Empowering Young Chinese Fathers in Australia to Experience Spiritual Transformation through Contemplative Disciplines

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EMPOWERING YOUNG CHINESE FATHERS IN AUSTRALIA TO EXPERIENCE SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION THROUGH CONTEMPLATIVE DISCIPLINES

Written by

PUI LEUNG CHOY (ANDREW)

and submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Ministry

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EMPOWERING YOUNG CHINESE FATHERS IN AUSTRALIA TO EXPERIENCE SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION THROUGH CONTEMPLATIVE DISCIPLINES

A DOCTORAL PROJECT
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY
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IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY

PUI LEUNG CHOY (ANDREW)
DECEMBER 2017
ABSTRACT

Empowering Young Chinese Fathers in Australia to Experience Spiritual Transformation through Contemplative Disciplines
Pui Leung (Andrew) Choy
Doctor of Ministry
School of Theology, Fuller Theological Seminary
2017

This doctoral project aims to empower the Christian fathers at West Sydney Chinese Christian Church (WSCCC) to experience spiritual transformation in their busy daily lives. The demands from work and the pressure of living in Sydney, Australia, together with additional family responsibilities, have drained and prevented them from experiencing God on an ongoing basis. To address this need, this pilot project attempts to enable the men to experience spiritual transformation through practicing Christian contemplative disciplines and receiving spiritual direction individually and in a group context.

The project firstly identifies the socio-economic and cultural challenges facing the Chinese fathers who live in Sydney. The rise of the internet and social media culture poses further complications and demands upon the already overextended lifestyle. This part will also describe the dynamics of WSCCC and its influence on these men’s spiritual formation. Upon examination, the Christian fathers have exhibited a robust desire for an intimate relationship with God but have often failed to maintain that.

Part Two lays out the biblical and theological foundation for experiencing spiritual transformation through recognizing and living in God’s presence consistently. It articulates an ecclesiology that urges a paradigm shift in WSCCC to embrace contemplative spirituality. There is also a discussion regarding the pastoral theology of spiritual direction and its unique contribution towards godly formation when it is combined with the regular practices of spiritual disciplines.

Finally this study presents a ministry plan informed by the theological investigation, and seeks to introduce, familiarize, and resource Christian men to engage in various contemplative disciplines in the context of a retreat and spiritual direction group. It also outlines the development tools required for all involved. Attention is given to the timing, processes, and assessment tools required for the successful implementation of such an initiative.

Content Reader: Terry Walling, DMin

Words: 293
To my parents, Hung and Yuet, who have always supported me
To my wife, Zoe, who has breathed life into my soul and our marriage
To my daughters, Verity and Karis, who have made me a better father
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful to my parents for showing me at a very young age that even in the darkest of days God is still present. I would also like to thank Rev. Thomas Auyeung for modelling accountability and transparency during my formative ministry years. I want to express my sincere gratitude to Stephen Ho for showing me the essence of spiritual mentoring by meeting with me regularly for a lengthy period of time. Thank you to Dr. John Yates for infusing me with a paradigm of a deeply spiritual life and prayerful discernment of the divine. Thanks go to my fellow brothers and sisters at Perth Alliance Church and West Sydney Chinese Christian Church, who knowingly or unknowingly experimented with me different spiritual disciplines and ways to grow in the Lord. This project is a result of the inspirations from all of you.
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PART ONE
MINISTRY CONTEXT
INTRODUCTION

Joshua, the pride of his parents who migrated from China in 1980s, was a bright young man who received a scholarship to enable him to study in a top-tier university in Australia. Talented, confident, and committed, he was part of the leadership team of the church’s youth fellowship. Joshua believed evangelism and discipleship for young people are instrumental in reaching the lost and equipping others in the Christian life, and so he determined to be committed to the ministry of discipleship. He met his future wife Ellen while they served in campus ministry to the students of the university. Almost a decade passed. Joshua is now married with two small children and has become an architect of a prestigious design and architecture firm in town. His work has been very demanding and often requires him to travel out of state. The toddlers at home have been keeping him and his wife exhausted most of the time. Joshua is no longer a committed leader at church now, not to mention he is struggling with even attending regularly the young couples’ monthly fellowship. He still maintains his belief in God, but he lives a life as if God does not exist and does not relate to him in a personal way.

Society, culture, and spiritual landscape have evolved in the past millennia and these have become part of the underlying issues for a loss of spirituality. But church growth strategists and pastors cannot help doubting the fruitfulness of their churches’ spiritual formation endeavor to nurture and mentor the younger generation, particularly those who strive to balance everything that life presents them in its current state. Although the story of Joshua is fabricated, there are so many new parents like him in today’s churches. I have seen many “Joshuas” in the church pastored for twelve years,
and the church where I currently serve, West Sydney Chinese Christian Church (hereafter, WSCCC).

Sydney, Australia has long been attracting migrants who have aspired to live a prosperous lifestyle. Among these migrants are many Chinese who want a better life for their families and future generations. WSCCC, a suburban church started in 1978 with a few families, currently has over eight hundred congregants who meet every weekend in six services in three languages, namely English, Mandarin, and Cantonese. There are dozens of Chinese fathers in the Cantonese congregation, mostly in their thirties, who consider WSCCC to be their home church. These Cantonese-speaking men, who migrated to Sydney from Hong Kong or the southern part of China, either as in-demand professionals or with their parents many years ago, currently work in professions such as technology, healthcare, and finance. The demands of work, the pressure of living in a fast-paced city, together with additional family responsibilities, have drained and prevented them from experiencing God. The main goal of this project is to identify their needs and explore ways to enhance the spiritual vitality of these young fathers in their busy daily lives.

My interest in this topic has sprung from a personal quest to make sense of my own busy family, ministry, and study life. Approximately ten years ago, after I had been a full-time pastor for several years, I started my second postgraduate degree in pastoral ministry and spirituality and become a new father. All I have ever wanted is a vibrant spiritual life in the midst of the frantic demands surrounding me. Initially I believed that if I could sleep less, I would have more time for different duties and meaningful undertakings that could help advance the kingdom of God. I wished that we would have
delayed having children in order that my life could be considered worthy of Christ’s calling. Over the years, I have explored various spiritual disciplines – including silence, solitude, fasting, prayer walking, journaling, and regular retreats, among other practices – in the hope that my life could be sustained for its continuous outpouring for the benefit of others. The bottom line is that I was not content with what I had and who I was in Christ, and I yearned for more.

I gradually came to the realization that many younger men in the church I was pastoring showed signs of such yearning in one way or another. Many complained that they felt neglected by their spouses, felt disgruntled with their devotional habits, or were disappointed in the church’s busy-ness and lifeless prayer meetings. They shared about their own lack of sleep and energy, and a lack of motivation for church ministