionally. They long for a stronger personal prayer life, yet make little effort to learn more about prayer. They express a desire to have a closer relationship with God, yet spend little time getting to know him.

Over time, the cycle of offering classes that were poorly attended repeated itself with disheartening regularity, and I could relate well to the saying, “You can lead a horse to water, but you cannot make it drink.” Our corporate emphasis on prayer increased and decreased depending on the season and how many other events were vying for attention during service on Sunday mornings. With a heavy heart, I eventually resigned myself to the fact that, despite my desire and enthusiasm to help our members grow in their prayer life and experience intimacy with God through prayer, nothing had changed in three years of dedicated effort. I was perplexed and despondent.

After almost three years of going around in circles and failing to sustain a greater desire and enthusiasm for prayer in our church, I began to ask why so many Christians struggle with prayer and remain spiritually immature. I wondered why the church does not allow more time to teach on prayer and cultivate practicing this and other essential spiritual disciplines. One of my spiritual mentors suggested that I examine my walk with the Lord to see when and where my passion for prayer developed. I quickly recognized that for the first half of my life in Christ, despite my faith in the Trinity, despite regular church attendance, and despite my belief in the importance of prayer, I too had a superficial prayer life and did not experience the connection of a deep and intimate relationship with God. Upon reflection, I identified when and why my heart began to

change. About twenty-five years ago, I began to study the Word personally and was taught the inductive Bible study method. In the years that followed, the Lord revealed himself to me through Scripture, and I began to know his nature, attributes, and promises. Furthermore, I understood who I was in Christ and fell in love with the God whom I had been worshipping for twenty-five years. Secondly, during a crisis and the near-death of our daughter, I had a life-changing personal encounter with God. I am sure there were many moments where God intervened in my life before this; however, I recognized how my increased knowledge, awareness, and love for him allowed me to recognize his presence during this time of trial.

My desire to know him more intimately grew exponentially and resulted in an enduring, intimate relationship with God, which manifested itself in every aspect of my life. Most significantly, I appreciated the significance of my Christian identity and the responsibility of being a member of the body of Christ. Through prayer, God healed me from many emotional wounds. I began to see the necessity and power of prayer and other spiritual disciplines in our personal walk and ongoing sanctification. In time, I understood that our personal transformation is always for God's kingdom purposes and the continued formation of his bride, the church. Experience showed me that many believers did not know God and were stifled in their spiritual growth. Out of this grew a deep desire to help other believers discover the healing love of God, learn to pray, and grow spiritually. I sensed that the absence of meaningful prayer and a personal relationship with God, which so many Christians today express, was a reflection of a much bigger systemic problem within the church. Thousands of prayer requests and countless hours praying with people revealed the shocking spiritual superficiality of many contemporary

believers. Although they believe that Jesus died for their sins and that they have received the gift of salvation, they do not understand the full significance of the redemptive story, their new identity in Christ, and their ongoing journey of spiritual transformation into his image both as individuals and collectively as the body of Christ. I recognized how the lack of “knowing” God is one of the contributing factors to the superficial nature of their relationship with God and therefore an obstacle to loving him. When believers do not love him, they do not seek his presence through spiritual practices, which impedes their ongoing spiritual transformation. They do not grow into spiritually mature individuals and mistakenly expect the local church to fulfill all their spiritual needs.

While prayer and other spiritual practices are initially learned through biblical teaching and discipleship, according to the example Jesus set, they ought to become life-giving habits as Christians mature in their faith. They bring believers into God’s presence and help them grow in their knowledge and love for God. Fortified by knowledge of Scripture and nurtured by experiencing God’s transforming love through an intimate personal relationship with the Trinity, Christians engage in an ongoing transformational journey through a mysterious, supernatural partnership with the Holy Spirit and, as Paul says, “continue to work out our own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and act according to His purpose” (NASB, Phil. 2:12–13). Spiritual growth is not only essential for each believer, but it is vital to the body of Christ, the church. It enables Christians to reflect the image of Christ individually and corporately more accurately and to fulfill the purpose for which they were created.

Statement of the Problem

Many Christians do not know and love God, despite professing faith in him. While 75 percent of Christians say they believe the Bible is the Word of God, many believers in America have only a superficial knowledge of Scripture and how it relates to their everyday life. Pew Research Center conducted a study on Bible reading in 2014 and found that almost half of the Christians interviewed said that “reading the Bible or other religious materials is an integral part of what being Christian means to them personally” (Geiger). Among those who believe that reading the Bible is important, a survey done by the Barna Group in 2017 revealed that they “are not satisfied with their current level of Scripture reading. The majority—about six in 10 American Christians express a desire to read the Bible more than they currently do” (“State of the Bible 2017”). Because many practicing Christians do not know Scripture, they do not know the nature, attributes, and promises of God communicated to them through his Word. They do not know or love the God whom they worship; nor do they truly understand his all-encompassing, holy love for us. Sadly, this translates to the absence of an intimate, transformational relationship with the Trinity.

Many Christians do not understand their ongoing spiritual transformation. Contemporary Christians, writes M. Robert Mulholland, Jr., “tend to view the spiritual life as a static possession rather than a dynamic and ever developing growth toward wholeness in the image of Christ” (*Invitation to a Journey* 15). Consequently, relatively few practicing Christians intentionally participate in their spiritual development through observing the spiritual disciplines in any disciplined manner. They do not apprehend what spiritual disciplines are or appreciate the necessary growth toward spiritual

maturity. A survey on spirituality asked “practicing Christians” their “personal definition of what it means to be a healthy, spiritually mature follower of Jesus. One-fifth were able to offer an opinion” (Barna Group “Many Churchgoers and Faith Leaders...”). Believers expect the local church to fulfill all their spiritual needs; but according to the same Barna survey, pastors themselves are surprisingly vague about the concept and necessity for spiritual growth. “Most pastors struggle with feeling the relevance as well as articulating a specific set of objectives for spirituality, often favoring activities over attitudes”(Barna Group). The author of this study observes that there is truth in the adage, “You get what you measure,” which in the contemporary context is church attendance. When the standard for being a practicing Christian is church attendance once a month, and spiritual maturity is measured by church attendance, the current situation looks rather bleak.

While the spiritual disciplines are only a *means* to an end, they *are* the means to the *end*, and it is well-nigh impossible, as Paul says, “to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God” (Eph. 3:19) and to grow in our faith without searching Scripture, praying, worshipping in community, and partaking of the Lord’s Supper. Not only are many Christians personally disengaged in studying God’s Word and undevoted in prayer and other spiritual practices, but many churches are as well. To compete for Christian consumers, churches have to be relevant and contemporary. Bible preaching has been replaced with teaching topical messages, scantily undergirded by Scripture. Prayer has become a perfunctory exercise that bookends Sunday morning services; worship is timed; and the Lord’s Supper is only served occasionally.

Brad Harper and Paul Metzger make this poignant observation:

When churches focus on being vendors of religious goods and service providers to expectant consumers, churches tend to focus on doing what it takes to make sure their fellowships survive in the religious free market, where only the fittest survive. (43)

This is hardly adequate for spiritual transformation into Christlikeness both as individuals and as the body of Christ. In place of a life-transforming relationship with the living God and a deep enduring love for him, a void exists which the local church tries to fill with a flurry of activity. Therefore, both believers and non-believers see faith as impotent, unable to make a difference in their lives, and much expressed disappointment exists in the character of Christians and the Church as an institution. Dallas Willard comments on the experience of many modern Christians and writes, “What they have found, at least, does not ‘exceed all expectations,’ as the standard evaluation form says” (*The Divine Conspiracy* 86). Church pews are full of believers whose attitude toward their professed faith ranges from indifference to spiritually unfulfilled because they do not truly know God.

Purpose of the Project

The purpose of this research was to measure the spiritual formation in relation to biblical theology, holy love, and dispositional living among a group of practicing Christians desiring to deepen their relationship with God, who participated in a twelve-week spiritual formation workshop with an emphasis on knowing and loving God.

Research Questions

Research Question #1

What level of spiritual formation in relation to biblical theology, holy love, and dispositional living was identified among the practicing Christian adults who desired a deeper relationship with God before participating in a twelve-week spiritual formation workshop focused on knowing and loving God?

Research Question #2

What level of spiritual formation in relation to biblical theology, holy love, and dispositional living was identified among the practicing Christian adults who desired a deeper relationship with God after participating in a twelve-week spiritual formation workshop focused on knowing and loving God?

Research Question #3

What aspects of the spiritual formation workshop had the greatest impact on the observed changes in spiritual formation in relation to biblical theology, holy love, and dispositional living among practicing Christians who desired a deeper relationship with God and participated in a twelve-week spiritual formation workshop focused on knowing and loving God?

Rationale for the Project

Biblical Rationale

The Bible is the Word of God. Jesus says, “It is written, ‘Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God’” (Matt. 4:4). This and many other Bible verses clearly express God’s intention for Christians to know him through his Word, live by his Word, and fulfill his purposes communicated to us (John

5:39; 6:63; Thess. 2:13; 2 Tim. 2:15; Eph. 6:17; Heb. 4:12; 1 Pet. 1:25). Christians believe the Bible is one of the ways, if not the most significant way, through which God reveals himself and communicates with his followers. The psalmist says, “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (Ps. 119:105). The Bible is Christians’ manual, teaching them everything they need to know about loving God and living a God-honoring life. “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:16–17).

Yet, research shows that many Christians do not take Bible reading seriously. According to a Barna study, “Half of Americans are ‘Bible users’—that is, they engage with the Bible by reading, listening to or praying with the Bible on their own at least three to four times a year ” (“State of the Bible 2017”). Consequently, many Christians do not know the Word of God through which they are to be sanctified. “Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth” (John 17:17), and they do not understand the truths and practices that cultivate a loving relationship with God; they remain stagnant in their faith and do not grow in spiritual maturity. According to Peter, Christians are to “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ . . . ” (2 Pet. 3:18), and the primary way to grow is by engaging in the spiritual practices which Jesus taught them by example.

Paul says Christians are to “learn Christ” (Eph. 4:20). Christians primarily learn whom they are worshipping through the Bible. Through a deeper knowledge of biblical truth and the experiential knowledge of encountering him through spiritual practices, they begin to know God and feel his love, and their relationship with him matures. This loving

relationship is deeply personal and integral to God's plan for the church. As believers represent and reflect him to the world individually and corporately, they fulfill the mission he has for the church. Christians need to know his voice so that they will recognize it when he speaks.

Theological Rationale

Christ followers are not saved by knowledge, but “by grace, you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God” (Eph. 2:8). Clearly, their salvation is a gift and a supernatural experience, which changes their position in Christ. However, knowledge is essential to the ongoing spiritual formation of believers because it informs their thinking. “Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures” (Luke 24:45). Beth Felker Jones writes, “Theology is the discipline of learning from the Word of God . . . ” (14). Scriptural knowledge teaches Christians about God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, who exist in perfect relationship with one another and invite them to participate in this divine relationship.

As people learn and grow in their understanding intellectually, something simultaneously happens to their hearts, and their love for God and others begins to grow. Believers recognize the “depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God” (Rom. 11:33). Jones writes, “Theology, as the study of the things of God, a God who loves the world, is a discipline for all Christians. It is to be practiced with love, and, by God's grace, it can make the practitioner more loving” (11).

Theology teaches the doctrines that are foundational to the Christian faith. It helps believers think and articulate more clearly what they believe and why. It undergirds their faith, develops their relationship with God, and by the power of the Holy Spirit, helps

them understand God's design for his church. It strengthens the Christian witness to the world. Willard writes, "Every Christian must strive to arrive at beliefs about God that faithfully reflect the realities of his or her life experience, so that each may know how to live effectively before Him in this world" (*Divine Conspiracy* 25). Theological grounding produces transformed lives, which lead to action.

The moment Christians say yes to the call of Christ, their position in Christ changes; they are saved and become new creations. According to Scripture, salvation also sets into motion a transformational journey, progressively sanctifying Christians so that they might glorify God (John 17:17), do his will (Rom. 12:1–2), and reflect the image of Christ (Eph. 4:24). Culturally, they view this as an individual journey and spiritual formation as a private matter. However, they do not live in a vacuum, and every aspect of their life is influenced by their community. This is no truer for their social, educational, and economic development than it is for their spiritual growth. Adrian van Kaam and Susan Muto believe that contrary to cultural belief, "independent self-actualization is incompatible with the Christian Faith" (14). According to the authors, "[T]he processes by which we are being formed, reformed, and transformed ultimately by the grace of God" happen within the context of community (van Kaam and Muto 11).

Believers are also formed within the community of the Trinity. "Our spiritual formation is a gift from our Divine source to humanity" (van Kaam and Muto 14). Second Corinthians 3:18 says, "But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit." While Christians are participants in this transformation, God initiates it. Paul says, "[I]t is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work

for His good pleasure” (Phil. 2:13). Therefore, writes Jones, “we will learn in the power of the Holy Spirit, to be faithful bearers of the image of God, to be transformed body and soul into Christlikeness” (115).

Transformation is necessary for Christians to be the people God created them to be and, as Paul says, “to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called” (Eph. 4:1). Therefore, believers “learn Christ”; they “put off” the old person which is unbecoming of Christ; and “put on” the new man, which reflects his image; and they are “renewed in the spirit of our mind” (Eph. 4:20–24). Markus Barth comments that this process is “much more than rejuvenation or restoration of the first Adam” (508). New birth is required, and Paul has nothing less in mind than for Christians to be new creations (508). This renewal of the mind comes through knowledge of the truth as well as the work of the Holy Spirit in Christians. Their minds are renewed and their lives transformed ultimately by God’s grace. In his article on grace, Edward Collins Vacek argues “that fundamentally grace is an emotion, the emotion of love: God’s love for us, our love for God, and the mutual union that results” (37). According to the Bible, “God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us” (Rom. 5:5).

God’s holy love transforms the Christian. This kind of transformation leads to personal holiness and a deep, life-transforming love of God with our whole heart, soul, mind, and strength, and loving our neighbor as ourselves (Mark 12:30). Furthermore, as we mature spiritually, we understand that in this way we are part of God’s plan for his kingdom, and, writes Ruth Haley Barton, “[s]piritual [t]ransformation is the process by

which Christ is formed in us for the glory of God, for the abundance of our own lives and the sake of others” (12).

Ecclesiological Rationale

In our highly individualistic, egocentric Western culture, we have mistakenly indulged the notion that faith is only a private matter, something between the individual and God. Harper and Metzger write, “Today, the danger exists that people view the born-again experience in private, individualistic, and even consumerist terms” (40). This misconception fails to recognize an essential aspect of our communal faith and reduces the church to a gathering of individuals who profess faith in Christ or, worse, consider their Christian identity as something private, apart from being involved and participating in Christian community (42). While salvation is a deeply personal experience requiring each person to embrace the Lordship of Jesus Christ in response to God’s divine calling, it is also public, interpersonal, and communal (Harper and Metzger 41). John Stott says, “The Church lies at the very center of the eternal purpose of God. It is not a divine afterthought. It is not an accident of history” (19). Christians are the Church, created for fellowship with the Trinity and one another after the nature of God. They are instructed to function collectively as the body of Christ.

Stott says, “The Church is God’s new community” (19). The scriptural description of the church as the body of Christ is alive, organic, and communal. First Corinthians 12:12 says, “Just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ.” This image, says Jones, “disallows an individualistic faith, one that is self-centered and reads the whole of Christian doctrine through the lens of ‘I’” (196). Therefore, collectively, Christians are

the Church but also members of smaller groups and communities who gather across the world in a multitude of different ways as the local church. God calls and God saves for God's purpose. It is intrinsically a communal, relational affair meant to reflect the Trinity. Thomas C. Oden describes the Church as "a mystical extension of the incarnation and the glorified body of Christ" (713), and as such, "the Church acts as an instrument of Christ's will, mission, and work within the world" (709). The Church is integral to God's purpose. Christopher Wright notes in *The Mission of God's People*, "It is not so much the case that God has a mission for His Church in the world, as that God has a Church for His mission in the world" (24).

Definition of Key Terms

Biblical Theology. "It is the systematic, ordered, and reasoned interpretation and application of what the scripture reveals" (class notes).

Dispositional Living. "This is a set, loving, self-motivated way of life marked by faithfulness in the primary means of grace" (class notes).

Holy Love. "Holy Love is loving God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength, and loving our neighbor as ourselves. It is marked by a transformed life" (class notes).

Means of Grace. "The means of grace are the outward signs or actions which are ordained by God to be the ordinary channels whereby he might convey prevenient, justifying and sanctifying grace" (Collins and Vickers 70).

Spiritual Formation. "[T]he whole person in relationship with God, within the community of believers, growing in Christ likeness, reflected in a spirit directed, disciplined lifestyle, and demonstrated in redemptive action in our world" ([Tracy](#) 3).

Practicing Christians. “Practicing Christians are believers who identify themselves as Christians, who have said that their faith plays a significant role in their life and attend a church service at least once a month” (“Many Churchgoers and Faith Leaders Struggle to Define Spiritual Maturity”).

Delimitations

To be representative of most American Christian congregations, I intentionally chose to work with a group of twenty-four practicing Christian adults, both male and female, from the greater Houston area. This study was not aimed at new believers, rather those who have been Christians for several years and have spiritually matured to the point of expressing a desire to experience a more intimate relationship with God. All participants were regular attenders at their respective churches.

Review of Relevant Literature

I consulted and cited common literature/resources from biblical, theological, psychological, and social disciplines. Contributions from the following individuals added compelling insights to this project:

Scriptural and theological: Markus Barth, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Kenneth Collins, Phillip Greenslade, Keith Johnson, Beth Felker Jones, Catherine Mowry LaCugna, M. Robert Mulholland, Jr., Albert C. Outler, J. I. Packer and Kevin Vanhoozer, Eugene Peterson, Stephen Seamands, John Stott, Thomas A. Tarrants, A. W. Tozer, Dallas Willard, and Christopher J. H. Wright.

Psychological and social: Barna Group, Mark A. Maddix, Thomas Jay Oord, Pew Research (Geiger), and Adrian van Kaam.

Research Methodology

The intervention chosen for this study was a twelve-week spiritual formation workshop. Each session included teaching relevant material on aspects of spiritual formation and a group discussion reflecting on the material presented. Participants completed a pre- and post-intervention survey. During the first session, I provided participants with journals that contained a prompt for each week. I allowed them to take their journals home and asked them to journal weekly. Sixteen members of John Wesley Church in Houston, Texas, participated in the workshop.

At the end of the last session, eight participants met in a focus group to discuss the changes in their own knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors related to biblical knowledge, holy love, and dispositional living, as well as the efficacy of the workshop sessions and the content covered over the twelve-week period.

Type of Research

The nature of this project was an intervention. I applied a combination of research methodologies. I gathered information about self-described believers' spiritual formation in relation to biblical theology, holy love, and dispositional living before and after completing a twelve-week spiritual formation workshop, through both quantitative and qualitative instruments.

Participants

I invited self-described adult Christian men and women over the age of twenty-one who represented the body of Christ and desired to deepen their relationship with God to participate in the spiritual formation workshop to note and study their spiritual formation in relation to biblical theology, holy love, and dispositional living.

Instrumentation

1. I designed a spiritual formation quantitative and qualitative pre-survey and gathered responses on participants' spiritual formation in relation to biblical theology, holy love, and dispositional living that existed among the Christians adults who expressly desired a deeper relationship with God prior to participating in a twelve-week spiritual formation workshop focused on knowing and loving God.
2. I designed a spiritual formation quantitative and qualitative post-survey and gathered responses on participants' spiritual formation in relation to biblical theology, holy love, and dispositional living. The survey included several open-ended questions for participants to evaluate their experience and make suggestions for improvement.
 - (a) The researcher-designed spiritual formation participant journal questions. I included specific times for individual prayer and reflection as well as small group discussions during the workshop to encourage journaling and facilitate the processing of material presented during the sessions. I permitted participants to take their journals home and journal in their own time if they preferred.
3. I designed the post-intervention focus group.

The selected instrumentation corresponded to the three main research questions.

Research Question #1

What level of spiritual formation in relation to biblical theology, holy love, and dispositional living was identified among the practicing Christian adults who desired a deeper relationship with God before participating in a twelve-week spiritual formation workshop focused on knowing and loving God?

Research Question #2

What level of spiritual formation in relation to biblical theology, holy love, and dispositional living were identified among the practicing Christian adults who desired a deeper relationship with God after participating in a twelve-week spiritual formation workshop focused on knowing and loving God?

Research Question #3

What aspects of the spiritual formation workshop had the greatest impact on the observed changes in spiritual formation in relation to biblical theology, holy love, and dispositional living among practicing Christians who desired a deeper relationship with God and participated in a twelve-week spiritual formation workshop focused on knowing and loving God?

Data Collection

I utilized the following methods of collecting data for the Intervention Transformation Workshop:

- I utilized the following methods of collecting data for the Intervention

Spiritual Transformation Project:

- Quantitative and qualitative surveys before and after the spiritual formation workshop: I conducted the pre-survey two weeks prior to and the post-survey after the last session.
- Journaling and small group discussions (during the spiritual formation workshop): A portion of this study relied on providing adequate time for participants to respond to a journal prompt at the end of each session. I provided journals with preformulated questions to initiate responses to what they had learned during the spiritual formation workshop.
- A qualitative focus group convened one week after completion of the spiritual formation workshop to discuss the impact the study had on their lives. Participants who volunteered for the focus I encouraged to refer to their journals whenever necessary to accurately describe significant moments.

Data Analysis

The spiritual formation project was an intervention with both qualitative and quantitative research methods utilized. The pre- and post-event surveys provided statistical, quantitative information, including the mean and standard deviation. The journals and focus group contributed important qualitative information that guided the interpretation of the surveys.

I analyzed qualitative data collected through the journals and interviews by reading data in three varied ways: literal, interpretive, and reflexive. This helped to identify patterns, themes, and categories.

Generalizability

Although no context is the same as another, the participants in this study were representative of most White suburban churches within the US. Christians' desire for a meaningful relationship with God and their biblical call to an ongoing transformational process applies to all ages, languages, and cultures, making the work transferrable to other ministry settings.

Project Overview

This project outlines a twelve-week spiritual formation workshop for practicing Christian adults who desired a closer relationship with God. Chapter 2 engages the most influential writers and practitioners in the areas of spiritual formation. Chapter 3 outlines the various ways the researcher investigated her research questions. Chapter 4 analyzes the findings that emerge from such qualitative and quantitative methods as surveys, journaling, and focus groups. Chapter 5 outlines the study's major findings with implications for each discovery now and in the future.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW FOR THE PROJECT

Overview of the Chapter

Many contemporary Christians do not understand that knowing God and growing in a dynamic relationship with the Trinity are foundational to the Christian walk. While salvation and ongoing spiritual transformation are God's gifts of grace (Eph. 2:8–9; Phil. 2:13), Christians ought to be engaged in their spiritual development. By the renewing of their minds, followers of Jesus continuously grow in spiritual maturity and learn to reflect his image on earth by becoming more like Christ (Rom. 12:1–2). The instruction to “renew their minds” implies participation in the process of spiritual formation. The Christian journey toward Christlikeness is a pilgrimage, a “Faith-Journey” (*Long Obedience* 16). God has chosen primarily through Scripture to reveal himself to his people, teaching them who he is, who they are in Christ, and how they are to live in the light of their relationship with him.

The purpose of this chapter is to review literature pertaining to the biblical exhortation to know and love God and the spiritual formation that transpires when Christians begin to know and experience God through his Word and other spiritual disciplines. The chapter begins with a biblical foundation for knowing and loving God (Deut. 6:5; 8:3; 10:12; 11:1, 13, 22; 11:18–19; 13:3; 19:9; 30:6, 16, 20; Josh. 22:5; 23:11; Ps. 119:10, 11; Jer. 9:23–24; 31:33–34; Mark 12:33; John 17:3; 2 Pet. 3:18; 1 John 2:5; 4:10, 19; 5:3; 2 John 1:6; 2:5) and the biblical directive to be transformed by the renewing of the mind (Rom. 12:1–2; Eph. 4:20–23; Col. 3:2, 10, 16; 1 Cor. 2:16; 10:4–5; 2 Cor. 5:17). The second section of the review focuses on the theological foundations of

the study and touches on the doctrines of revelation, sanctification, and the *imago Dei*.

This is followed by a historical foundation for the primacy of Scripture.

Biblical Foundation

Different examples and passages highlighted in Scripture informed the biblical foundation of this research study. Given that the study focuses on knowing and loving God, the biblical foundation is based on these two biblical constructs.

Reasons for Knowing Scripture

Scripture tells the story of God's people. The Israelites first came to know God by experiencing him through his actions. The early followers of Jesus knew the story of God and their place in that story because they knew the Scriptures, which God gave them. Through this story, says Phillip Greenslade, "we are drawn into the action and find ourselves caught up in the saving moment of God . . . through believing the story, we allow our minds to be continuously renewed by the normative narrative of God" (42–43). Wright says they knew God because "knowledge and experience go together" (*Mission of God's People* 43). Through the Bible, God's people continue to receive the written and "experiential proof of His presence" (43). Like the early Christians, Christians today need to understand that the Bible is a story of God's mission. Moreover, says Wright, believers need to understand that their role in the story "is to participate in its last great act, as 'God's co-workers'" (37). Christians must know Scripture. Barbara E. Bowe notes that "[b]iblical spirituality grounds a person in the experience of the infinite God acting in and through history . . . our access to God is always a mediated one" (13). Understanding the story and their place and role in that story changes people as they grow in their knowledge and experience of God.

Christians learn about their faith through the Bible. As they become familiar with Scripture, God reveals his nature and character to them, and they begin to know whom they worship, learn to hear his voice, and trust him. “My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me” (John 10:27), says Jesus. J. I. Packer and Kevin J. Vanhoozer state that knowing God must surely be a precondition to trusting him (39). Paul asks, “But how can people call for help if they do not know whom to trust? And how can they know whom to trust if they have not heard of the one who can be trusted?” (MSG Rom. 10:14). Packer suggests that not knowing God through Scripture presents a major challenge:

Since humanity lives in the world God created we are cruel to ourselves if we try to live in this world without knowing about the God whose world it is and who runs it and disregarding the study of God is tantamount to stumbling through life blindfolded and without direction. (19)

Paul exhorts Christians, “So, then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling” (Phil. 2:12). Christians may learn much about God and Jesus from others, but one cannot to grow in the knowledge of God and Jesus Christ without personally learning what Scripture teaches about him and his will for humanity. Biblical knowledge is essential to knowing God.

God’s Word instructs his people on how to live and makes it clear that he requires obedience to his commandments. The psalmist did not only want to have theoretical knowledge about God but practical knowledge. “Blessed are they whose ways are blameless, who walk according to the law of the Lord. Blessed are they who keep his statutes” (Ps. 119:1–2, 5). He desired to know God’s truth, say Packer and Vanhoozer, “in order that his heart might respond to it and his life be conformed to it” (42). In the

Old Testament, God reveals, in detail, the way his people must live and which responses please him and which ones do not. However, says Willard, “salvation apart from obedience is unknown in the sacred Scriptures” (*Great Omission* 14). When Christians know Scripture, they know God’s nature and attributes, his commandments, and his promises. Therefore, they know how their hearts and lives should respond to him.

According to John Wesley, “The spirit of God not only once inspired those who wrote the Bible but continually inspires, supernaturally assists those that read it with earnest prayer” (qtd. in Lodahl 24). Reading the Scriptures, therefore, can be a vital coping resource for Christians. More specifically, the words of wisdom and encouragement and the promises of God contained in Scripture can facilitate the coping process of Christians during stressful events. Through Scripture, Christians can experience God’s presence and learn the promises of God that are able to comfort, strengthen, protect, and inspire hope. Many Christian religious traditions believe that developing a close relationship with God is an essential aspect of spiritual development. Peter C. Hill and Kenneth I. Pargament examined the correlation between closeness to God and spiritual struggles. They found that when participants felt “higher in closeness to God spiritual struggles were less strongly associated with depression and were no longer associated with loneliness” (67). Neal Krause concludes that this also extended to physical well-being (653–654). This echoes Wesley’s belief that God supernaturally assists believers through Scripture.

While God employs several means by which to reveal himself to Christians, Scripture is unique in this; it is his spoken Word to humanity. It is instructional, pragmatic, and ethical, yet it can nurture the greatest intimacy and love for God the

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Scripture is a treasured gift of grace and Christ followers should meditate on it “day and night” (Ps. 1:2–3) so that they may experience growth and fulfilment in their divine relationship with the living God.

Scripture and Knowing God

Knowing God is essential to the life of every believer. Wright maintains that the knowledge of God is one of the “truly immense themes of the Old Testament” and concludes that such knowledge, “Yahweh as God,” brings a much deeper perspective of the Bible as a whole (*Mission of God’s People* 18). God’s Word instructs his people on how to live and makes it clear that he requires obedience to his commandments. But spiritual knowledge goes beyond the intellectual. The psalmist did not only want to have theoretical knowledge about God but practical knowledge. “Blessed are they whose ways are blameless, who walk according to the law of the Lord. Blessed are they who keep his statutes” (Ps. 119:1–2, 5). He desired to know God’s truth, say Packer and Vanhoozer, “in order that his heart might respond to it and his life be conformed to it” (42).

In the Old Testament, God reveals the way his people must live and which responses please him and which do not. Psalm 119 tells us that those who live according to God’s will and seek him are blessed. Those who do not are cursed (Deut. 28:15). Scripture teaches that humankind’s salvation comes by grace through faith in Christ Jesus and not by efforts or works (Eph. 2:8–9). Therefore, God loves, forgives, and saves people not because of who they are or what they do but because of Christ and what he did. Tozer concludes that knowing God is fundamental to “practical living” (2). Tony Evans states that “Scripture is spiritual food essential for knowing God better,

experiencing God deeper and loving God more” (121). Without sound knowledge of Scripture, life-changing biblical truths remain hidden to the believer.

Throughout the Old Testament, readers encounter characters who knew God, whose lives radically changed because of this knowledge, and who continued to grow in their desire to know him. Moses cries out to God, “If I have found favor in your sight, let me know your ways that I may know you, so that I may find favor in your sight” (Exod. 33:13). The Psalms speak of King David and his longing for a deep and meaningful relationship with God. “God, you are my God; I shall seek You earnestly; My soul thirsts for You, my flesh yearns for You, in a dry and weary land where there is no water” (Ps. 63:1), and, “[A]s the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul longs after You” (Ps. 42:1). Referencing Hosea, Packer and Vanhoozer observe that “of all the states God ever sees men in, knowledge of Himself gives God most pleasure. . . . For I delight in loyalty rather than sacrifice and in the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings” (33). God delights in humankind’s knowledge of himself. Ever since God began to reveal himself through his written words, his people have made scriptural knowledge central to worshipping him. Scripture demonstrates that, like King David, God’s people long to know him and that God wants to be known.

As extraordinary as the Old Testament characters were, the Bible is clear that a deep and intimate knowledge of God is not intended for a few chosen and inspired characters (Tarrants 12). The New Testament regularly references the importance of God’s words. The Bible is God’s gift to humankind so that they might come to know him as he is revealed and speaks to the heart of humankind through divinely inspired words.

Humankind's desire to know God comes from God himself: "I will give them a heart to know me, for I am the Lord; And they will be my people, and I will be their God, for they will return to me with their whole heart" (Jer. 24:7). Paul writes, "This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. 2:3–4). Expounding on this truth, Tozer penned an entire book and says: "We pursue God because, and only because He has first put an urge within humankind that spurs us to the pursuit" (*Pursuit of God* 11), and in Jesus's own words, "[N]o one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws Him . . ." (John 6:44). In his sermon, "On Working out Our Own Salvation," Wesley calls this desire to know God "prevenient grace" (Wesley 62). He describes it as "including the first wish to please God, the first dawn of light concerning His will, and the first slight, transient conviction of having sinned against Him" (Outler 199). God places within his people a longing for him, and he beckons humankind to respond.

John Calvin says, "As experience shows, God has sown a seed of religion in all men . . ." (1.3.1; cf. Ps. 1:3). God prompts humankind with a desire to know him. By God's grace and mercy, those who want to know him will have the desire of their heart. He hears those who call out to him and answers the prayers of those who search for him. "You will seek me and find me when you search for me with all your heart" (Jer. 29:13). Jesus confirms this statement:

Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; And to the one who knocks, the door will be opened (Matt. 7:7–8).

Not only can humankind know God, but God has also gone to great lengths so that they might know him and have a personal relationship with him. Wright states,

[T]he Bible insists throughout that the living God of whom it speaks not only can be known but wills to be known. And far from leaving it up to us to get to know him through some game of religious hide and seek, God takes the initiative in revealing himself to mankind. (*Knowing God the Father* 47)

Knowing God requires the believer to enter into a scripturally informed experience. This marvelous anthology of books and letters called the Bible. It is for divine transformation, not intellectual or “small-self” coziness (Rohr 6). He is a God of words who spoke creation into existence and continues to speak through Scripture (Jones 33).

Scripture and Loving God

The love for God is inextricably bound to knowing him. The Bible links these two biblical constructs in Deuteronomy 6:4–9, which states:

Hear, Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one! And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. And you shall repeat them diligently to your sons and speak of them when you sit in your house, when you walk on the road, when you lie down, and when you get up. You shall also tie them as a sign to your hand, and they shall be as frontlets on your forehead. You shall also write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

Through these words, God declares that he is the only God and that he is personal. He demands that his people love him with every aspect of their being by having his words on their hearts, teaching it to their children diligently, talking about them day and night, and

openly displaying their devotion for all to see. These instructions are reiterated throughout the Bible.

The prophet Jeremiah says God calls humanity to know and love him and “delights” in their knowledge of him, “[f]or I delight in these things, declares the Lord” (Jer. 9:23–24). In Deuteronomy 6:5, God commands them: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.” The Old Testament connects knowing him with obedience and his consequential love for them. “Know therefore that the Lord your God, He is God, the faithful God, who keeps His covenant and His loving kindness to a thousand generations with those who love Him and keep His commandments” (Deut. 7:9), and, “[Y]ou shall therefore love the Lord your God, and always keep His charge, His statute, His ordinances, and His commandments” (Deut. 11:1). This message continues into the New Testament.

Jesus says, “[W]hoever has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me. The one who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and reveal Myself to him” (John 14:12), thereby declaring that knowledge, obedience, and love are all connected. When a lawyer asks Jesus what to do to inherit eternal life, Jesus confirms that the commandment to love God is the key to life. “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself. Do this and you will live” (Luke 10:27–28).

Scripture describes God’s profound love for his children as an outpouring of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 5:5), who testifies to their spirit that those who are in Christ are his children (Seamands 61). This knowledge is vital to the Christian’s relationship with God. Jesus was firmly grounded in his knowledge of God’s love and affection for him. Stephen

A. Seamands suggests that Jesus never sought to establish his worth through what he did in ministry, “[I]t was rooted in his confidence in his belovedness” (63). Willard and Johnson conclude that Christians acquire such life-giving knowledge of the love of God from Scripture (*Hearing God* 17). Sound knowledge of Scripture is formational and is of primary importance in the Christian walk; however, knowledge is not an end in itself, and scriptural knowledge is not the ultimate goal. The ultimate goal for studying Scripture is an “encounter with living God as He has revealed Himself in Christ through the personal presence of the Holy Spirit” and an ongoing relationship with the living Word (Leclerc and Maddix 19).

In terms of love, Wesleyan theology views love as devoid of self-interest. Love is considered in Wesleyan theology as the ultimate theological and ethical experience, enjoying supremacy in the Bible (Oord 144). Compared to other theologians, Wesley puts primacy in the love of God. According to Wesley, God communicates his holy love for humankind through the Holy Spirit, and “without it, none can enter into glory” (Collins 22). This emphasis is often reflected in the practices of Wesleyan theology rooted in love, which Wesley considered the true heart of religion (144).

Accepting Christ in response to the prompting of the Holy Spirit is the beginning of a loving relationship with the Trinity. Relationships need to be nurtured for them to grow. Knowing God through Scripture is one of the ways believers learn to love him. John 3:16 is probably the first Bible verse every Christian is introduced to (Kelly). It simply states a profound scriptural truth. Christ followers love God in response to his great love for them; they love him because he loved them first.

Theological Foundation

Revelation and Scripture

God reveals himself to humankind both generally and specifically in various ways. Jones says he is a revealing God who wants to be known (32). Two categories of revelation exist: general revelation and special revelation. Gilbert B. Weaver notes that special revelation “implies an active self-disclosure by God in contrast to the passive nature of general revelation, which must be gained by an effort on the part of man” (16). Since God is infinite, humankind’s finiteness is an obstacle to knowing God, and they cannot know or be in fellowship with him unless he reveals himself (Erickson 34). Calvin explains that “we are creatures who learn through our senses, through materiality, and we are creatures who dwell in history, in time and space” (1.13.1). Therefore, God chose to reveal himself to humankind in several ways, through general and special revelation.

General revelation refers to God revealed in creation and nature. As the psalmist says, “[T]he heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament proclaims His handiwork” (Ps. 19), and, “By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and all their host by the breath of his mouth. . . . For He spoke, and it came to be, He commanded, and it stood firm” (Ps. 33:6, 9). The apostle Paul talks about the human conscience as “bearing witness” (Rom. 1:19–20) and instinctively doing what the law requires (Rom. 2:14–15). General revelation is available to all. Special revelation is considered God’s revelation specifically to his people. Jones notes that most Christians accept both kinds of revelation “in a relationship of ongoing continuity” where one builds on the other and serves to strengthen faith (37). God’s grace “pulls back the veil” and discloses the Lord in

creation and through his Word (38). Scripture is a gift precisely because without it, humankind would not be able to know God as he desires to be known (39).

Special revelation stands in direct contrast to general revelation in that it is not automatically available to everyone (Jones 34), but comes through the Word and Christian tradition. In contrast to the “universality” of general revelation, special revelation is particularly given to God’s people (Weaver 17). Christians refer to special revelation as “the Word of God,” which is God’s revelation of himself specifically in “the history of Israel and the incarnation of Jesus Christ” (34). Wright comments, “[F]ar from leaving it up to us to get to know Him through some game of religious hide and seek, this God takes the initiative in revealing Himself to us. God can be known because He has spoken” (*Knowing God the Father* 55).

Our relationship with God is structured around words (Johnson 88). Numerous instances exist in the Bible when God speaks and people hear him. Keith L. Johnson says that God’s people “interpreted their entire relationship with Him through the lens of their reception of words from Him” (89). Believers read in Genesis, “One does not live by bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord” (8:3). God speaks to Adam and Eve (Gen 2:16), and they speak to him. Beginning with Abraham, God’s covenant with his people is communicated with words they understand and are expected to obey (Johnson 88). “When the Lord saw Moses coming near the burning bush, He called him by name, and Moses answered, ‘Here I am’” (Gen. 3:4). “The word of the Lord came to Jonah” (Jon. 3:2), and God speaks to Jeremiah, “Then the Lord stretched out His hand and touched my mouth, and the Lord said to me, ‘Behold, I have put My words in your mouth’” (Jer. 1:9). Johnson says it makes sense,

from a practical and a theological point of view, that God would leave his followers with a written record of what he said and did so that each generation has access to it, and Scripture serves as revelation of God in history (Jones 92; Wiley and Culbertson 1:139). Practically speaking, Calvin observes that humankind is so quick to forget and so easily led astray that God knew “heavenly doctrine” had to be written down so that it would not “perish through forgetfulness, or be lost through error, or be corrupted by the impudence of men” (1.6.1). God’s written Word transcends time, culture, and language. Stott writes that it provides continuity of the “apostolic doctrine,” and Christians have access to the same teaching as the early Christians (*Living Church* 25).

Philip Jenkins remarks on the impact Bible translation has had on the globalization of Christianity. Whereas Christianity was, for centuries, perceived by many as the White man’s religion, “[a] translated Bible defies conventional images of missionary imperialism. Once the Bible is in a vernacular, it becomes the property of that people; reading this book opens the door to real inner power. It is the Word of God” (24–25). Accounting for our human limitations, his Word is a constant reminder to teach the truths preserved there into our children so that they may know the Lord (Deut. 31:13).

Scripture fulfills an important theological purpose, says Jones, in that it merges “God’s diverse and particular acts of grace from across salvation history into a single story so that we are better able to see how all of God’s actions fit within God’s divine plan” (92). Regarding Scripture being inspired, Scott Swain says,

God used His chosen people, equipped by the circumstances of the entire order of creation and history that God Himself has directed, to speak on God’s behalf in accordance with God’s will, so that their words are His own divine speech. (67)

They were inspired by the Holy Spirit, and in the words of Wesley, “The spirit of God not only once inspired those who wrote the Bible, but continually inspires, supernaturally assists those that read it with earnest prayer” (qtd. in Lodahl 24). The Holy Spirit’s illuminating power continues this ongoing act of revelation in that he crosses time and space to help his people understand Scripture and calls them out of their sinful self and transforms them into the image of Christ (Jones 43).

By grace, God chose to reveal himself to all of humanity, in general, through creation and an inherent understanding of his laws, and specifically, to his people through the Bible and Christian tradition.

Image of God (Trinity—Relational)

Understanding the *imago Dei* changes people. From the very beginning, the Bible associates human wholeness with the image of God (Barton 20). Knowing whom they worship and seeing themselves the way God sees them impacts their relationship with the Trinity. They experience the love of God, grow spiritually, and become better image-bearers. “Human beings is [sic] not something that we are, it is something we become during our relationship with God” (Jones 115). In the words of Tozer, “You and I are in little (our sins accepted) what God is in large. Being made in his image we have within us the capacity to know Him” (*Pursuit of God* 14).

In his account of God’s creation, the author of Genesis writes, “[T]hen God said, ‘Let Us make mankind in Our image, according to Our likeness . . . ’” (Gen 1:26), and, “Whoever sheds human blood, by man his blood shall be shed, for in the image of God He made mankind” (Gen. 9:6). Humankind is created in the image of God, they are not

simply the most highly developed creatures in creation but the only God-like creatures in all of creation.

It is said only about man—not about any other creature—that he or she has been made in the image of God. To be made in the image of God, therefore, must be an indication of what is unique about humankind. (Hoekema 6).

Christians understand at once that man is a creature and therefore under God yet created, “made in the image of God” and therefore more than other creatures (Hoekema 6). D. J. A. Clines says this “godlikeness” of mankind confirms dignity on them and “elevates them to the highest status conceivable, short of divinization” (53). There is no systematic doctrine in the Bible of what the *imago Dei* includes.

While believers cannot know exactly what it means to be made in the image of God, says Clines, one “essential meaning” is that man is somehow like God (54). For mankind to understand themselves, they will need to know how they resemble the image of God. Van Kaam and Muto conclude that mankind is a “human Epiphany” of the Creator (13). The Christian’s perception of identity requires grasping what it means to be made in the image of God (Jones 105). The authors add,

We are little words in the Divine Word. We have been granted the unspeakable privilege of being given a share in the sacred potency to speak, to announce, to herald, to prophesize, and to be bearers of the Good News to all nations. (Kaam and Muto 12)

The primary source for humankind to learn the nature and attributes of God as well as how God created mankind in his image is through a sound knowledge of Scripture.

Finally, the image of God refers to our nature as relational creatures. Jones says, When Christian theologians talk about human beings, we do so in terms of our relationship to God. This means that humans are not center stage in our own story: even here, perhaps especially here, the story is about God first and only then about us. (97)

Sound knowledge of the Word leads to a better understanding of Greater understanding and appreciation for whom

Christian doctrine teaches that Christians worship a triune God. Greg Ogden says that while they cannot completely comprehend the nature of God, he is the one eternal God who exists as three persons (66). “From all eternity, God was a being in fellowship. God is His own community, self-existent, and self-sufficient” (68). There has always been a loving relationship between God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Jones believes that the mention of humankind being made “male and female” in Genesis 1:27 suggests that reflecting the image of God includes “being in loving relationships with others” and with him (106). LaCugna explains that the “ultimate purpose” of the trinitarian doctrine is that God’s people would have an expanded understanding of the nature of God (228).

Wesley, in his sermon “The Image of God,” defines the *imago Dei* as “righteousness and holiness,” which was “free grace . . . that stamped on that soul the image of God” (Wesley 1). Wesley gives insight into the nature of Adam and Eve and their relationship with God before the fall. He made four observations. First, man had perfect understanding and saw everything as it was. He was just and, like God, knew right from wrong. Second, even more significant than this, humankind had perfect will and was filled with love for each other and God. Thirdly, they were free to choose whatever they wanted to do; and finally, the consequence of his perfect understanding, perfect will, and complete freedom was happiness (Wesley, “Image of God” 1). The significance of this insight is that it shows Christians what humankind can become through the restored image offered to humanity by Christ’s life, death, and resurrection. Understanding that humankind is recreated in the image of Christ is essential to the process of sanctification and spiritual formation. Jones states,

The image is something we receive in Christ. It means that we are no longer clothed with our sinful nature but with the human nature of Jesus . . . this is what it means to be made in the image of God (Gal. 3:27; Jones 115).

According to David H. Kelsey, the image of God is not what but who: “Who is the image? The answer is Jesus Christ” (2: 1932). Therefore, concludes Jones, people are becoming human beings as they live in relationship with God, the Trinity (116).

The image of God is a complex doctrine and includes spiritual, functional, and relational aspects, which all have implications for the way Christians perceive God, themselves, and the purpose of their existence. Humankind begin to understand, comments Packer, that God knows them. “It is a knowledge that implies personal affection, redeeming action, covenant faithfulness and providential watchfulness toward those whom God knows” (41). While Christians must know God and realize that “for some unfathomable reason, He wants me as His friend, and He knows me” (42). Only in Scripture do people discover whom they were created to be.

Sanctifying Grace

“Sanctification,” in general terms, refers to the whole act of transformation in people’s lives, through the power of the Holy Spirit, from the moment they are born again. The purpose of Christian transformation is to restore the image of God and make Christians more like Jesus (Bounds 35). Jesus prays for his disciples in John 17:17, “[S]anctify them by the truth your word is truth.” This process begins with justification. According to the New Testament, mankind can have a right relationship with God the Father through faith in Jesus Christ, who was crucified for everyone’s sins and raised from the dead for their justification (Toon 20). In contrast to Old Testament teaching on righteousness earned through obedience to the law, the apostle Paul communicates

beyond doubt that justification is tied to the cross and is a gracious gift from God (Rom. 3:22–24). Those who affirm Jesus Christ as Lord become right with God as Christ's righteousness is imputed to them (2 Cor. 5:21). This justification is an act of free grace that pardons sinners and accepts them as righteous. Martin Luther calls it the "joyful Exchange" (Francisco). The believer is redeemed from his sin nature and born again as a new creation in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). God's gift of justifying grace changes the Christian's position before him and sets the Christian on a journey toward holiness.

Holiness and love are crucial themes in Christian growth. Oden states that "holiness is integral to the life of prayer, familiar to all who worship" (655). Wesley connects the love of God and justification. He believes that "the essence of justifying faith" is the love of God and, similarly, that the love of God is also the wellspring of Christian holiness or sanctification (Collins 9). Wesley refers to this as "sanctifying grace." Sanctifying grace, says Oden, "is the culminating phase of the Christian teaching on salvation. . . . It is by means of sanctifying grace that the moral disposition is being transformed and Christians are sanctified (655). Vacek maintains that if Christians cannot experience God's love in one way or another, their lives will not be transformed, and he cites 1 John 4:8, 12: "God is love . . . God lives in us, and His love is perfected in us" (1). This lifelong journey toward holiness is driven by God's holy love expressed through sanctifying grace and empowered by the indwelling Holy Spirit.

The major Christian traditions have similarities as well as differences about the nature of divine grace, human cooperation in sanctification, and the relationship between the two (Bounds 35). Protestantism seems have a broad consensus on initial and progressive sanctification but not on the subject of entire sanctification (35). Both

Wesleyan and other denominations have adopted various Wesleyan models. On the most optimistic side, some hold that believers can be entirely sanctified at the moment of conversion. Whether by grace or “uncorrupted free will,” each believer is inherently capable of the faith required for entire sanctification (35). This is traditionally referred to as the “shorter way.” Christopher T. Bounds describes it as a “synergism in which the work of consecration and faith by a Christian is met immediately with deliverance from the inner propensity to sin by the Holy Spirit” (37). It distinguishes between Christian maturity and entire sanctification and teaches that one can have the inherent capacity for entire sanctification but not the Christian maturity to achieve it.

Proponents of the “middle way” believe that the believers need more grace than is available at conversion to achieve entire sanctification. Rather, Christians receive the gift of prevenient grace to which additional grace must be added “in order to make possible the creation of faith necessary to appropriate entire sanctification” (Wesley, “Means of Grace” 70). Through participation in the means of grace, believers can choose to cooperate in their sanctifying journey and are capable of entire sanctification during moments when God’s grace puts such faith in their hearts through the means of grace (Wesley, “Scripture Way of Salvation” 581). Referring to “progressive sanctification,” Steve DeNeff describes it as “a daily growing in grace” and infer that more grace is given to the believer, which enables total surrender to Christ and faith for entire sanctification (125–37). Thus, it is not as simple as the “shorter way” but also not as difficult as “the longer way.”

Unlike the first two positions, “[t]he longer way” embraces Wesley’s teaching that Christians most often reach entire sanctification or “Christian Perfection” only after a

lifetime of spiritual growth (Bounds 38). While some might accomplish entire sanctification during their lifetime, most will arrive there before they die “or at the point of glorification” (39). This level of perfection can only be achieved through progressive spiritual growth and maturity (Oden 226–57; Maddox 176–90).

The Reformed position on entire sanctification holds that it is not attainable by mankind as a consequence of original sin. The Westminster Larger Catechism states that “no man is able either in himself or by any grace received in this life, perfectly to keep the commandments of God, but doth daily break them in thought word and deed” (Westminster Assembly ans. 149). While entire sanctification is unachievable, it should be the goal of the Christian’s spiritual life (Bounds 40). Humanity will always fall short of God’s perfect will, but Christians do grow spiritually by God’s grace and the power of the Holy Spirit who indwells them (Packer).

The most pessimistic position on holiness holds that righteousness is imputed to the believer at conversion. Mankind’s sinfulness is covered by the redemptive work of Christ and, as such, hidden from God, who only sees the holiness of Jesus and not the individual. This teaching neglects the concept of imparted righteousness and progressive spiritual development made possible by God’s gift of sanctifying grace. Salvation is seen as a “ticket to heaven.” Bounds notes that this view is supported by some contemporary evangelicals (41). Although this may not be what contemporary Protestant churches teach, Willard asserts that within the reformed tradition and indeed most of American Protestant Christianity, the scriptural teaching on personal salvation, which emphasizes the need for repentance and transformation into the image of Christ, has become little more than a pronouncement of forgiveness and assurance of eternal life (*Divine*

Conspiracy 1–60). However, justification is not the “summit” but the foundation, the place where the journey with Christ begins (Oden 584), and it calls for “a continuing reception of grace by which sin is gradually uprooted” (590). Thus, having been justified by grace and having Christ’s righteousness imputed to every Christian, the Christ follower begins his journey toward Christlikeness through the gift of sanctifying grace.

Despite differences about the extent to which believers can be sanctified while on earth, sanctification is a requirement. Jesus says, “[S]anctify them by the truth: your Word is truth (John 17:17). David Powlison says the moment of conversion is the start of a long salvation. “It is the birth that leads to a lifetime of growing up into Jesus’s image. Sanctification is discipleship into His way of life” (49). This process involves both the work of the Holy Spirit and individual effort (2 Cor. 3:18; Phil. 2:12–13). Through the power of the Holy Spirit, say van Kaam and Muto, Christians are “inspired to express with our whole being the gift of the unique-communal Christ-form we received at baptism” (14). The “pride-form” is replaced by a “Christ-form,” through the indwelling and work of the Holy Spirit. Humanity is not defined by sin but by Jesus. Our Christ-form is “made complete when we become like Him” (1 John 3:2), remade in the image of his perfect humanity (Jones 114). Jones concludes, “In the truest sense, we are what we are becoming in and through Christ” (115). Sanctification is not an option; Christians must grow into the redeemed people they were created to be. The apostle Paul explains that the process whereby believers become like Christ involves teaching and learning:

You were taught to put away your former way of life, your old self, corrupt and deluded by its lusts, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to clothe yourself with the new self, created according to the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness. (Eph. 4:22–24)

Further:

But you did not learn Christ in this way, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him, just as truth is in Jesus, that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth. (Eph. 4:20–24)

At this point in Ephesians, Paul is “describing the new standards which are expected of God’s new society . . . one people . . . must cultivate unity . . . and a holy people . . . must cultivate purity” (Stott 174). This passage exhorts believers to “walk worthy of the calling with which you have been called” and highlights the importance of right thinking, which follows conversion and leads to right living. Stott notes the following, “What is immediately noteworthy is the apostle’s emphasis on the intellectual factor in everybody’s way of life” (174). Both here and in Romans 1:21–22, Paul points out that futile thinking leads to darkness and alienation from God, resulting in sinful living. Futility is translated as meaningless. Paul is saying their thinking is meaningless, which leads to their understanding being darkened, separating them from God and hardening their hearts.

The word *porosis*, translated as “hardness,” meaning “petrification,” is used. Barth argues that although the mere reference to ignorance often implies a mitigating circumstance in the Bible, “ignorance . . . in the religious sense, is almost always equal to sin . . . as it amounts to suppressing the truth by unrighteousness in flagrant repudiation of God’s revelation, rendering it inexcusable and ungrateful” (501). The consequences of not growing spiritually are devastating. John Brown says the “hardening of the heart is similar to a veil which prevents a non-believer from seeing God” (7). It leads to spiritual blindness and moral unresponsiveness to God.

Believers are expected to be different because they have “learned” Christ and know the truth is in him (Eph. 4:20–21). Paul knows this congregation has been well-schooled in Christ. Essentially, he is saying: Do not walk as you used to when you did not know Christ; but now that you know better, do better. Paul reminds them that they have been schooled in Christ and that their eyes and hearts have been opened. “I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened so that you will know what the hope of His calling is, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints” (Eph. 1:18). Therefore, stop behavior that is unbecoming of Christ and start behaving in such a way that reflects a new image as a follower of Christ and learn to think differently. It is “much more than rejuvenation or restoration of the first Adam” (Barth 508). New birth is required, and Paul has “nothing less than a new creation in mind” (508). This renewal of the mind comes through understanding truth as revealed in Scripture and the work of the Holy Spirit in Christians.

Paul argues that “the path to right-thinking (and hence to right living) is via the school of Messiah” (Brown 7). Through the power of the Holy Spirit, the mind is renewed. Becoming new by renewing the mind is an ongoing action, “describing perpetual and ever repeated renewal” (Barth 507). It is a process that was set in motion through Christ, but there is an ongoing renewal through the Holy Spirit, in which believers must participate (Mulholland, *Invitation to a Journey* 13). Having put aside the old self and put on the new self, created in the likeness of God, they are to live as new creations united in their faith.

In response to God’s gift of sanctifying grace, Wesley posits two fundamental principles. Firstly, “God works; therefore, you can work.” Secondly, “God works;

therefore, you must work” (qtd. in Collins 62). Kenneth J. Collins says it points both to the ability and obligation to participate in spiritual transformation; it is a supernatural collaborative effort, a “divine, and human cooperation” (62). Therefore, from the moment of rebirth, the Christian ought to play an active role and participate in his ongoing sanctification. Wesley refers to this as “cooperant grace” (Wesley 581). Mulholland says that the journey toward “holistic spirituality is a pilgrimage of deepening responsiveness to God’s control on our life and being” (*Invitation to a Journey* 16). From the moment of their conversion, God is working to fulfill his will for Christians to be whole, and, notes Mulholland, Christians are not able to do it on their own. Only God can accomplish this transformation in Christ followers; however, it requires intentional and ongoing commitment to engaging in this lifelong process of being made whole in the image of Christ (29). God has provided various means through which Christians join in their sanctifying journey and become spiritually transformed.

Historical Foundation

Throughout Christian tradition, the Bible is understood to be of primary importance in Christian life. Ogden says, “The scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are the uniquely inspired revelation of God and the standard of truth in all matters of faith and practice” (40). That the early church fathers understood the primacy of Scripture in living the Christian life is evident in their writings.

St. Benedict’s life was deeply rooted in Scripture. This is evidenced by numerous Scripture references in his Rule. He taught that the Word is inspired, and that God is personal and speaks to us through Scripture. He believed that the Word of God was the rock upon which every man should build his entire life. According to Benedict, believers

do not have to “discover new ideas” as they meditate on God; rather, the Word is “sufficient” when Christians read it, understand it, let it into our hearts, and “dwell” on it (De Waal 37). “Therefore, everyone who hears these words of Mine, and acts on them, will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock” (Matt. 7:24). His Rule addressed principles and practices that he believed engendered unity within the monastic community, spiritual development for the individual, and an intimate relationship with God (St. Benedict 5).

The centrality of Scripture in his spirituality and theology can be seen in the role the Bible played in the daily life of the monks. So important was Scripture in their formation that they recited lengthy portions of the Bible several times a day and memorized all the psalms. Benedict believed that the Bible prepared our hearts and minds for obedience in every area of life and understood how scriptural knowledge combined with spiritual practices deepens the believers knowledge and aligns them with God’s purposes (5). Most significantly, he understood that such knowledge of God’s Word formed the love of God within the heart of a Christian; “But as we progress in this way of life and in faith, we shall run on the path of God’s commandments, our hearts overflowing with the inexpressible delight of love” (6). Benedict knew that knowledge of God leads to loving God.

Bernard of Clairvaux grew up in a family of devout believers, but by all accounts, his mother was the one who cultivated his spirituality from an early age. After he entered monastic life, he devoted himself to studying Scripture and theology. He was recognized as having a superior intellect as well as being a gifted communicator. Within a few years,

he established the monastery at Clairvaux, which followed a strict form of St. Benedict's Rule, itself deeply rooted in Scripture. Elizabeth Kennan remarks regarding Bernard:

For the remainder of his life, he was engaged in spiritual formation of those who, by the hundreds, flocked to his tutelage. Despite his more extensive role in ecclesiastical politics, Bernard's first responsibility was to teach and disciple the monks, and he fulfilled it. (Bernard 4)

Bernard is remembered for the profound influence he had on the papacy.

Beginning with Pope Innocent, he remained an advisor to several more popes during his lifetime. The reader cannot help but be impressed by the wisdom of his counsel and note the masterful way in which almost every topic and piece of advice offered has a scriptural reference woven into it. "For what is as integral to the worship of God as that which He urges in the Psalm: 'be still and know that I am God.' This certainly is the essence of consideration" (37).

While not addressing the centrality of Scripture specifically, Bernard's advice on the practical and theological demands of the papal office is firmly grounded in Scripture. He demands that Pope Eugenius III, in all his actions and decisions, make the knowledge of God his goal. Biblical truth shaped his personal life, and his counsel and teaching proceeded from his bibliocentric spirituality. This approach contributed to the spiritual formation of innumerable people.

Dorotheos of Gaza, a near contemporary of St. Benedict, expressed many sentiments similar to Benedict's. Eric Wheeler observes that it seems as if Abbot Dorotheos "might have been giving a commentary on the spiritual doctrine of St. Benedict" (Dorotheos 15). He adds that much of Dorotheos' writing was based on Holy Scripture, and particularly, the gospel. He was heavily influenced by the theology of two desert fathers, Barsanufius and John the Prophet, which, according to Wheeler and

Dorotheos, was “purely scriptural Christianity” (16). His teaching is steeped in Scripture, and much like Benedict, scriptural references proliferate every page. He taught that after the fall, humankind was oblivious to God, who in “His goodness had mercy on His creatures and gave Moses a written law” (78), commanding his people to love the Lord with all their souls and mind. He described God’s law as a “help,” which mankind ignored. “Their soul abhors nourishment” (78) until a new Adam came to renew and restore humankind (79). Through Christ and the Spirit, Christians have been empowered to overcome sin but remain sinful. Dorotheos writes, “God from His goodness gave us holy precepts which purify us, so that, if we want to, through the keeping of those commandments we can be purified (80). He believed that God instilled into every Christian a conscience and the ability to choose between good and evil, but they need to learn from Scripture what his holy precepts are so that they can choose. Jesus says, “Learn of me, for I am meek and humble of heart, and you shall find rest for your souls” (81). Although he did not address the topic directly, all his writing, work, and life reflected his belief in the central role of Scripture in their spiritual transformation.

Another influential theologian in Christian tradition, Philipp Jacob Spener, penned the *Pia Desideria* after some years in pastoral ministry and made a compelling call for reform within the Lutheran Church. Although Spener publicly verbalized a wide range of criticisms against the church and believers, the sentiments expressed in his publication were shared by other prominent European theologians and clergy (Spener 1). At the heart of Spener’s theology was the primacy of Scripture, and he passionately believed that a return to the Bible would redirect God’s people and the church (McCullum). *Pia Desideria* triggered a reaction that spread throughout Europe and

initiated the pietist movement. The complicated relationship between church and state had severe repercussions for the church. Leadership within the church no longer fell to men whom God had called but to politicians with little faith, scant knowledge of Scripture, and an altogether different agenda (7). Consequently, the spiritual growth and development of the body of believers were neglected; people at all levels of society and the church were morally corrupt (8). Tappert writes, “Despite the outwardly flourishing condition of the church, there seemed to be little evidence of genuine Christian life” (8). This was not only an obstacle to each believer and Christian community; it was a hindrance to Christian witnesses outside of the church. In this context, Spener offered some proposals for reform. First on Spener’s list was the importance of the Bible in education and spiritual formation. “Thought should be given to a more extensive use of the Word of God among us. If there is to be any good among us, it must be brought about by God” (Spener 87). Spener believed that scriptural knowledge would be one of the ways individuals, as well as the church, would grow spiritually. He writes:

To this end, the Word of God is the powerful means since faith must be enkindled through the Gospel, and the law provides the rules for good works and many wonderful impulses to attain them. The more at home the Word of God is among us, the more we shall bring about faith and its fruits (Spener 87).

In his opinion, Scriptural knowledge would transform each individual believer and in so doing, the body of Christ.

Spener understood the practical reasons which made it challenging for the laity to know the Word of God. Nevertheless, he believed their lack of Bible knowledge and spiritual superficiality was responsible for the moral laxity within the church. He proposed several methods to help believers hear and understand the Bible better.

Benjamin Espinoza says, “Spener’s clarion call to a more personal, devotional reading of

scripture serves as a hallmark of Pietist thought. . . . It was Pietism that gave the Bible to the people, not the Reformation” (142). Spener and the Pietist movement brought revival to the Christian Church, which had a far-reaching influence on other prominent theologians, including Wesley, who shared Spener’s passion for Scripture.

Wesleyan theology is deeply rooted in Scripture. Wesley called himself “a man of one book” (Collins and Vickers 581). Randy L. Maddox observed that for Wesley, Scripture was both the “witness” and the “setting” of divine revelation; it was central to his life” (90). The Bible first and foremost shaped Wesley’s theology.

I want to know one thing, the way to heaven—how to land safe on that happy shore. God Himself has condescended to teach the way: for this very end He came from heaven. He hath written it down in a book. O give me that book! . . . Let me be *homo unius libri*. Here then I am, far from the busy ways of men. I sit down alone: only God is here. In His presence I open, I read his book; for this end, to find the way to heaven (91).

Spiritual Formation

Many definitions of “spirituality” and “spiritual formation” exist. The word “spirituality” has its roots in the Latin word *spiritus*, meaning “spirit,” “breath,” and “life.” It has to do with that part of being human that transcends our physical bodies (Bowe 11). In the Christian tradition, spiritual formation refers to the process by which the innermost part of the human being, namely the heart or the spirit, is being transformed so that its instinctive expression reflects Christ’s teaching (Willard, *Great Omission* 69). C. S. Lewis says people are to be transformed into “little Christs” (qtd. in Leclerc and Maddix 11). It requires intentional human participation with God through the “means of grace.” James C. Wilhoit’s definition describes “spiritual formation” as the “intentional communal process of growing in our relationship with God and becoming conformed to Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit” (23). Spiritual formation is

ongoing. Within the Christian community, the metaphor of a journey is used to illustrate a lifelong process (Fowler 117). Samuel M. Powell says it is communal and must happen within the context of church community (36), and Diane Leclerc and Mark A. Maddix add that it also includes growing in relationship to others (15). The journey of spiritual formation is described in various places in Scripture, most notably in 2 Peter 1:4–7:

Now since you have become partakers of the divine nature, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge; and in your knowledge, self-control, and in your self-control, perseverance, and in your perseverance, godliness; and in your godliness, brotherly kindness, and in your brotherly kindness, love.

These verses illustrate the progressive nature of spiritual formation that occurs as Christ followers participate with God’s divine gift of grace and can only transpire through the power of the Holy Spirit as they learn to follow Jesus more closely. The Bible and Christian tradition provide Christians with an understanding of the need, the process, the purpose, and the means by which the “new man” is formed within the heart of the believer.

Discipleship is God’s way of effecting change in Christians. Jesus demonstrated this in the way he disciplined and through his teaching. Willard says Christians must become disciples who not only profess to be followers of Christ but intentionally engage in the habits and practices, the means of grace, through which they become more like Christ by following his teaching and the way he lived. He adds that Christians are able to do this by practicing the spiritual disciplines and, like Jesus, include the activities that help them to remain in fellowship with him (*Great Omission* ix). Spiritual practices facilitate and nurture an intimate relationship with God as believers travel on the journey toward becoming the people they were destined to be.

Scripture and various definitions of spiritual formation identify several elements of the process. The transformational journey originates in the love of God, is fueled by the love of God, and forms the love of God in the human heart (Leech 20). In the New Testament, the transformation process always concludes with love, *agape*. *Agape* holds it all together. Colossians 3 wonderfully demonstrates this progression: “And beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity” (v. 14). In Romans 5, the progression culminates in *agape* being “poured out” the believer’s heart, “because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us” (v. 5). Built into the biblical concept of spiritual formation and other definitions is the notion that transformation is both passive and active—passive in the sense that it is initiated by God. Without his direction and presence, human effort to change is for naught. Christ says, “Without me, you can do nothing” (John 15:5). It is active in the sense that the believer must engage and bear some responsibility for the process. Participating with the Holy Spirit, the Christian must “give all diligence to add to my faith moral excellence and add to my moral excellence knowledge” (Rom. 7:3). As individuals cooperate with God, they are conformed to the image of Christ by the Holy Spirit working in them, and their whole lives begin to come into alignment with the will of God (Johnson 76).

Willard posits that spiritual formation will not happen, the “old man” will not be put off, and the “new man” put on, unless the Christian does the right things (*Great Omission* 24). Within the Christian community, the metaphor of a journey is used to illustrate a lifelong process (Fowler 117). This journey is ongoing; it is complex, and it takes time (Francis de Sales 43–44). Leclerc and Maddix add that it includes growing in

relationship to others (51), and Powell adds that it must happen within the context of church community (36). Through Scripture and Christian tradition, Christians are instructed on what they need so that they might grow spiritually when they participate with the Holy Spirit on this formational journey.

As believers grow in spiritual maturity, they increasingly reflect the righteousness of Jesus and become “the light of the world and the city on a hill” (Bonhoeffer 125). By becoming disciples of Jesus and experiencing God’s transforming love, they also understand their role in God’s mission to save mankind. Therefore, spiritual formation is essential, not only to the individual but also as a participant in God’s mission. Barton states: “I am utterly convinced that God works miracles of transformation in the world through miraculously transformed people . . . ” (11). When Christians participate in God-ordained spiritual practices, they grow in relationship with the Trinity, become more mature in their faith, and become better reflections of Christ to the world.

The spiritual disciplines are activities of the mind and body purposefully undertaken to bring the personality and total being of a Christian into effective cooperation with the divine order . They enable Christians more and more, to live in a power that is, strictly speaking, beyond themselves, deriving from the spiritual realm itself as they “yield to God, as those who have been brought from death to life: and offer every part of yourself to him as an instrument of righteousness (Rom. 6:13). These God ordained activities connect Christians to their source of spiritual growth and development.

Historically, the phrase “means of grace” referred to the disciplines which God uses to communicate grace to Christians. Wesley adopted this phrase in his sermon by

that title, he says, “[B]y the means of grace I understand outward signs, words or actions, ordained by God, and appointed for this end, to be ordinary channels whereby God might convey to men preventing, justifying and sanctifying grace to humanity” (Wesley 70). They have no salvific worth in and of themselves but provide a channel through which God works in the human heart (Leclerc and Maddix 74). The classical or “instituted” or means of grace refer to the biblical spiritual practices Jesus modeled personally and encouraged his disciples to engage in. These include prayer, searching Scripture, receiving the Lord’s Supper, fasting, and worshipping in community. Willard suggests that each of these practices is a means to an end and offer a way for the believer to fully enjoy the “love of God and humankind in all the daily rounds of normal existence where we are placed” (*Divine Conspiracy* 137). Participating in these spiritual practices is the Christian’s way of “cooperating” with God in their ongoing journey of sanctification (75). Richard J. Foster and Dallas Willard argue that transformation requires obedient and faithful participation in these practices (R. Foster 74). They add that it takes “practice,” meaning they must be engaged in repeatedly. Charles R. Foster states that by habitual participation in these habits they eventually become “second nature,” nurturing Christians in their faith and prepares them to receive “God’s daily sanctifying grace” (C. Foster 76, 78). The means of grace are just that, channels through which Christians can respond, learn, and experience God for their own sanctification and for the sake of the world.

Christian Illiteracy in the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries

Christian illiteracy can manifest in various forms. These forms include a lack of Bible knowledge and liturgy, unfamiliarity with Christian vocabulary, not knowing hymns and worship songs, lack of knowledge about fundamental Christian doctrine and

the tenets of the Christian faith, and inability to articulate Christian concepts and beliefs. Not knowing these different aspects of being a Christian poses a significant hindrance to knowing and loving God. Consequently, many churchgoing Christians are spiritually immature and static. Peter Scazzero observes that it has become the topic of recent studies as researchers examine the reasons for Christians leaving the church (11). He explains that these Christians who made a “genuine “commitment to Christ have “come to realize slowly and painfully, that spirituality available in the church has not delivered any deep, Christ transforming life change either in themselves or others” (10). The price of Christian illiteracy is high both for these individuals who find Christianity impotent and for the church who cannot stem the tide of people leaving the church. Several reasons exist for the apparent lack of knowledge exhibited by many followers of Jesus.

One explanation for Christian illiteracy is that many school classrooms have undergone the phenomenon of “de-Christianization” (Boeve 143). School prayer organized by the institution was primarily banned from public schools by Supreme Court decisions since 1962. Consequently, schools have stayed away from integrating Christian education in their curriculum due to secularization and fear of prosecution (Geiger). Religion, in general, has become less integrated into the educational system of all but faith-based schools. Although religious education and the responsibility to teach children about Christianity should not be the responsibility of schools, a void exists where religious education at school in bygone eras provided some understanding of God and the Bible. Lieven Boeve says that “there is a deterioration in academic performance, moral fabric, and ethical behavior among students in public schools” (144). Further, he says, “The simple reality is that our American society has come unglued from the religious

morals and ethics woven into our nation's founding documents by our forefathers" (144). The absence of religious instruction and prayer in public education seems one factor that has had an impact on Christian illiteracy.

Religious plurality can also explain the prevalence of contemporary Christian illiteracy (Boeve 143). More specifically, society has moved away from Christianity as its predominant religion due to the presence of many different religions in American communities. Scant knowledge of Christianity and other religions seem to lead to a perceived smorgasbord from which to choose a faith persuasion that suits individual preferences (145). Hence, religious plurality has contributed to the contemporary cultural shift away from Christianity.

Another explanation has been the church's failure to teach the Bible from the pulpit (Achteimer 597). More specifically, it seems that in some instances the Christian pulpit has surrendered its role to teach on the Bible, leaving Christians uneducated in the foundations of their beliefs (Peterson; Willard).

However, a renewed interest in spirituality is trying to fill this void. Eugene H. Peterson described this growing interest as far back as 1993 when he commented, "[T]here is a groundswell of recognition spreading through our culture that all of life is at root spiritual, that everything we see is formed and sustained by what we cannot see" (*Eat This Book* xv). In his opinion, secularization has marginalized two basic human needs, namely "intimacy" and "transcendence," and, he says, "most anything exotic that includes a sense of mystery will do for transcendence . . ." (xv). He concludes that the church is facing an enormous challenge and needs an understanding of fundamental Christian beliefs and "practices that have stood the test of time" (xvi). Contemporary

Christians, like the those in the early church, need to become biblically literate and taught spiritual practices that nurture a relationship with Christ leading to transformation.

Research Design Literature

Having observed the general lack of biblical knowledge and minimal spiritual development among many practicing contemporary Christians, I created a spiritual formation workshop for believers who expressed a desire to have a more intimate relationship with the Lord and grow in their understanding and participation in the spiritual disciplines. The nature and purpose of the project determined my choice of methodology. This project was focused on measuring the spiritual formation of individuals who have been Christians for years, before and after participating in this intervention.

Tim Sensing suggests that “methodological triangulation” using multi-data collection method enhances the reliability of the research and “provides a complex view of the intervention enabling a thicker interpretation” (Sensing 72). I chose a mixed-methods approach combining quantitative and qualitative instruments. According to Sensing, “[T]hree angles of vision are considered the saturation point to support the criteria of trustworthiness” (76; Patton 4). Following this observation I utilized three instruments, namely surveys, journals, and focus group interviews, to gather the data for this project.

Summary of Literature

Many passages in the Old and New Testaments highlight the importance of knowing God’s Word. The Bible makes it clear that believers need to know and internalize Scripture and rely on the power of the Word to change their lives (2 Tim.

3:15–7). Scriptural knowledge in conjunction with spiritual practices help Christians to grow in relationship with the Trinity and learn to become more like Christ. Many contemporary Christians do not understand that knowing God through Scripture and growing in a dynamic relationship with him through the means of grace are foundational to the Christian walk.

The purpose of this chapter is to review literature pertaining to the biblical exhortation to know and love God and the spiritual formation that transpires when Christians begin to know and experience God through his Word and other spiritual disciplines. The following underscores the most critical themes of the literature review.

The Biblical Foundation focuses on knowing and loving God, both prominent themes in the Bible. Through Scripture, God reveals himself to mankind, instructs his people on how to live, and makes it clear that he requires obedience to his commandments. God's Word communicates his love and describes the behavior and practices that nurture spiritual growth and an intimate relationship with him. Without sound knowledge of Scripture, life-changing biblical truths remain hidden to Christians. It directly impacts their relationship with the Lord, and they remain spiritually immature. Loving God is inextricably bound to knowing him. Jesus was firmly grounded in his knowledge of God's love and affection for him. The Bible links these two biblical constructs in Deuteronomy 6:4–9. Scripture describes God's profound love for his children as an outpouring of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 5:5), who testifies to the Christian spirit that those who are in Christ are his children (Seamands 61). This knowledge is vital to the Christian's relationship with God.

The Theological Foundation examines revelation, *imago Dei*, sanctifying grace, and spiritual formation.

1. Revelation:

God reveals himself to all of humanity generally through creation and specifically through Scripture. General revelation is available to all, and by grace, all of humanity is able to observe the wonder of creation. Special revelation is considered God's revelation specifically to his people. Most Christians accept both kinds of revelation "in a relationship of ongoing continuity" where one builds on the other and serves to strengthen their faith. God's grace "pulls back the veil" and discloses the Lord in creation and through his Word. Scripture is a gift precisely because without it, humankind would not be able to know God as he desires to be known (Jones 39).

2. *Imago Dei*:

From the very beginning, the Bible associates human wholeness with the image of God (Barton 20). Knowing whom they worship and seeing themselves the way God sees them impacts their relationship with the Trinity. They experience the love of God, grow spiritually, and become better image-bearers. The New Testament teaches that the righteousness of Christ is attributed to the believer upon salvation and that Christians are to be progressively sanctified so that they reflect his image to the world. Christlikeness and sharing in God's mission for the church are the goal of the Christian spiritual journey.

3. Sanctifying Grace

Christians are redeemed from their sin nature and born again as new creations in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). God's gift of justifying grace changes the Christian's position before him and sets them on a journey toward sanctification whereby they grow holiness and love. Although differences exist within the Christian tradition on the extent to which the believer can be sanctified before ultimately being made whole, all agree that sanctification is the end goal of the pilgrimage.

Historically, Christian tradition demonstrates the primacy of Scripture in the Christian life. The early church and patristic fathers were deeply grounded in Scripture. Although the church in the early Middle Ages became more ritualistic, the Reformation brought the doctrine of *sola scriptura* and a renewed passion for the Word of God. The modern age saw the Puritans and theologians, like Spener and Wesley, who believed that all Christians need to know Scripture and live according to the truths revealed in the Bible.

Sadly, many Christians do not know the Bible well. Christian illiteracy can manifest in various forms. These forms include a lack of Bible knowledge and liturgy, unfamiliarity with Christian vocabulary, not knowing hymns and worship songs, lack of knowledge about fundamental Christian doctrine and the tenets of the Christian faith, and inability to articulate Christian concepts and beliefs. Not knowing these different aspects of being a Christian poses a significant hindrance to knowing and loving God and many churchgoing Christians remain spiritually immature and static. Consequently, the church in America is facing an enormous challenge. What is needed is an understanding of

fundamental Christian beliefs and practices that have stood the test of time.

Contemporary Christians, like those in the early church, need to become biblically literate and participate in the spiritual disciplines that nurture their relationship with Christ and lead to transformation.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY FOR THE PROJECT

Overview of the Chapter

This chapter describes the research methodology utilized for the spiritual transformation project evaluating if Christians advanced spiritually with respect to biblical theology, holy love, and dispositional living through their participation in this twelve-week workshop. The chapter includes the nature and purpose of the project, research questions, ministry context, criteria for participant selection, instrumentation, reliability and validity of the research design, and the procedures for collecting and analyzing the data.

Nature and Purpose of the Project

In the New Testament, Jesus identifies the two greatest commandments. Firstly, to love God with “all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind,” and secondly, “to love your neighbor as yourself” (Matt. 22:37–39). Therefore, spiritual growth happens as one progressively develops a greater love for God and for other people. However, developing a loving relationship with God requires a basic understanding of biblical theology and regular participation in the spiritual disciplines, particularly contemplating Scripture. Consequently, many Christians do not grow spiritually. They do not know and love the God whom they worship; nor do they truly understand God’s holy love that fills their hearts and directs their thoughts, words, and actions. The most significant and tragic consequence of Christians not knowing the Word of God is that they fail to enter into true worship, discipleship, and mission. Thus, the nature of this project was to measure the level of spiritual formation.

The purpose of this research project was to design a spiritual transformation workshop that would serve as an impetus for spiritual growth. I wanted to determine if participants experienced growth in relation to biblical theology, holy love, and dispositional living by participating in a workshop that combined biblical teaching with spiritual disciplines in an environment conducive to experiencing God's presence intimately through prayer.

Research Questions

I designed the following three questions to determine the participants' level of spiritual formation before and after participating in a twelve-week spiritual formation workshop. I designed instruments purposed to measure the level of spiritual formation in the areas of knowledge, attitude, and behavior.

Research Question #1

What level of spiritual formation in relation to biblical theology, holy love, and dispositional living was identified among the Christian adults who desired a deeper relationship with God before participating in a twelve-week spiritual formation workshop focused on knowing and loving God?

In the spiritual formation survey pre-test, knowledge, attitude, and behavior related to biblical theology were addressed in questions 1, 9, 12, 14, 15, 18, 23, 25, 26, 27, 29, 30, 31, 34, 36, and 41. Knowledge, attitude, and behavior related to holy love were addressed in questions 3, 8, 10, 19, and 22. Knowledge, attitude, and behavior related to dispositional living were addressed in questions 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 11, 13, 16, 17, 20, 21, 24, 26, 28, 32, 33, 35, 37, 38, 39, 40, 42, and 43. Journal entries 1 and 3 and focus group questions 1, 3, 4, and 5 addressed knowledge, attitudes, and behavior related to

biblical theology. Journal entry 2 and focus group questions 1, 3, and 4 addressed knowledge, attitudes, and behavior related to holy love. Journal entries 2 and 3 and focus group questions 1, 3, and 4 addressed knowledge, attitude, and behavior related to dispositional living.

Research Question #2

What levels of spiritual formation in relation to biblical theology, holy love, and dispositional living were identified among the practicing Christian adults who desired a deeper relationship with God after participating in a twelve-week spiritual formation workshop focused on knowing and loving God?

In the spiritual formation survey post-test, knowledge, attitude, and behavior related to biblical theology were addressed in questions 1, 9, 12, 14, 15, 18, 23, 25, 26, 27, 29, 30, 31, 34, 36, and 40. Knowledge, attitude, and behavior related to holy love were addressed in questions 3, 8, 10, 19, and 22. Knowledge, attitude, and behavior related to dispositional living were addressed in questions 4, 2, 5, 6, 7, 11, 13, 16, 17, 20, 21, 24, 26, 28, 32, 33, 35, 37, 38, and 39.

Research Question #3

What aspects of the spiritual formation workshop had the greatest impact on the observed changes in spiritual formation in relation to biblical theology, holy love, and dispositional living among practicing Christians who desired a deeper relationship with God and participated in a twelve-week spiritual formation workshop focused on knowing and loving God?

Journal entry 3 and focus group questions 3 and 4 measured this question.

Ministry Context(s)

I presented the spiritual formation workshop at John Wesley United Methodist Church (JWUMC) in Houston, Texas. JWUMC is a well-established suburban congregation. The church is geographically located in a predominantly White middle- to upper-middle class neighborhood. Although several ethnicities were represented, most of the congregants were White. The church was founded fifty years ago and has many long-standing members. Due to the location, the majority of the members and attendees were older than fifty. JWUMC offered a variety of Bible studies, served the local community by way of community outreach projects, and was actively involved in missions and supported missionaries on the field. Two services took place each Sunday. The contemporary service started at 9:00 a.m. and the traditional service took place at 11:00 a.m. Between 10:00 a.m. and 11:00 a.m., members could choose from multiple Bible study classes, as well as Sunday school for children. Children attended the main services with their parents.

As part of their ongoing desire to disciple church members and attendees, the church offered four, twelve-week studies on Wednesday evenings during the spring and the fall semesters. These studies were included under the heading “Pathways to Discipleship.” One of the four listed pathways was “spiritual formation.” This provided the ideal opportunity to conduct the research project. The spiritual formation workshop was included as one of four parallel studies for the fall.

Participants

Considering the purpose statement and research questions associated with this project, I selected a purposive sample of participants because they met the criteria and attributes essential to the research (Sensing 83). Participants were attendees or members of John Wesley United Methodist Church in Houston, Texas. They were all over the age of eighteen, with no other age restrictions. The project was not aimed at new Christians; rather, it sought to identify spiritual growth in Christians who, after several years of being Christ followers, desired a closer relationship with him. Therefore, additional requirements were that participants were professing Christians with the expressed desire to grow spiritually and who were interested in learning how to engage in their spiritual formation. There were both men and woman from several ethnicities. They were well-educated and have been Christians for a varied number of years. Their involvement in church-related activities also varied. The participants were in good mental and physical condition.

Ethical Considerations

I duly informed participants of the strict confidentiality measures observed throughout the duration of the research project. I initially informed them during the selection process and again prior to each instrument being administered. Each participant gave informed consent in the online spiritual formation pre- and post-survey. I assured confidentiality for the spiritual formation survey by making use of privacy protocols included in the online survey tool, Survey Monkey. The information coded by Survey Monkey remained confidential and was only accessible by using a login and strong password on the site. All participants received the spiritual formation journal consent letter

via email and asked to sign and return the spiritual formation journal informed consent by way of email. Upon receipt of the informed consent responses, I saved each consent form to the designated confidentiality file. Similarly, the participants in the focus group received a copy of the spiritual formation focus group informed consent via email prior to their participation in the focus group. The consent forms were signed and returned by way of email. Upon receipt of the informed consent responses, I saved each consent form to her computer. My computer was password protected. I was the only person with access to her computer.

I coded all recorded participant responses so that the data remained confidential. I was the only one who possessed the key to the code. The recorded focus group session was stored on my password-protected computer. I kept any hardcopy data, such as the participant journals, in a locked safe in my office with the key in my sole possession. I deleted all electronic data and any shredded hardcopy data within six months after the conclusion of the research project.

Instrumentation

Since this project is measuring spiritual transformation before and after participants attended the spiritual formation workshop, I designed qualitative and quantitative instruments to collect data. I uses a total of four instruments to collect the research data: a demographic survey, spiritual formation pre- and post-survey, journal entries, and a focus group.

Spiritual Formation Inventory

The spiritual formation research instruments included a spiritual formation pre-test survey (SFS-1), journal entry prompts (JEP), spiritual formation post-test survey (SFS-2), and focus group (JEP).

The demographic survey provided me with background information on the demographics of the participants. These questions provided context for the collected research data and allowed me to describe the participants and better analyze the data collected from the other instruments.

The spiritual formation survey consisted of qualitative, quantitative, and open-ended questions. The questions measured beliefs, attitudes, and behavior in the areas of biblical theology, holy love, and dispositional living. These were framed both negatively and positively.

Expert Review

I designed the instruments used in this study and submitted them to two experts for review: Dr. Ellen Marmon, director of Asbury Seminary's Doctor of Ministry program, and Dr. Marty Dunbar, senior pastor of John Wesley UMC in Houston, Texas.

The instruments had by a cover letter that explained the purpose and rationale and a synopsis of the project. The experts reviewed the instruments and made some helpful observations while affirming the alignment of the questions with the research questions. The expert review suggestions motivated me to include an additional question, which provided more specific data in a particular area.

Reliability and Validity of Project Design

The object of this project's research project was to measure spiritual growth in the participants. Since spiritual formation is not something that can be quantified, qualitative research was necessary for this study.

The survey asked questions focused on identifying the spiritual formation of participants before and after they took part in the study. The journal entries and focus group prompts allowed persons to reflect upon and discuss certain aspects of their spiritual formation and experience during the project. Participants used both of those tools to communicate their assessments of how the study impacted their spiritual formation.

Two expert reviewers validated the research process. Their comments helped me to adjust and add some questions to make the instruments clearer and more in line with the intended goal of the project. I was confident to proceed with the study. All the participants from all the congregations received the same instruments in the same way. No deviation occurred.

Data Collection

I took the following steps to collect the data:

1. She secured a list of names with contact information of each person who signed up for the workshop.
 - a. She called and had a phone conversation, verifying that they met the criteria for the study and confirmed their contact information.
 - b. She informed them that they would receive an introductory email in which she explained the process to them.

- c. She confirmed that all participants had her contact information and extended an invitation for them to call her if they had any questions.
2. The mixed-methods pre- and post-spiritual-formation surveys went out electronically, using Survey Monkey. The pre-survey went out one week prior to the commencement of the study. The post-intervention survey went out one week after the last meeting. The participants had five days to respond, and a reminder email went out on the fourth day.
3. During the first meeting, each participant received a journal with prompts dated for every week. Only three predetermined journal entries are included in the study. Participants did not know which three journal entries would be included in the study.

A focus group gathered one week after the last meeting to provide participants the opportunity to reflect on the topic of spiritual formation and to discuss their thoughts about the effectiveness of the experience.

Data Analysis

This spiritual formation project utilized both quantitative and qualitative data analysis. The pre- and post-surveys provided the quantitative data for the project. The researcher used Survey Monkey, an online survey instrument, as well as printed copies to gather the data. Pre-and post-surveys were compared using descriptive statistics.

The researcher gathered the qualitative data for the project from participant journals and the focus group.

Participant Journals

Participants received a spiral notebook containing a printed prompt for each week. To become familiar with the data, I read and reread the journal entries multiple times. I read the data in three different ways: (1) literal reading: identifying words or phrases that appear repeatedly; certain relevant quotes were included in reporting the data; (2) interpretive reading: grouping data with implied or inferred meanings together; and (3) reflexive reading: I reflected on her subjective understanding of the data and her feelings (Sensing 196).

Focus Group

I followed a semi-structured protocol for the focus group discussion. I transcribed the recorded discussion and utilized the same three reading methods listed above to analyze the data. I also noted which aspect of the workshops had the greatest impact on the participants.

CHAPTER 4

EVIDENCE FOR THE PROJECT

Overview of the Chapter

The purpose of this research project was to evaluate the spiritual formation related to biblical theology, holy love, and dispositional living of the participants in a twelve-week spiritual formation workshop presented at John Wesley United Methodist Church in Houston, Texas.

This chapter describes the participants in this project. It contains results from the quantitative data collected from the pre- and post-surveys, the qualitative data open-ended questions in the pre-survey, the journal entries in response to specific prompts, a focus group interview, and the field notes. The chapter highlights the major findings from this data.

Participants

Twenty-four persons registered for the spiritual formation workshop and attended the first few sessions. Only sixteen participants completed the pre- and post-surveys, journal entries, and attended all twelve sessions. I chose to include only the data collected from participants who completed the entire project, the true sample consisted of sixteen participants. I provided participants with journals and a prompt for each week's session; however, I only included the data from three specific prompts. The participants were not aware that only certain journal entries were included in the data. The focus group consisted of eight persons who agreed to participate. I conducted the focus group interview on the evening of the last session, immediately after the session ended. I recorded and transcribed the focus group interview.

All the participants were over the age of fifty-five, Caucasian, and currently active members of John Wesley Church. Ninety-four percent had been Christians for fifty years or more. Seventy five percent were women, and sixty-nine percent of participants were married. The demographic profile of those who took part in the spiritual formation workshop is represented in the Summary of Demographic Data figure.

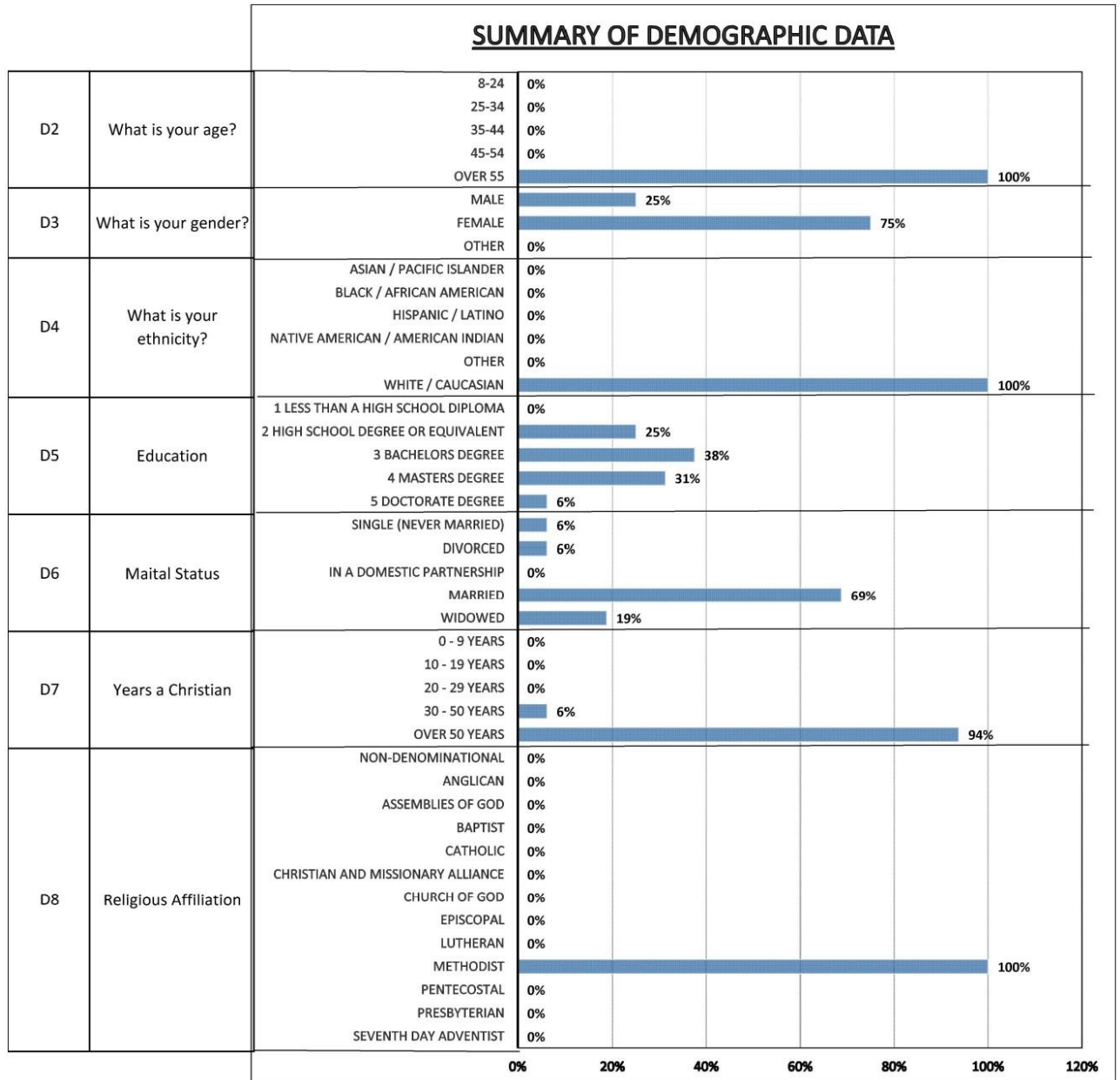


Figure 4.1. Summary of demographic data.

Research Question #1: Description of Evidence

What level of spiritual formation in relation to biblical theology, holy love, and dispositional living was identified among the practicing Christian adults who desired a deeper relationship with God before to participating in a twelve-week spiritual formation workshop focused on knowing and loving God.

I asked participants to complete a pre-survey (categorized as S1), which had thirty-nine questions that identified the participants' initial knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors related to biblical theology, holy love, and dispositional living. It had three additional open-ended questions, bringing the total number of questions in the pre-survey to forty-three. There were three sub-groups of questions : The first group of fifteen questions (categorized as S1a) related to biblical theology (Table 4.2). The second group of fifteen questions (categorized as S1b) related to holy love (Table 4.3), and the last group of nine questions (categorized as S1c) related to dispositional living (Table 4.4). There were three open-ended questions that are discussed later with other qualitative data.

Table 4.1. Mean of Each Category in the Pre-Survey

Survey	Category	Catagory Mean	Average of Std Dev.
S1	A. Bib. Theo.	80%	0.19
S1	B. Holy Love	80%	0.17
S1	C. Disp. Living	79%	0.18
S1 Total		80%	0.18

The mean for all the questions in the pre-survey regarding biblical theology demonstrated that 80 percent of participants had a confident understanding of biblical theology related to spiritual formation (Figure 4.2).

Table 4.2. Knowledge, Attitudes, and Behavior Related to Biblical Theology (S1a)

Q#	Survey	Question	Strongly Agree.	Agree.	Disagree.	Strongly Disagree.	Question Mean	Std Dev.
10	S1	The Bible teaches that I must be transformed into the image of Christ.	25%	50%	25%	0%	67%	0.24
13	S1	My faith is based on a well thought out system of beliefs.	13%	69%	19%	0%	65%	0.19
15	S1	It is very important to know God's truths as they are revealed in Scripture.	75%	25%	0%	0%	92%	0.14
16	S1	I believe spiritual transformation is the work of the Holy Spirit.	69%	31%	0%	0%	90%	0.15
20	S1	I do not believe reading Scripture is a necessary spiritual discipline.	0%	13%	31%	56%	81%	0.23
25	S1	I tend to be less concerned about knowing Bible details than other Christians.	0%	25%	44%	31%	69%	0.25
27	S1	I spend a significant time trying to grow in knowledge and understanding of my faith.	19%	56%	25%	0%	65%	0.22
29	S1	I believe regular worship in community is necessary for my spiritual growth.	75%	25%	0%	0%	92%	0.14
30	S1	I do not need to engage and participate in my own spiritual formation.	0%	0%	44%	56%	85%	0.17
31	S1	I can be a faithful follower of Christ without being part of a Christian community.	0%	19%	50%	31%	71%	0.23
32	S1	I believe that I am accountable to God who watches over me as a Heavenly Father.	63%	38%	0%	0%	88%	0.16
33	S1	I think spiritual practices are necessary to deepen my relationship with Christ.	56%	38%	6%	0%	83%	0.20
36	S1	I do not have a good knowledge of the Scriptures.	0%	38%	31%	31%	65%	0.28
39	S1	I believe prayer is a necessary spiritual discipline.	81%	19%	0%	0%	94%	0.13
40	S1	I believe the Word of God is revealed in Scripture.	50%	13%	0%	0%	93%	0.13

Sixty-seven percent of the participants said they knew that the Bible teaches that a Christian must be conformed to the image of Christ (Q10). Eighty-nine percent recognized that Scripture, prayer, and worship are important spiritual practices contributing to their spiritual formation. They acknowledged their personal participation as well as the role of the Holy Spirit in this formational process (Q15, 16, 20, 29, 33, 39, 40). Sixty-five percent felt they did not have a good knowledge of Scripture and said they

did not spend a significant time trying to grow in the knowledge and understanding of their faith (Q13, 27, 36). The standard deviation is 0.19 (Fig. 4.2).

Table 4.3. Knowledge, Attitudes, and Behavior Related to Holy Love (S1b)

Q#	Survey	Question	Strongly Agree.	Agree.	Disagree.	Strongly Disagree.	Question Mean	Std Dev.
2	S1	I am not very confident that God knows and loves me.	0%	0%	0%	100%	100%	0.00
5	S1	I regularly feel close to God in times of corporate worship and prayer.	56%	44%	0%	0%	85%	0.17
6	S1	I am as excited about my faith today as I was the day I accepted Christ.	50%	31%	19%	0%	77%	0.26
8	S1	I do not experience the Holy Spirit working actively in my life.	0%	6%	38%	56%	83%	0.20
9	S1	When I speak to non-Christians about my faith, I usually focus on my experience of the love of Christ rather than my knowledge of Christian Doctrine.	31%	38%	25%	0%	69%	0.26
18	S1	My faith is generally more emotional than cognitive.	0%	44%	50%	6%	46%	0.20
23	S1	I cannot say that I have felt God's presence.	0%	0%	38%	63%	88%	0.16
34	S1	Prayer is deeply satisfying and an integral part of my religious experience.	63%	38%	0%	0%	88%	0.16
38	S1	I am spiritually more mature today compared to ten years ago.	50%	50%	0%	0%	83%	0.17

The second group of nine questions intended to gather data about the participants' initial knowledge, attitudes, and behavior related to holy love (S1b). Ninety-one percent were confident that God loves and knows them and expressed an awareness of his loving presence and the activity of the Holy Spirit in their lives (Q2, 5, 23). The question addressing spiritual growth revealed that 83 percent felt they had matured in their faith and grown spiritually (Q38), while 77 percent were as excited about their faith today as they were when they accepted Christ. The standard deviation for this section was 0.17.

Table 4.4. Knowledge, Attitudes, and Behavior Related to Dispositional Living (S1c)

Q#	Survey	Question	Strongly Agree.	Agree.	Disagree.	Strongly Disagree.	Question Mean	Std Dev.
4	S1	I pray regularly for the well-being and blessing of those with whom I have a difficult relationship.	31%	63%	6%	0%	75%	0.19
7	S1	When I feel anxious or afraid my first response is to pray about it.	38%	63%	0%	0%	79%	0.16
11	S1	I demonstrate patience with those who are in my care (children, patients, clients, subordinate co-workers, dependents) as well as those with whom I do not need to have a relationship. (e.g., telemarketers, cashiers, servers)	25%	69%	6%	0%	73%	0.18
12	S1	My faith in Christ does not help me through the trials and joys I experience in my daily life.	0%	6%	25%	69%	88%	0.20
14	S1	I do not pray to seek God's guidance.	6%	0%	19%	75%	88%	0.26
17	S1	I have a hard time not worrying.	6%	25%	63%	6%	44%	0.23
21	S1	I do not talk to other people about my religion regularly.	6%	19%	63%	13%	60%	0.24
22	S1	My faith in Jesus Christ touches every area of my life.	69%	31%	0%	0%	90%	0.15
24	S1	I take the initiative in asking for forgiveness and seek reconciliation when I have wronged someone else.	6%	88%	0%	0%	69%	0.08
26	S1	I do not understand why we need to worship corporately (Sunday service) because it does not do much for me.	0%	0%	19%	81%	94%	0.13
28	S1	I regularly pray when I am not at church.	75%	25%	0%	0%	92%	0.14
35	S1	When I am faced with a decision, I try to find out what God wants me to do.	25%	69%	6%	0%	73%	0.18

Q#	Survey	Question	Never.	Several Times a Year.	Monthly.	2-3 times a month.	Weekly.	Question Mean	Std Dev.
3	S1	How often do you take a day of rest (Sabbath) each week?	13%	0%	0%	31%	56%	80%	0.32
19	S1	How often do you attend corporate worship?	0%	0%	0%	6%	94%	98%	0.06
37	S1	How often do you participate in activities like Bible studies and discipleship groups.	0%	0%	6%	13%	75%	89%	0.22

The third group of fifteen questions intended to gather data about participants' initial knowledge, attitude, and behavior relating to dispositional living (S1c). Eighty-one percent acknowledged the impact of their spiritual formation on their personal behavior (Q7, 12, 14, 17, 22, 26, 28, 35). Prayer had a strong influence on discerning God's will and making personal decisions (81 percent) (Q4, 7, 14, 28, 35). Sixty-nine percent demonstrated the impact of spiritual formation on their behavior toward others (Q4, 11, 21, 24). The standard deviation in this section was 0.19 (Fig. 4.2).

Research Question #2: Description of Evidence

What levels of spiritual formation in relation to biblical theology, holy love, and dispositional living were identified among the practicing Christian adults who desired a deeper relationship with God after participating in a twelve-week spiritual formation workshop focused on knowing and loving God?

I asked the participants to complete a post-survey containing the same thirty-nine questions as the pre-survey (categorized as S2). The questions sought to identify the knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors related to biblical theology, holy love, and dispositional living. There were three sub-groups of questions: One group of fifteen questions focused on biblical theology. Another group of nine questions focused on holy love, while the last subgroup of fifteen questions focused on dispositional living. The post-survey did not repeat the three open-ended questions from the pre-survey.

Table 4.5. Comparison of the Pre- and Post-Survey Mean by Category and Collectively

Survey	Category	Catagory Mean	Average of Std Dev.	% Change Mean I2 - I1	% Change Std Dev I2 - I1
S1	A. Bib. Theo.	80%	0.19		
S1	B. Holy Love	80%	0.17		
S1	C. Disp. Living	79%	0.18		
S1 Total		80%	0.18		
S2	A. Bib. Theo.	84%	0.17	5.1%	-9.0%
S2	B. Holy Love	81%	0.19	0.9%	8.4%
S2	C. Disp. Living	79%	0.18	-1.0%	1.1%
S2 Total		81%	0.18	1.8%	-1.3%

The mean of all three categories in the pre-and post-survey marginally increased from 80 percent to 81 percent. All the questions that revealed notable differences between the pre- and post-surveys occurred in the group of questions that sought to identify the knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors regarding biblical theology.

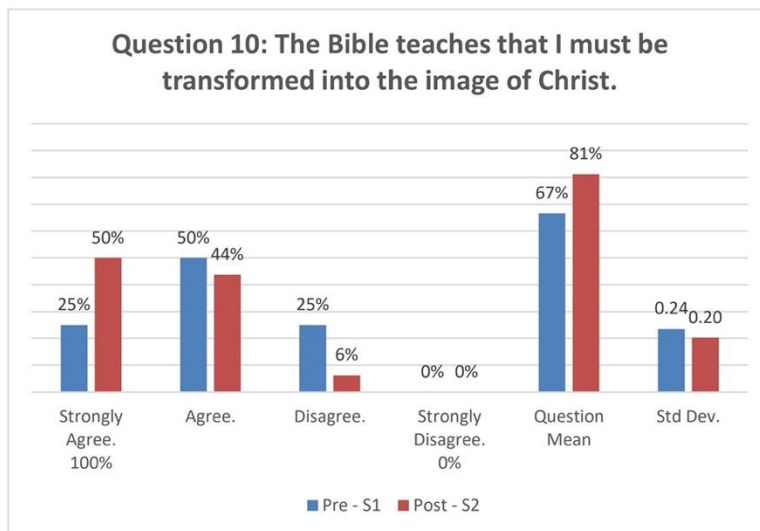


Fig. 4.2. Q10, pre/post comparison.

Q10: The Bible teaches that I must be transformed into the image of Christ.

Participants' responses showed a marked increase in the "strongly agree" column. Thus, the 25 percent pre-survey increased to 50 percent post-survey, suggesting a better understanding of the biblical exhortation to be transformed into the image of Christ

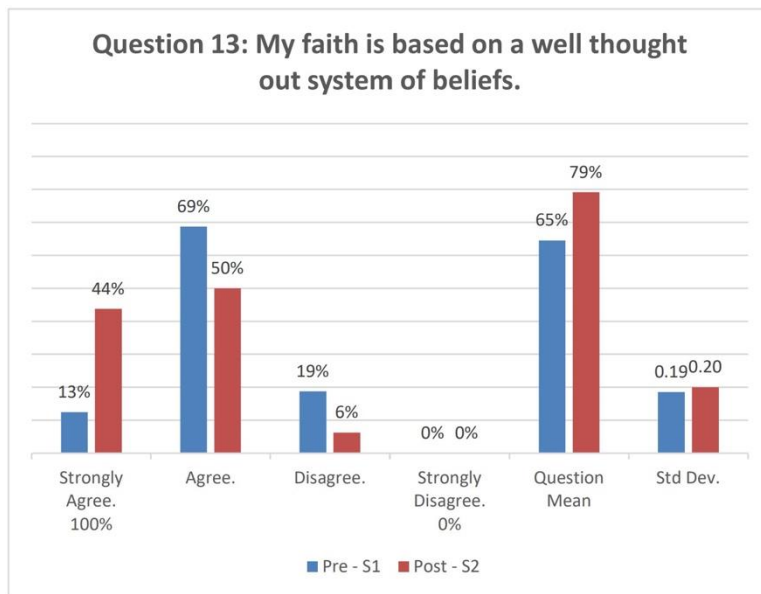


Fig. 4.3. Q13, pre/post comparison.

Q13: My faith is based on a well-thought-out system of beliefs. Responses went from 13 percent who strongly agreed in the pre-survey to 44 percent who strongly agreed in the post-survey, indicating that participants felt more certain about the foundation of their belief system.

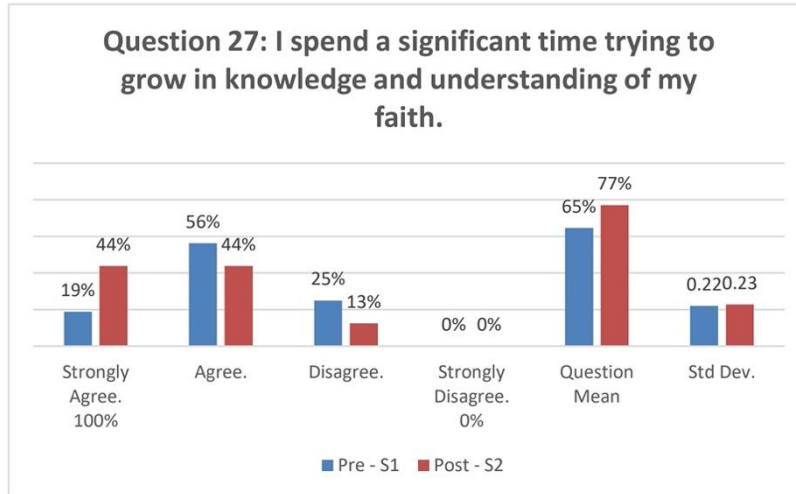


Fig. 4.4. Q27, pre/post comparison.

Q27: *I spend a significant time trying to grow in knowledge and understanding of my faith.* “Strongly agree” responses went from 19 percent pre-survey to 44 percent post-survey. It suggests that participants showed a greater appreciation for the importance of spending time growing in the knowledge and understanding of our faith.

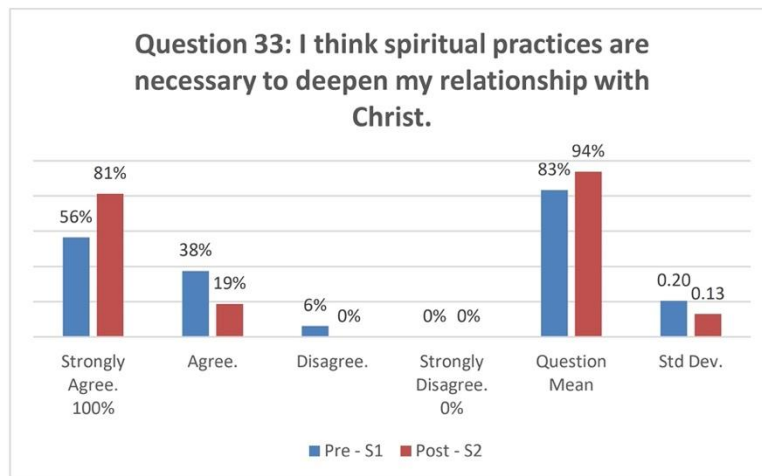


Fig. 4.5. Q33, pre/post comparison.

Q33: I think spiritual practices are necessary to deepen my relationship with Christ. The pre-survey “strongly agree” increased from 56 percent to 81 percent in the post-survey, and the standard deviation decreased. This suggests that participants grew in appreciation for the correlation between practicing spiritual disciplines and developing a closer relationship with Christ.

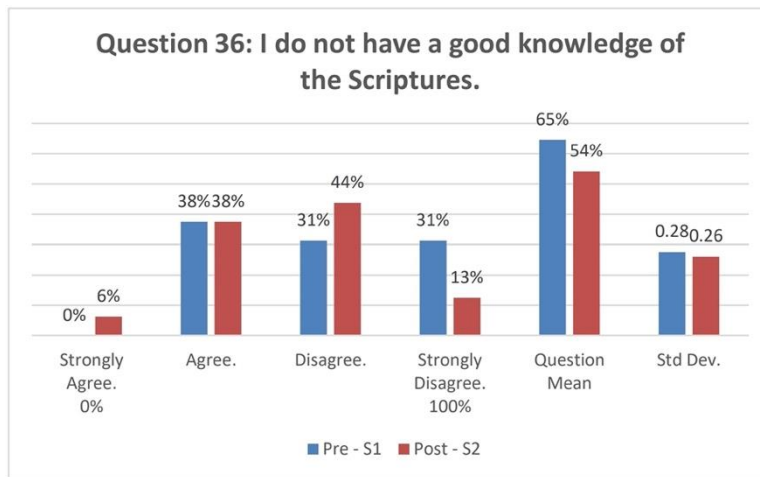


Fig. 4.6. Q36, pre/post comparison.

Q36: I do not have a good knowledge of the Scriptures. Despite the overall increase in appreciation for having a sound knowledge and understanding of one’s faith, the mean in this question decreased from 65 percent pre-survey to 54 percent post-survey. This seems to suggest that participants were less certain of their level of scriptural knowledge after the intervention than before.

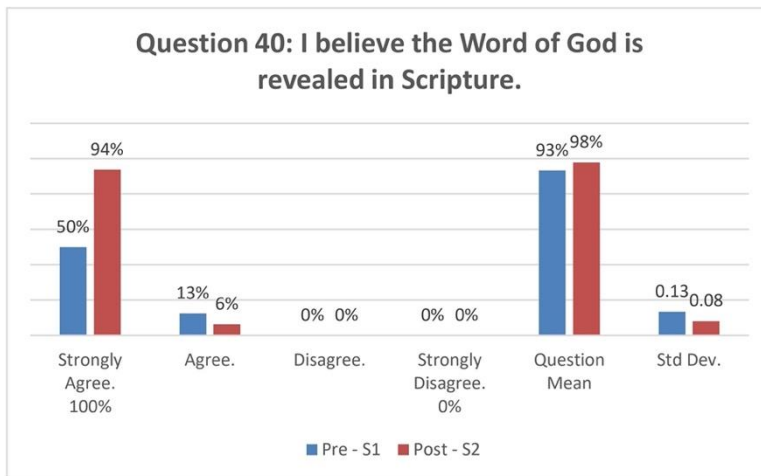


Fig. 4.7. Q40, pre/post comparison.

Q40: *I believe the word of God is revealed in Scripture.* A significant increase occurred between pre-and post-survey “strongly agree” responses. Results went from 50 percent to 94 percent, suggesting that more participants believed the Word of God is revealed in Scripture.

Research Question #3: Description of Evidence

What aspects of the spiritual formation workshop had the greatest impact on the observed changes in spiritual formation in relation to biblical theology, holy love, and dispositional living among practicing Christians who desired a deeper relationship with God and participated in a twelve-week spiritual formation workshop focused on knowing and loving God?

I gathered qualitative data for the project using three sources. The pre-survey concluded with three open-ended questions, participant journals, and a focus group interview.

Open-Ended Questions from Pre-Survey

The pre-survey included three open-ended questions that sought to gauge the participants' initial understanding of their spiritual growth, their motivation for participating in the workshop, and what they expected to gain from it.

Question 40: *What is your understanding of spiritual growth?* Most of the participants' responses named some aspect of spiritual growth but did not demonstrate a comprehensive understanding of spiritual formation. These were some of the responses to Q40:

- “The love of the Holy Spirit.” (Participant 2)
- “Learning more about God’s will.” (Participant 16)
- “Increasing my [k]nowledge of Jesus and God.” (Participant 12)
- “I don’t like this question—I’m just trying to constantly improve.”
(Participant 31)

Two of the responses articulated a sound grasp of what spiritual growth means.

- “For me spiritual growth is moving along the process of sanctification. This is done through prayer, Bible study, corporate worship and serving.” (Participant 35)
- “[A] deepening relationship with God and a more complete understanding of what he wants us to do in order to become more like Christ.” (Participant 34)

Question 41: *What has motivated you to grow spiritually in the last year?*

Responses varied widely. Only one participant said he was motivated by God’s desire for us to become Christlike.

- “Teaching Sunday School.” (Participant 33)

- “My age.” (Participant 30)
- “Schism in the Methodist Church.” (Participant 21)
- “Personal relationships.” (Participant 27)
- “The TV-series, The Chosen.” (Participant 20)
- “Obedience to what God has revealed I should do.” (Participant 5)

Question 42: *What do you hope to gain from participating in this spiritual formation workshop?* Church leaders and a sense of duty motivated some to participate. One said, “I like learning and being with other Christians that I know.” However, most of the responses demonstrated a desire for a closer relationship with God.

- “Understanding where self-reliance ends for me and where my faith and prayer starts.” (Participant 6)
- “Tools to grow my relationship with God.” (Participant 12)
- “To gain a better insight into my love for God and others and to learn how Scripture speaks to me.” (Participant 15)

Participant Journal Entries

I gave participants a prompt and asked them to journal for each of the twelve weeks; however, only the prompts from weeks 1, 2, and 8 were included in the data (Table 4.5). The coded data analysis from three pre-selected journal entries demonstrated varying levels of spiritual formation among participants even though they have all been Christians, members of a local congregation, and regular church attenders for more than fifty years. Participant’s responses indicated that they understood the word “church” to

mean the local church where they worship and serve as members of the congregation. All the participants demonstrated an eagerness to learn more about spiritual formation in general and seemed positively engaged in several spiritual disciplines. The following analysis from the journal entries highlights important insights and excerpts from participant writings.

Table 4.5. Journal Questions (JQ)

JQ1	How has the church helped your understanding of your ongoing journey toward Christlikeness?
JQ2	Which spiritual disciplines have you participated in that contributed to your spiritual growth?
JQ3	Which of the spiritual disciplines you have learned about during this twelve-week spiritual formation workshop will be most helpful for your continued spiritual formation and why?

The coded data analysis from three pre-selected journal entries revealed widely varying levels of spiritual formation among participants even though they have all been Christians, members of a local congregation, and regular church attenders for more than fifty years. All the participants were excited about the workshop and demonstrated an eagerness to learn more about spiritual formation. Before the twelve-week workshop, most of the participants did not grasp the significance of the spiritual disciplines as the “means of grace” and did not recognize their role in ongoing sanctification. However,

they were all committed Christians, mature in their faith, and all positively engaged in several spiritual disciplines. The following analysis from the journal entries highlights important insights and excerpts from participant writings.

JQ1: How has the church contributed to your understanding of your ongoing journey toward Christlikeness: Some participants included activities outside of Sunday service in their understanding of the church, while others had a much narrower interpretation and only seemed to consider what happened during Sunday services when considering the role of the church in their transformation. Responses fell primarily into two categories. Six of the participants saw the church as a forum for opportunities to learn and serve. They seemed content to learn more about their faith and study Scripture through Sunday school classes and Bible studies and recognized how acts of service and corporate worship contributed to their spiritual growth. Participant 24 commented, “I would say the church itself doesn’t so much help me on my journey, but it is because of the church that I have opportunities to grow in loving and serving others.” The other ten persons had an expectation that teaching during Sunday sermons should instruct Christians on the tenets of their faith and give them a sound biblical foundation so that they would grow spiritually. During one of the workshop sessions, Participant 6 made the following statement: “I really think the church needs to do a better job of laying the foundation so that we understand spiritual formation and how and why Bible reading, prayer and the other things help to transform us.”

The participants who saw the church as a forum with different programs and activities to choose from felt that the church has contributed positively to their understanding of ongoing spiritual formation. They went on to list the various activities

presented by the church. These included Sunday school classes, worship, sermons, Bible studies, prayer groups, and serving opportunities as various means of learning about their Christian journey. One respondent commented, “There are many ways my church has helped me to understand my journey towards Christlikeness. Through classes, sermons, and music. I have also received help by participating in work projects” (Participant 16). Another said, “Through church I have been able to deepen my understanding of God. I have learnt from Bible studies, friends, and Sunday sermons that I am made in the image of Christ,” and “Classes the church offers on Bible study has led me to get more into scripture in my daily life. It has helped me grow spiritually and become more like Christ” (Participant 25). Participant 15 said, “Our church has made many studies on the Bible and Christian values available to us.” It seems as if these respondents were content with the impact the church has had on their spiritual formation.

One of the participants who voiced appreciation for the impact the church has had on her spiritual formation attributed it to confirmation classes she attended when she was young:

The church has had a profound effect on my life. When going through confirmation classes as a young person the lessons not only installed information in my head but also in my heart. Leaders in that church modelled how becoming Christlike can change a life. So, teaching me what my faith is built on and modeling a Christlike life is one of the most impressive ways my church has helped me grow spiritually and become who I am today. (Participant 15)

The participants who did not feel as if the church has positively contributed to their understanding of their ongoing spiritual formation seemed to have a different expectation from the church, as if they expected much more from sermons. Participant 6 commented, “The pulpit preaching has been the least effective way to understand my

journey toward Christlikeness. I have been a Christian since I was 13, I am 74, that is 59 years.” Participant 12 made the following comment:

I have attended many churches, but I don’t remember much of anything from years of sermons. John Wesley Church may have been one church where the offering of programs addressed aspects of growing into Christlikeness. Still, the usual topical studies have been drudgery, dull and boring.

Another said, “I would like to say that worship services, sermons and Sunday school classes were the basis of my spiritual development and my strong Christian faith, but I cannot, even Bible studies at church were not that impactful” (Participant 24). Participant 5 said, “I think my understanding of doctrine and theology have come from outside of my church.” The ten participants who expressed similar sentiments about teaching and Sunday sermons were all significantly impacted by years of inductive Bible study, primarily through Bible Study Fellowship and their participation in spiritual renewal weekends such as Emmaus Walk. Participant 6 said, “The walk to Emmaus spiritual retreat was extremely effective in my development as a Christian, it was like discipleship 101-a basic course in Christianity.” Another commented that the,

[w]alk to Emmaus is probably where I learned more about the tenets of my faith. This is where I came to understand prevenient grace, justifying grace, and sanctifying grace. This is not explained in sermons, and I also did not learn about the means of grace in Sunday sermons. (Participant 5)

The teaching, fellowship, and experiencing the presence of the Holy Spirit on these Spiritual weekends

While all the participants recognized that activities/disciplines like Bible study groups, prayer groups, worship, and serving were important parts for spiritual formation, 60 percent of them were disappointed in the church’s contribution to both their understanding of spiritual formation as well as the church’s contribution to their spiritual

growth. Only four of the sixteen participants said that teaching from Sunday sermons contributed to their understanding of spiritual formation and their personal growth.

JQ2: Which spiritual disciplines have you participated in, and how have they contributed to your spiritual growth? All the participants in this intervention were Christians who had not only been believers for a very long time but who also demonstrated the attitudes and behavior of mature Christians. Their participation in the spiritual disciplines varied but was motivated by the same sincere desire to serve the Lord. Each person's focus was different, but most participants listed several spiritual disciplines. Scripture reading/Bible study, prayer, worship, and service were the most common among this group. The following disciplines are presented in the order of the importance the participants placed on them.

- Scripture reading and Bible study: All sixteen participants mentioned the impact studying the Scriptures has had on their spiritual development. Sixty-three percent said that studying the Bible made the greatest contribution to their spiritual formation and mentioned Bible study groups, Sunday school, and private devotional time spent reading the Bible. There were forty-five references to studying Scripture. Commenting on Bible study classes at church, Participant 20 said, "Classes the church offers on Bible study has led me to get more into the Scripture and it has helped me in my spiritual growth as I grow more like Christ." Participant 12 quoted John Newton who said, "It is thus by looking to Jesus that the believer is enlightened and strengthened and grows in grace and sanctification. By beholding we are gradually formed

into the resemblance of Him who we see and admire and love.” With reference to this quotation, Participant 12 concluded:

To behold the glory and the love of Jesus is the only effectual way to participate in His image. In other words, gospel holiness is only possible to those who behold the glory of Christ in disciplined and expectant Bible reading.

Five respondents had been members of Bible Study Fellowship for many years. It was clear that years of intensive Bible study had a profound impact on their spiritual growth. Participant 6 commented,

The systematic study of Scripture that I have learned through BSF changed my life in Christ. Absolutely nothing has grown my faith more than the verse-by-verse study of the Bible. Understanding the source of my faith, the source of the doctrine which I believe, and the promises of God have given me a deeper love for God and has grounded my faith.

It seemed as if the participants who actively studied the Word demonstrated a better understanding of the Christian journey toward Christlikeness and a deeper love of God.

- Prayer: There were forty-three references to prayer, which included personal prayer time, corporate prayer, and various prayer groups. All sixteen participants said prayer is important; 50 percent appeared to have a robust prayer life; and five participants named prayer as having the biggest impact on their relationship with the Lord and spiritual growth. Participant 6 said, “I have practiced many spiritual disciplines, but prayer has been the one that has grown me the most.” Participant 33 said, “Prayer solidifies my relationship with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Through prayer I’ve always been able to see His miracles and truths just like they were told in Scripture.” Some participants acknowledged the importance of prayer but admitted that this was

an area in which they needed to grow. “Prayer tends to be something I continue to work on to make my spiritual life stronger” (Participant 30).

- Worship: All the respondents listed worship as an essential spiritual discipline. participants comments referred to corporate worship on Sunday mornings. They recognized the value of worshipping the Lord corporately as well as the bond that develops between Christians who worship together.

Participant 30 said,

Corporate worship is by far my most favorite discipline to participate in. I realized just how much I valued this when the church doors were closed during Covid. The first Sunday we were back in church tears of joy streamed down my face. As I looked around, I realized I was not the only one. Many others felt the same. This experience taught me that worshipping God as a community brings us closer, it makes me know and love the Lord as the Almighty and makes my personal relationship with Him better.

One participant referred to worshipping the Lord specifically through music.

She said, “I don’t know if singing Hymns and praise songs is a spiritual discipline. However, I love them because they help me remember Scripture and Scriptural truths” (Participant 6). Participant 24 said,

Corporate worship has been part of my life since an early age. I used to do it out of habit, but it has become more meaningful to me. Now I truly see it as an opportunity to praise God as well as learn.

Participants mentioned worship as a spiritual discipline, twenty-one times.

- Service: Most of the participants listed acts of service as a spiritual discipline. Sixty percent said they served in various ways, but only three of them felt that serving has had a major impact on their spiritual growth. Participant 16 said, “I have grown by participating in work projects, both major projects on mission trips and small behind the scenes projects and services. I can see the

dedication to God in the eyes and actions of fellow participants and it touches me deeply.” Participant 25 commented that, “the service discipline has helped me grow in compassion. I still Need heart growth but am working on that! When helping others, it tends to soften my heart and I see God in His truly loving way.”

Words related to service occurred fourteen times.

- One or two participants included other disciplines, namely fasting, sharing one’s faith with others, participating in the sacraments, and accountability to one another. While most of the participants were unfamiliar with the term “spiritual formation” and unaware that the spiritual disciplines are the means of grace and instruments through which Christians are sanctified, their comments were a testimony to the transformational power of the Holy Spirit by means of the spiritual disciplines.

JQ3: Which of the spiritual disciplines you have learned about during this twelve-week spiritual formation workshop will be most helpful for your continued spiritual formation and why?

Responses to this question ranged widely. Most of the participants came to this workshop with a limited understanding of how practicing the spiritual disciplines impacts spiritual growth. Participant 32 said, “[P]robably the most helpful thing to me is just knowing I’m supposed to be like Jesus. Being conscious of this and having an awareness will allow me to do a better job.” Two participants indicated that much of the content was new to them. Participant 1 said, “I did not know about what spiritual disciplines are. This

class has been very uplifting, and I have learned a lot, especially new ideas about praying.

I feel that I will continue to move forward with my spiritual growth.” Participant 30 said:

I could name several that I’ve never really thought about as being spiritual disciplines. For instance, the one about reviewing my actions, words, and thoughts each morning and evening. Doing this would certainly assist me in evaluating my spiritual life and determining how I can improve it to serve others more.

Several participants indicated that the sessions on prayer, service, and the importance of studying the Bible were helpful. Five of the participants said learning about discipleship was most helpful. Participant 24 said:

I’m not sure if we are calling discipleship a spiritual discipline, but it has been the most enlightening to me. I have sought out an individual to disciple me and be a mentor so that I can learn how to disciple someone. Thank you for sharing that path so that I can grow deeper in love with Jesus and spread His love to others.

The participants who seemed to have had a good understanding of the role of the spiritual disciplines indicated that they did not learn anything new. They listed all the disciplines discussed in the workshops and felt that it was a good overview. Participant 16 said, “I have appreciated this class very much. I do not think I’ve learned about new disciplines. Rather I think I have benefitted from the continued studies of each of the disciplines we covered in these lessons.”

Research Question #3: Description of Evidence

What aspects of the spiritual formation workshop had the greatest impact on the observed changes in spiritual formation in relation to biblical theology, holy love, and dispositional living among practicing Christians who desired a deeper relationship with God and participated in a twelve-week spiritual formation workshop focused on knowing and loving God?

The focus group interview took place immediately after the last spiritual formation workshop. I invited eight persons to participate. I designed the focus group questions to measure the impact of the spiritual formation workshop (Table 4.7). I recorded the interview and later transcribed it for analysis.

Table 4.7. Focus Group Questions (FGQ)

FGQ1	Did you gain new knowledge or insights through your participation in this workshop?
FGQ2	In what ways did the workshop enhance your understanding of and attitude towards your spiritual formation?
FGQ3	What was the most valuable aspect of this workshop specifically related to the following topics? Biblical knowledge, your relationship with others and your faithfulness towards practicing the spiritual disciplines?

FGQ1: *Did you gain new knowledge or insights through your participation in this workshop?* Most of the participants said they were familiar with some of the content presented in the workshops but that it augmented their understanding of the spiritual disciplines. Participants made the following comments:

- “I was familiar with a little bit of what you talked about, but of course I didn’t know the depth. So, it was good to learn more.” (Participant 6).
- “One thing it did for me is just understanding the concept of spiritual disciplines. It has been a great help to become familiar with the phrase

spiritual disciplines and learning what they are and seeing how they have or could impact me.” (Participant 24)

- “I gained a greater spiritual awareness.” (Participant 12)
- “I realized that these things are not new, but I’d never thought about it until now. Now that I know more, I will think about it more so, from that standpoint it’s probably the biggest benefit I get out of this experience.” (Participant 13)

FGQ2: *In what ways did the workshop enhance your understanding of and attitude towards your spiritual formation?* Most of the interviewees felt that this experience enhanced their understanding of the spiritual disciplines in some way and several commented on the way it affected their attitude toward their spiritual formation. Comments included the following:

- “It showed me that my spiritual formation process has not been completed, I have much to learn.” (Participant 30)
- “I realized that it needs to be purposeful. This is important.” (Participant 24)
- “This has made me think more about the Holy Spirit. Really, how he has been working in me without me even thinking about it. I must be more intentional.” (Participant 20)
- “One thing it did for me is just understanding the concept of spiritual disciplines. It has been a great help to become familiar with the phrase spiritual disciplines and learn what they are and seeing how they have or could impact me.” (Participant 5)

- “These workshops have been affirmation of the veracity of the spiritual disciplines.” (Participant 24).

FGQ3: *What was the most valuable aspect of this workshop specifically related to the following topics? Biblical knowledge, your relationship with others, and your faithfulness towards practicing the spiritual disciplines?* Participants commented included the following:

- “You brought everything we discussed back to the Bible. It made me think about the fact that it’s been there all along, I just haven’t been aware of it.” (Participant 21)
- “I have never thought about reading the Bible for the purpose of knowing God’s character, and it’s like you said, “How can I love God if I don’t know Him.” (Participant 5)
- “One thing that particularly hit me was thinking back over all the years and all the things I’ve done. At the time I did them they seemed inconsequential, I just did them to be part of something. I started thinking of all the ways I’ve served and can see how I grew with each one. It sort of blew my mind that while I was doing something for someone else, God was working in me.” (Participant 20)
- “The spiritual disciplines are not a to do list, they help me experience God in my life.” (Participant 21)

The qualitative data demonstrates that the participants in this spiritual formation workshop reflected on the material covered and asked questions about how it impacted their attitudes and beliefs. They were eager to learn more about the spiritual disciplines because they all desired a closer relationship with the Lord. Even though they were impacted differently, they all expressed their intent to be more intentional.

Summary of Major Findings

The data from this project revealed several significant findings about the spiritual formation of a mature group of Christians at John Wesley Church in Houston, Texas. The findings may be relevant to other Christian churches that are interested in intentionally supporting the spiritual formation of its members. These are the major findings which are discussed in Chapter 5.

1. A lack of understanding exists about spiritual formation among the participants in this intervention.
2. A discrepancy exists between the value participants placed on scriptural knowledge and the extent to which they personally interact with Scripture.
3. Long-term, regular involvement in a Christian worshipping and serving community contributes to spiritual formation.
4. Participation in the spiritual formation workshop increased the participants' overall awareness and understanding of spiritual formation, which inspired and motivated them to be more intentional about engaging in all the spiritual disciplines.

CHAPTER 5

LEARNING REPORT FOR THE PROJECT

Overview of the Chapter

This chapter presents the four major findings that emerged from the spiritual transformation project. It includes evidence and my personal observations supported in the research through the biblical/theological perspectives and the literature review. Each finding is discussed from three perspectives, namely personal observations, literature review, and the biblical/theological framework for this project. Chapter 5 also introduces the implications for ministry and considers the limitations of the study as well as surprising encounters and observations. It makes suggestions for ministry applications and potential areas of research.

As previously stated, many Christians do not know or love God despite professing faith in him. Seventy-five percent of Christians believe that the Bible is the Word of God, yet many believers in America have only a superficial knowledge of Scripture and how it relates to their everyday life. Among those who believe that reading the Bible is important, a survey by the Barna Group in 2021 revealed that they “are not satisfied with their current level of Scripture reading” (State of the Bible)

Because many practicing Christians do not know Scripture, they do not know the nature, attributes, or promises of God communicated to through his Word; nor do they understand the transformational journey that they are on. Failure to engage in Bible reading and the other spiritual disciplines translates to the absence of an intimate, transformational relationship with the Trinity. Consequently, Christians do not grow

spiritually; they do not know or love the God whom they worship; nor do they truly understand his all-encompassing holy love for them.

The purpose of this research was to measure the spiritual transformation in relation to biblical theology, holy love, and dispositional living among a group of practicing Christians after participating in a spiritual formation workshop that emphasized knowing and loving God.

Major Findings

1. General lack of understanding about spiritual formation among participants in this research project.

The participant surveys, journals, class discussions, and the focus group discussion revealed an unfamiliarity with the concept of spiritual formation. Given that 100 percent of the participants have been Christians for more than fifty years, this was significant.

Personal Observation. Even though I became a Christian as a child and attended church almost every Sunday of my life, my introduction to the concept of spiritual formation happened at seminary. While I knew that reading the Bible, praying, worshipping in community, and partaking of the Lord's Supper were important because the Bible says so, I did not understand the formative value of these habits. It was a shocking realization that forty-five years of Sunday sermons had not imparted this essential knowledge to me. Despite my observations in ministry, which showed me that this was the norm and I was not the exception, I wondered if it was true for the participants.

Leading up to the spiritual formation workshop, I had a few concerns. I did not know most of the participants, but was aware that they were all mature, active Christians. I wondered how familiar they were with this subject, whether they would trust me and be receptive to the content of the sessions, and how comfortable they would be with journaling and discussing their spiritual formation in a group setting. The Lord reminded me that gaining an understanding of spiritual formation changed my life in Christ and that he gave me the desire to share this with other Christians. I prayed that they would be open and transparent so that the time spent together would yield valuable insights.

During our time together, it became clear to me that despite their vast number of years as practicing Christians, most of the participants did not know that spiritual formation was essential to their growing relationship with Christ. Only 25 percent strongly agreed that being transformed into God's image ought to be a goal of every Christian, and only 50 percent strongly agreed that spiritual disciplines are fundamental to our spiritual formation process. One of the reasons for this was a lack of scriptural knowledge about Christian transformation. Reading the journals and focus group transcripts confirmed my observations, but I was humbled and deeply touched by their deep desire to continue growing in their knowledge and relationship with the Lord, even after fifty years of worshipping and serving him.

Biblical/Theological. In Romans 12:2, Paul exhorts Christians not to “conform to this world” but to renew their minds. In 2 Corinthians 3:18, Christians learn that the goal of their spiritual transformation is Christlikeness. It follows, firstly, that they should be aware of their need for change. Secondly, they need to understand that the goal of their spiritual formation is holiness, and thirdly they need to know which habits or practices

will help Christians know him more and create space and time in their busy lives to bring them into his presence and encounter the transformative power of the Holy Spirit. We cannot change and be more like Jesus if we do not know him and do not regularly engage in the means of grace, but most importantly, we cannot know him if we do not know the Bible? Knowing and loving God are two major themes in Scripture. Sound biblical knowledge is essential to spiritual transformation.

God addresses knowing him in many verses throughout the Bible, and he connects both love and obedience to knowledge of him. In Deuteronomy 6:4–5, God’s people are instructed to know him and love him by immersing themselves in Scripture. Paul says, Christians are to “learn Christ” (Eph. 4:20). Christians learn who they are worshipping and what he requires of them primarily through God’s Word. Not only does the Bible teach Christians to be transformed, but it also teaches them ways of interacting with the Lord that help them grow in their relationship with Christ. The prophet Hosea warns God’s people that they will be destroyed because they “lack knowledge” and forgotten because they “reject knowledge.” In Philippians 2:12, Paul addresses new Christians and encourages them to embrace this transformational process and “continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling.” By implication, they need to engage and participate in their spiritual formation.

Through a deeper knowledge of biblical truth and the experiential knowledge of encountering him through spiritual practices, Christians begin to know God, grow in their love for him, and are progressively made holy in the image of Christ—thus becoming better disciples of Jesus and better representatives of Jesus Christ as they disciple others.

Literature Review. The literature review supports the idea that scriptural knowledge is essential to knowing God and the Christian “faith journey” (Peterson, *Eat This Book* 16; Bowe 13). Wright’s (37) and Michael Lodahl’s (25) believe that biblical knowledge grounds Christians because they understand the story of their faith as well as their place in that story. For them to grow in a loving, obedient, trusting relationship, they have to know him (Packer). Willard and Johnson point out that there is a big difference between knowing God and knowing about God (*Hearing God* 15). Spiritual formation requires a personal knowledge of God and an understanding of the God-ordained spiritual disciplines through which the Spirit works in Christians (Wesley; Peterson).

The mind is renewed ultimately through the power of the Holy Spirit, but transformation by renewing the mind is an ongoing action, “perpetual and ever repeated renewal” (Barth 507). It is a process that was set in motion through Christ, but there is an ongoing renewal through the Holy Spirit in which believers must participate (Mulholland, *Invitation to a Journey* 13). Sadly, many Christians do not understand this and the purpose of the spiritual disciplines (Willard, *Spirit of the Disciplines* 75; R. Foster 76). The cost is high. Many Christians do not embrace the habits put in place by Jesus for them to participate in and grow spiritually.

2. A discrepancy exists between the value placed on scriptural knowledge and the extent to which participants interact with Scripture.

The data revealed that the participants believed scriptural knowledge is foundational. However, data also shows that most Christians are not satisfied with their level of personal Bible knowledge.

Personal Observation. The participants in this intervention were all committed, mature Christians who have been very active in the life of their church community for many years. I designed the study hoping to have a more diverse demographic but was excited to see so many eager participants who have been engaged, lifelong Christians. I presumed that given their longevity as believers, they would know or at least be familiar with much of what we were going to discuss, especially about the place of Scripture in the life of a Christian. The pre-survey confirmed that the majority believed that reading the Bible was an important spiritual practice, but most of them said they were not satisfied with the extent to which they interacted with Scripture. Some shared that their Bible reading was mostly for information. They were well versed in Bible stories and lessons, but several said they did not read the Bible expecting a divine encounter with the Lord. The Bible was seen as God's Word that teaches Christians many things about him and how to be a Christian. The idea of reading the Bible as a means of grace through which the Lord transforms Christians was a new perspective for some. During the course of the twelve-week workshop, the class discussions revealed a shift in their point of view and a desire to interact differently with Scripture.

Literature Review. God reveals himself through his inspired Word (Calvin; Jones; Oden; Erikson; Wright). Research by the Barna Group and Pew Research concluded that most Christians accept the authority of Scripture and believe it is the primary means through which God chose to reveal himself to us (5 Facts). Yet, a quick inventory of Christians' Bible reading habits reveals a gap between theory and practice. Christian authors have observed this general trend in Christianity and believe it is one of the major reasons why Christians do not develop spiritually (Rohr; Peterson; Willard; Wright). Not

only was Scripture inspired by God, but it continues to be inspired in the sense that the “Holy Spirit illuminates it to us in an ongoing act of revelation” by revealing its meaning to us and drawing us into a relationship with him (Jones; Peterson).

Literature from the early church fathers and a long line of authors and theologians—Benedict, Bernard of Clairvaux, Dorotheos, Luther, Spener, Wesley—demonstrate the primary importance that they placed on Scripture. Alan Kreider notes that the early church leaders understood that conversion was just the beginning and explained their diligence in teaching new converts how to embody change through catechesis and changing how they lived (50). They believed that it took time to reform a person’s character and lifestyle by instilling biblical truth and setting the right example (Spener; Wesley; Kreider). Vigen Guroian calls it “deep ontological repair” (50). The consequences of not growing spiritually are devastating. It leads to spiritual blindness and moral unresponsiveness to God. Barth says “ignorance . . . in the religious sense, is almost always equal to sin . . . as it amounts to suppressing the truth by unrighteousness in flagrant repudiation of God's revelation, rendering it inexcusable and ungrateful” (501). Looking back at the rich Christian tradition, knowing God through his Word is front and center in their teaching as well as in their practice.

Biblical/Theological. Many Bible passages in both the Old and New Testaments directly address the topic of knowing Scripture. Christians are to meditate on it day and night and write it in their heart (Deut. 6:4–9; Ps. 1:2–3). They are to obey and love him, for with it comes all his blessings (Deut. 11:13–21). The psalmist says, “I have hidden your words in my heart, I meditate on your precepts, consider your ways and delight in your decrees; I will not neglect your Word” (Ps. 119). Hosea warns that absence of

knowledge leads to destruction (Hos. 4:6). Paul says faith comes by hearing the Word of God (Rom. 10:17). Jesus says his sheep follow him because they know and listen to his voice (John 10:17–28). Listening to his voice changes believers “Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth” (John 17:17). Sanctification is intricately linked to knowing what is in the Bible.

3. Long-term, regular involvement in a Christian worshipping and serving community and participating in the means of grace contributes to spiritual formation.

When Christians follow the example that Christ and his disciples set for them by regularly worshipping in community and engaging in the spiritual habits that the Lord ordained, they place themselves in an environment where they can learn more about the God whom they worship and encounter the presence of the Holy Spirit who is their helper. God requires obedience in this. The reward is a relationship with the creator of the universe, ongoing sanctification, and the privilege of participating in his mission for the church.

Personal Observation. Growing up in the church was a blessing. I went through catechesis, which taught me what I believe and why; it grounded me in my Christian faith tradition. I attended church on Sundays because I had to and learned to pray from an early age. It was not until years later that I began to study the Word. Although I initially read the Bible for information and not formation, by his grace, my relationship with God grew because I was in the Word. This also inspired me to become involved and serve him in many ways. I had never heard of spiritual formation and did not know that these spiritual practices were put in place by God precisely for the purpose of progressively

sanctifying Christians; nor did I realize that there is an active component to spiritual formation that requires participation in the spiritual disciplines. Without any understanding of progressive sanctification, the Holy Spirit was actively transforming me through the means of grace. My experience in ministry showed me that I am not unique in this. Many Christians experience Christianity in this way and this project confirmed my observations. Most of the participants reported a personal relationship with the Lord and were spiritually mature because of their participation in some or all of the means of grace. The topic of this intervention piqued their interest, but they did not really know what to expect. Most of them were unfamiliar with the concept of spiritual formation but happy to learn that God is working whether they know it or not. Interestingly, participants favored some spiritual disciplines over others and named which ones had the most profound effect on their spiritual formation. Those who had been studying the Bible testified to the transformative effect it had on them. Others named worshipping in community, prayer, and acts of service as having the greatest impact on them. Most participants said that a better understanding of the means of grace would have influenced their attitude and their desire to engage these practices more faithfully.

Literature Review. Christian authors—Leclerc and Maddix, Peterson, Willard, Jones—agree that the goal of the Christian formational journey is holiness, and the process is means of sanctification. God created mankind in his own image, which was damaged in the fall and needed to be restored so that his people could be the image bearers he created them to be. This call to holiness and transformation pertains to everyone who accepts Christ as Lord and Savior. By his grace, God provided the means for the process and will make Christians holy as they cooperate with his grace and grow

in love and purity. Leclerc and Maddix say sanctification is the outcome of the Lord's purifying grace. It is an ongoing, "moment by moment salvation that flows from obedience and trust" (Leclerc and Maddix; Packer and Vanhoozer). As Christians are inwardly transformed and sanctified through the work of the Holy Spirit and the means of grace, they are "set apart" for God's purposes.

Biblical/Theological. One of the biblical truths that resonated deeply with the participants was that Christians lost our image-bearing capacity through the sin of the first Adam, and it was and continues to be restored to us through the redemption of the second Adam and their progressive sanctification (1 Cor. 15:46–49; 2 Cor. 3:18; Phil 3:21). All the participants understood that Christ's righteousness was attributed to them at the moment of their salvation and expressed gratitude for the fact that it is "God who works in us" (Phil. 2:13). Some did not know that Christlikeness is the goal of sanctification, and several commented that they were not aware of the active component of the sanctification process, which Paul highlights earlier in this passage (v. 12).

4. Participation in the spiritual formation workshop increases awareness and understanding of spiritual formation and leads to more intentional engagement in spiritual disciplines.

Knowledge can change people. For Christians, knowledge of the Bible is essential to the change God wants to bring about in the heart of every believer. Each individual is responsible to become familiar with Scripture, but the church also is responsible to teach and disciple believers in scriptural truth so that they may grow in love and holiness. The research has shown that many Christians do not read the Bible and suggests that the church also does not seem to give enough teaching on spiritual formation.

Participants expressed their appreciation for the Scripture-based teaching on every aspect of spiritual formation during this project. It augmented their understanding of spiritual formation and inspired the participants to be more intentional and embrace all of the means of grace, not only those which they felt most comfortable with.

Personal Observation. Since the participants were all mature individuals who had been Christians for many years, I assumed that they would be familiar with the topic and much of the content of the intervention. Initially, the pre-survey indicated that this was not the case, and later, the journal entries and the focus group confirmed it. Only a few of them had a good understanding of what spiritual formation is and how it happens. They were all engaged in the sessions and eager to learn more, openly sharing their understanding and how the content and discussions positively influenced their perspective. The twelve-week workshop felt as if it was in itself a spiritual journey for some of them.

Literature Review. The vital role of Scripture and the need for intentional teaching on spiritual formation emerged repeatedly in my literature review. Luther, Calvin, Spener, and Wesley believed that, by nature, no good is in us and that “a more extensive use of the Word of God among us” would bring about transformation in the hearts of Christians. More recently, Christian authors have echoed this sentiment and commented extensively on the lack of biblical teaching in the modern Western church. They name it as one of the contributing factors to the state of many Christians in America. Evidence from literature suggests that where the Word is preached and believers are encouraged to participate in the means of grace, the Holy Spirit is faithful to grow them in the love of God and purity of heart.

Biblical/Theological. God's people have a biblical responsibility to know him through immersing themselves in his Word (Deut. 6:4–9; Ps. 1:2–3). Scripture teaches that obedience changes the way Christians live and respond to the world. Jesus set the example. He charges his disciples to answer the call, make disciples, and teach them everything they learned from him (Matt. 28:19–20). Paul continued to exhort the church to follow his example as he “followed the example of Christ” (1 Cor. 11:1). Through ongoing study of the Word, discipleship, and a lifetime of faithfully participating in those God-ordained spiritual habits, “[h]e who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus” (Phil. 1:6).

Ministry Implications of the Findings

This project, along with its major findings, offers some particular implications.

1) The first major implication stems from my finding that a general lack of knowledge exists regarding spiritual formation among Christians. The project revealed that most of the participants were unaware of the scriptural foundation for spiritual formation and did not appreciate the deep and extensive benefits of engaging in all the means of grace. Growing in a relationship with anyone takes conscious effort and time. A Christian's relationship with the Lord is no different. The literature review revealed that pastors, church leaders, and theologians have agonized over this problem and ways to address it for centuries. The solution seems obvious. Jesus gave Christians the formula. Teach Scripture, teach and practice the spiritual disciplines, and disciple new believers in the application of the Word by setting an example of what living a transformed life looks like.

At the start of my research, I became quite disillusioned by the cycle that has repeated itself since God revealed himself to his people. People are fickle who easily stray from what they know. Christian behavior demonstrates fluctuation between times of growing in loving obedience and times of drifting away from what Scripture teaches. It was true for the Israelites; it has been true for many Christian communities over centuries; and it is true for them today. When Christians obey the Lord, it creates fertile soil for the Holy Spirit to work. Christians can be encouraged by the fact that God is faithful. This is his church, and he will always move in the hearts of obedient people. Pastors and teachers have a great responsibility to teach the Word and encourage Christians to intentionally participate in their spiritual formation, but they cannot do it by themselves. Jesus says, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore, pray earnestly to send out laborers into the harvest” (Matt. 9:37–38), and he addresses the whole church in Matthew 28. Christians all have a responsibility in this.

I think the most important ministry implication of this study is that many Christians do not follow the example Jesus gave because they do not know what is required of them. One of the reasons for the lack of growth in love and holiness is the lack of scriptural knowledge. Christians cannot love God and live the way they ought to if they do not know who he is or how they are to live in response to that. Therefore, the church, must do better at teaching Christians how to be Christians, beginning with the Word.

2) A second major contribution of this project is that it revealed the value of intentional, Scripture-based teaching on spiritual formation. These seasoned, mature Christians openly shared their formational journey with the group. The curriculum

offered structure and ensured a systematic approach, while the group discussion and individual contributions augmented their experience. They were not only eager to learn but excited about what they learned and the implications it had for them personally and for the kingdom. Their response indicates that other Christians would also benefit from a similar class or workshop that focuses on spiritual formation.

Limitations of the Study

I encountered a few limitations that might have influenced the study in some way; however, I do not believe that they significantly impacted the generalization of the study findings:

1. Pre- and post-survey: The pre-survey was initially created in Survey Monkey and sent to the participants online. Several of the participants were not able to access the surveys that way because they were not proficient computer users. Since not all the responses were in Survey Monkey, I was not able to use their data findings. I decided to use hard copies for the post-survey to eliminate this problem. It was much more comfortable for the participants.
2. Absence of clergy and elders: No members of the clergy attended the workshop primarily because it was held on Wednesday evenings as one of several classes at our church, and the pastors were teaching other classes during that time. Perhaps they could have contributed to sessions by sharing their own spiritual journey and perspective on this topic, but their presence might also have prevented the other participants from being as transparent as they were. I do not believe including clergy would have strengthened this project.

3. Demographic: It was my hope that the workshop would be a diverse demographic of participants, particularly with respect to age and the number of years they have been Christians. All the participants were over fifty and, on average, had been Christians for more than sixty years. I wondered how and to what extent this would impact the findings. I concluded that their rich and extensive experience as Christians and church members offered depth and strengthened the findings from the data. I do not think this affects the generalizability of this study in any way.
4. Questions worded negatively: The pre- and post-surveys included several questions that were framed negatively. The incongruence between the pre- and post-surveys in Q36 made me wonder if the negative question caused some confusion. Q36: *I do not have a good knowledge of the Scriptures*. In the pre-survey, 65 percent said they strongly disagreed, and 54 percent said they strongly disagreed in the post-survey. In my opinion, this could suggest one of two things: that they were less sure of their Bible knowledge after the study than before because the teaching was grounded in Scripture, highlighting that they may know less than originally thought; alternatively, that they were confused by how the question was phrased.

Unexpected Observations

A hunger for continued spiritual growth after a lifetime of following Jesus. As previously stated, I was initially surprised by the age of the participants. These participants were all deeply grounded in their faith. From the start, it was both humbling and encouraging to be with a group of people who have loved and served the Lord for

most of their lives but were still actively learning more about their spiritual journey and serving the Lord. I was unsure if they would derive some benefit from the workshop and how their maturity would impact the data. I was pleasantly surprised by the results. The fact that they were older and had been Christians for more than half a century meant they spoke from years of experience. It added a level of validity to my observations that might not have happened with believers who were less mature in their faith.

Age and number of years as a Christian is not an indicator of spiritual maturity. It was apparent that some individuals had far more extensive biblical knowledge and a better understanding of spiritual formation than others. One cannot assume that Christians know their Bible and have matured spiritually simply because they are older.

Insecurity about their own ability to disciple younger Christians. During the course of the twelve-week workshop, the class discussion frequently gravitated to the reasons for the apparent lack of spiritual growth among many Christians. One of the reasons we discussed was the failure of mature believers to disciple new believers in the way the early Christians disciplined new Christians. We also considered that discipling could be considered a spiritual discipline. None of the participants had ever disciplined someone because they said they did not feel equipped. I suggested that following Jesus for as long as they have should have equipped them to disciple new Christians. We discussed the Great Commission and the fact that every Christ follower has been charged with this responsibility. Several of the participants were profoundly impacted by this realization and reported that they felt a holy conviction about this and intended to start discipling a younger believer.

Recommendations

I am grateful and humbled to have had the opportunity to present this workshop and for the favorable results—the changes in knowledge, behaviors, and attitudes in the participants and in myself. With respect, I offer the following suggestions for the practice of ministry, uses of the research in the future, other areas of research that build on this one, and who may benefit from this study.

Changes in the practice of ministry

In my opinion, the results from this study invite the reexamination of how the church is teaching Christians, both new converts and others, about spiritual formation and the importance of knowing one's Bible and the spiritual disciplines. It should challenge pastors to preach sermons grounded in Scripture on this particular topic and encourage individuals to embrace all the means of grace and intentionally participate in these transformational habits. It requires a shift in thinking that Christians will learn about their spiritual formation informally and highlights the value of addressing it specifically. This means that the church will need to rethink how pastors and teachers see this issue and consider how to impart this new perspective to their members.

Despite a trend to encourage mature Christians to disciple other believers, it is an area in which the church needs to improve. Every Christian, embraces its responsibility to teach new Christians how to be Christians; it requires intentionality and work.

For those desiring to replicate this research, I would offer the following recommendations.

1. **When facilitating:** Remember that your role as a researcher is to be an engaged educator and learner. (a) Be considerate and respectful to participants throughout

the process as you present your content for their consideration or reflection. (b) Be a good listener and show sincere interest in their comments. (c) Be patient and demonstrate self-control if you do not agree. (e) Be flexible and willing to make adjustments, if necessary, without compromising the research.

2. **Learning environment.** Ensure that the location is conducive to the study and suitable for teaching, group discussion, and individual participation. Include diverse teaching styles, materials, and activities that would accommodate different personalities.

Uses of this research in the future

Considering the favorable response to this project, the church should be more intentional about preaching the Word of God, teaching Christians about spiritual formation and the means of grace, and provide ample opportunity for individuals to participate in them. Further, I believe that every church should actively teach members the value of discipleship and equip them to disciple someone.

Future area of research that build on this study

Data from Barna and Pew Research found that pastors struggled to define spiritual formation and indicated that they did not appreciate the value of teaching on the topic. Further research could be directed at pastors, that would focus on their understanding of spiritual formation and help them consider ways in which to educate and encourage their congregants in this area. The same is true for discipleship.

Who may benefit from this study?

Clergy, Bible teachers, spiritual directors, the Christian community, and the church in general can benefit immensely from this study.

Postscript

As I reflect on the last three years and this spiritual formation project, I cannot help but be extremely grateful for the journey I have been on. My personal experience motivated me to pursue this topic so that could learn these life-changing truths and habits that have a major impact on their relationship with the Lord. Friedrich Nietzsche once said, “The essential thing ‘in heaven and earth’ is that there should be a long obedience in the same direction; there thereby results, and has always resulted in the long run, something which has made life worth living.” This statement is profoundly true for every Christian (Peterson; *A long Obedience* 13)

Appendix A

Demographic Survey

1. Participant number # _____
2. What is your age?
 - ___ 8-24
 - ___ 25-34
 - ___ 35-44
 - ___ 45-54
 - ___ Over 55
3. What is your gender?
 - ___ Male
 - ___ Female
 - ___ Other
4. What is your ethnicity?
 - ___ White / Caucasian
 - ___ Hispanic / Latino
 - ___ Black / African American
 - ___ Native American / American Indian
 - ___ Asian / Pacific Islander
 - ___ Other
5. What is the highest degree or level of school you have completed?
(If you are currently in school, please indicate the highest degree you have received)
 - ___ Less than a high school diploma
 - ___ High school degree or equivalent
 - ___ Bachelor's degree
 - ___ Master's degree
 - ___ Doctorate degree
6. Marital Status
 - ___ Single (never married)
 - ___ Married
 - ___ In a domestic partnership
 - ___ Divorced
 - ___ Widowed
7. How many years have you been a Christian? _____
8. What is your religious affiliation?

- ___ Non-denominational
- ___ Anglican
- ___ Assemblies of God
- ___ Baptist
- ___ Catholic
- ___ Christian and Missionary Alliance
- ___ Church of God
- ___ Episcopal
- ___ Lutheran
- ___ Methodist
- ___ Pentecostal
- ___ Presbyterian
- ___ Seventh Day Adventist

B. Spiritual Formation Survey: Pre-Test

The purpose of this survey is to find out what people think about various aspects of their religious faith and how their beliefs impact their lives. Please answer each question and only choose one answer per question.

I would like you to respond to each statement by marking (X) under the word that best describes your own belief, attitude, or behavior. There are three open-ended questions at the end of the survey. Please tell us what you really think. There are no “right” answers. Your answers will be anonymous, and we guarantee strict confidentiality. Thank you for your help with this study.

Rate the following statements and answer the questions by marking (X) in the space provided.

1. I believe the Word of God is revealed in Scripture.
 Strongly Agree ___ Agree ___ Disagree ___ Strongly
 Disagree ___
2. I am not very confident that God knows and loves me.
 Strongly Agree ___ Agree ___ Disagree ___ Strongly
 Disagree ___
3. How often do you take a day of rest (Sabbath) each week?
 Never ___ several times a year ___ Monthly ___ 2-3 times a month ___
 Weekly ___
4. I pray regularly for the well-being and blessing of those with whom I have a
 difficult relationship.
 Strongly Agree ___ Agree ___ Disagree ___ Strongly
 Disagree ___
5. I regularly feel close to God in times of corporate worship and prayer.

Strongly Agree ____ Agree ____ Disagree ____ Strongly
Disagree ____

6. I am as excited about my faith today as I was the day I accepted Christ.
Strongly Agree ____ Agree ____ Disagree ____ Strongly
Disagree ____

7. When I feel anxious or afraid my first response is to pray about it.
Strongly Agree ____ Agree ____ Disagree ____ Strongly
Disagree ____

8. I do not experience the Holy Spirit working actively in my life.
Strongly Agree ____ Agree ____ Disagree ____ Strongly
Disagree ____

9. When I speak to non-Christians about my faith, I usually focus on my experience
of the love of Christ rather than my knowledge of Christian doctrine.
Strongly Agree ____ Agree ____ Disagree ____ Strongly
Disagree ____

10. The Bible teaches that I must be transformed into the image of Christ.
Strongly Agree ____ Agree ____ Disagree ____ Strongly
Disagree ____

11. I demonstrate patience with those who are in my care (children, patients, clients,
subordinate co-workers, dependents) as well as those with whom I do not need to
have a relationship. (e.g., telemarketers, cashiers, servers)

Strongly Agree ____ Agree ____ Disagree ____ Strongly
Disagree ____

12. My faith in Christ does not help me through the trials and joys I experience in my
daily life.

Strongly Agree ____ Agree ____ Disagree ____ Strongly
Disagree ____

13. My faith is based on a well thought out system of beliefs.
Strongly Agree ____ Agree ____ Disagree ____ Strongly
Disagree ____

14. I do not pray to seek God's guidance.
Strongly Agree ____ Agree ____ Disagree ____ Strongly
Disagree ____

15. It is very important to know God's truths as they are revealed in Scripture.
Strongly Agree ____ Agree ____ Disagree ____ Strongly
Disagree ____

16. I believe spiritual transformation is the work of the Holy Spirit.
 Strongly Agree ____ Agree ____ Disagree ____ Strongly
 Disagree ____
17. I have a hard time not worrying.
 Strongly Agree ____ Agree ____ Disagree ____ Strongly
 Disagree ____
18. My faith is generally more emotional than cognitive.
 Strongly Agree ____ Agree ____ Disagree ____ Strongly
 Disagree ____
19. How often do you attend corporate worship?
 Never ____ several times a year ____ Monthly ____ 2-3 times a month ____
 Weekly ____
20. I do not believe reading Scripture is a necessary spiritual discipline.
 Strongly Agree ____ Agree ____ Disagree ____ Strongly
 Disagree ____
21. I do not talk to other people about my religion regularly.
 Strongly Agree ____ Agree ____ Disagree ____ Strongly
 Disagree ____
22. My faith in Jesus Christ touches every area of my life.
 Strongly Agree ____ Agree ____ Disagree ____ Strongly
 Disagree ____
23. I cannot say that I have felt God's presence.
 I Strongly Agree ____ Agree ____ Disagree ____ Strongly
 Disagree ____
24. I take the initiative in asking for forgiveness and seek reconciliation when I have
 wronged someone else.
 Strongly Agree ____ Agree ____ Disagree ____ Strongly
 Disagree ____
25. I tend to be less concerned about knowing Bible details than other Christians.
 Strongly Agree ____ Agree ____ Disagree ____ Strongly
 Disagree ____
26. I don't really understand why we need to worship because it does not do much for
 me.
 Strongly Agree ____ Agree ____ Disagree ____ Strongly
 Disagree ____

27. I spend a significant time trying to grow in knowledge and understanding of my faith.
 Strongly Agree ____ Agree ____ Disagree ____ Strongly Disagree ____
28. I regularly pray when I am not at church.
 Strongly Agree ____ Agree ____ Disagree ____ Strongly Disagree ____
29. I believe regular worship in community is necessary for my spiritual growth.
 Strongly Agree ____ Agree ____ Disagree ____ Strongly Disagree ____
30. I do not need to engage and participate in my own spiritual formation.
 Strongly Agree ____ Agree ____ Disagree ____ Strongly Disagree ____
31. I can be a faithful follower of Christ without being part of a Christian community.
 Strongly Agree ____ Agree ____ Disagree ____ Strongly Disagree ____
32. I believe that I am accountable to God who watches over me as a Heavenly Father.
 Strongly Agree ____ Agree ____ Disagree ____ Strongly Disagree ____
33. I think spiritual practices are necessary to deepen my relationship with Christ.
 Strongly Agree ____ Agree ____ Disagree ____ Strongly Disagree ____
34. Prayer is deeply satisfying and an integral part of my religious experience.
 Strongly Agree ____ Agree ____ Disagree ____ Strongly Disagree ____
35. When I am faced with a decision, I try to find out what God wants me to do.
 Strongly Agree ____ Agree ____ Disagree ____ Strongly Disagree ____
36. I do not have a good knowledge of the Scriptures.
 Strongly Agree ____ Agree ____ Disagree ____ Strongly Disagree ____
37. How often do you participate in activities like Bible studies, discipleship groups, prayer groups etc.?

Never____ several times a year ____ Monthly ____ 2-3 times a month ____
Weekly____

38. I am spiritually more mature today compared to ten years ago.

Strongly Agree ____ Agree ____ Disagree ____ Strongly
Disagree____

39. I believe prayer is a necessary spiritual discipline.

Strongly Agree ____ Agree ____ Disagree ____ Strongly
Disagree____

40. What is your understanding of spiritual growth?

41. What has motivated you to grow spiritually in the last year?

42. What do you hope to gain from participating in this workshop?

Appendix B

Spiritual Formation Post-Test Survey

Rate the following statements and answer the questions by marking (X) in the space provided.

1. I believe the Word of God is revealed in Scripture.
 Strongly Agree ____ Agree ____ Disagree ____ Strongly
 Disagree ____
2. I am not very confident that God knows and loves me.
 Strongly Agree ____ Agree ____ Disagree ____ Strongly
 Disagree ____
3. How often do you take a day of rest (Sabbath) each week?
 Never ____ several times a year ____ Monthly ____ 2-3 times a month ____
 Weekly ____
4. I pray regularly for the well-being and blessing of those with whom I have a
 difficult relationship.
 Strongly Agree ____ Agree ____ Disagree ____ Strongly
 Disagree ____
5. I regularly feel close to God in times of corporate worship and prayer.
 Strongly Agree ____ Agree ____ Disagree ____ Strongly
 Disagree ____
6. I am as excited about my faith today as I was the day I accepted Christ.
 Strongly Agree ____ Agree ____ Disagree ____ Strongly
 Disagree ____
7. When I feel anxious or afraid my first response is to pray about it.
 Strongly Agree ____ Agree ____ Disagree ____ Strongly
 Disagree ____
8. I do not experience the Holy Spirit working actively in my life.
 Strongly Agree ____ Agree ____ Disagree ____ Strongly
 Disagree ____
9. When I speak to non-Christians about my faith, I usually focus on my experience
 of the love of Christ rather than my knowledge of Christian doctrine.
 Strongly Agree ____ Agree ____ Disagree ____ Strongly
 Disagree ____
10. The Bible teaches that I must be transformed into the image of Christ.
 Strongly Agree ____ Agree ____ Disagree ____ Strongly
 Disagree ____

11. I demonstrate patience with those who are in my care (children, patients, clients, subordinate co-workers, dependents) as well as those with whom I do not need to have a relationship. (e.g., telemarketers, cashiers, servers)
 Strongly Agree _____ Agree _____ Disagree _____ Strongly Disagree _____
12. My faith in Christ does not help me through the trials and joys I experience in my daily life.
 Strongly Agree _____ Agree _____ Disagree _____ Strongly Disagree _____
13. My faith is based on a well thought out system of beliefs.
 Strongly Agree _____ Agree _____ Disagree _____ Strongly Disagree _____
14. I do not pray to seek God's guidance.
 Strongly Agree _____ Agree _____ Disagree _____ Strongly Disagree _____
15. It is very important to know God's truths as they are revealed in Scripture.
 Strongly Agree _____ Agree _____ Disagree _____ Strongly Disagree _____
16. I believe spiritual transformation is the work of the Holy Spirit.
 Strongly Agree _____ Agree _____ Disagree _____ Strongly Disagree _____
17. I have a hard time not worrying.
 Strongly Agree _____ Agree _____ Disagree _____ Strongly Disagree _____
18. My faith is generally more emotional than cognitive.
 Strongly Agree _____ Agree _____ Disagree _____ Strongly Disagree _____
19. How often do you attend corporate worship?
 Never _____ several times a year _____ Monthly _____ 2-3 times a month _____ Weekly _____
20. I do not believe reading Scripture is a necessary spiritual discipline.
 Strongly Agree _____ Agree _____ Disagree _____ Strongly Disagree _____
21. I do not talk to other people about my religion regularly.

Strongly Agree ____ Agree ____ Disagree ____ Strongly
Disagree ____

22. My faith in Jesus Christ touches every area of my life.

Strongly Agree ____ Agree ____ Disagree ____ Strongly
Disagree ____

23. I cannot say that I have felt God's presence.

I Strongly Agree ____ Agree ____ Disagree ____ Strongly
Disagree ____

24. I take the initiative in asking for forgiveness and seek reconciliation when I have wronged someone else.

Strongly Agree ____ Agree ____ Disagree ____ Strongly
Disagree ____

25. I tend to be less concerned about knowing Bible details than other Christians.

Strongly Agree ____ Agree ____ Disagree ____ Strongly
Disagree ____

26. I don't really understand why we need to worship because it does not do much for me.

Strongly Agree ____ Agree ____ Disagree ____ Strongly
Disagree ____

27. I spend a significant time trying to grow in knowledge and understanding of my faith.

Strongly Agree ____ Agree ____ Disagree ____ Strongly
Disagree ____

28. I regularly pray when I am not at church.

Strongly Agree ____ Agree ____ Disagree ____ Strongly
Disagree ____

29. I believe regular worship in community is necessary for my spiritual growth.

Strongly Agree ____ Agree ____ Disagree ____ Strongly
Disagree ____

30. I do not need to engage and participate in my own spiritual formation.

Strongly Agree ____ Agree ____ Disagree ____ Strongly
Disagree ____

31. I can be a faithful follower of Christ without being part of a Christian community.

Strongly Agree ____ Agree ____ Disagree ____ Strongly
Disagree ____

32. I believe that I am accountable to God who watches over me as a Heavenly Father.
Strongly Agree ____ Agree ____ Disagree ____ Strongly Disagree ____
33. I think spiritual practices are necessary to deepen my relationship with Christ.
Strongly Agree ____ Agree ____ Disagree ____ Strongly Disagree ____
34. Prayer is deeply satisfying and an integral part of my religious experience.
Strongly Agree ____ Agree ____ Disagree ____ Strongly Disagree ____
35. When I am faced with a decision, I try to find out what God wants me to do.
Strongly Agree ____ Agree ____ Disagree ____ Strongly Disagree ____
36. I do not have a good knowledge of the Scriptures.
Strongly Agree ____ Agree ____ Disagree ____ Strongly Disagree ____
37. How often do you participate in activities like Bible studies, discipleship groups, prayer groups etc.?
Never ____ several times a year ____ Monthly ____ 2-3 times a month ____ Weekly ____
38. I am spiritually more mature today compared to ten years ago.
Strongly Agree ____ Agree ____ Disagree ____ Strongly Disagree ____
39. I believe prayer is a necessary spiritual discipline.
Strongly Agree ____ Agree ____ Disagree ____ Strongly Disagree ____

Appendix C

Journal Entry Questions

Each participant will be given a journal and asked to write a paragraph in response to the following three questions. These questions will be asked in weeks 1, 2, and 11.

1. How has the church helped your understanding of your ongoing journey toward Christlikeness?
2. Which spiritual disciplines have you participated in, and how have they contributed to your spiritual growth?
3. Which of the spiritual disciplines that you learned about in this workshop will be most helpful for your continued spiritual formation and why?

Appendix D

Focus Group

1. Did you gain new knowledge or insights through your participation in this process?
2. In what ways did the process enhance your understanding of and attitude toward your spiritual formation as a Christian?
3. What was the most helpful aspect of this process specifically related to the following topics?
 - Your biblical knowledge
 - Your relationship with others
 - Your faithfulness toward practicing spiritual disciplines

Appendix E

Informed Consent Letter

Knowing and Loving God: A Spiritual Formation Journey

You are invited to be in a research study being done by **Tania van Dongen** from Asbury Theological Seminary. You are invited because you signed up for a spiritual formation workshop and indicated that you desired a closer relationship with the Lord. If you agree to be in the study, you will be asked to attend 12 meetings on successive Wednesday evenings during the fall. Each session will be an hour and 30 minutes. We will meet at the church in the designated room to be assigned. Each meeting will consist of teaching, discussion, and a time for prayer. Before and after the 12-week workshop you be asked to complete a survey, on Survey Monkey. Each participant will be assigned a participant number and I will always maintain strict confidentiality. During the 12-week period you will be asked to journal, each week, with a short paragraph in response to a prompt. You may also be selected to participate in a Focus Group one week after the last meeting. This meeting will be recorded with my computer and the recording will be kept confidential on my password-protected computer. Your participation in the focus group will be voluntary. Although confidentiality will be encouraged, it cannot be guaranteed due to the presence of other participants. However, nothing of a sensitive or personal nature will be discussed at the focus group. All hardcopy material, like the journals, will be locked in a cabinet and the key stored in a secure location. After the data has been collected and analyzed, the journals will be destroyed, and the recording of the focus group session will be deleted.

The purpose of the workshop is to see if a group of Christians experience spiritual growth through their participation. This will provide our church, and others in the future, with valuable insights to inform future ministry in this area.

If something makes you feel uncomfortable in any way while you are in the study, please tell **Tania van Dongen**, who can be reached at **Taniavandongen@gmail.com**. You can refuse to respond to any or all the questions, and you will be able to withdraw from the process at any time without penalty.

If you have any questions about the research study, please contact **Tania van Dongen** at Taniavandongen@gmail.com.

Signing this paper means that you have read and understand the content, or had it read to you, and that you want to be in the study. If you do not want to be in the study, do not sign the paper. Being in the study is up to you, and no one will be upset if you do not sign this paper or even if you change your mind later. You agree that you have been told about this study and why it is being done and what to do.

 Signature of Person Agreeing to be in the Study

 Date Signed

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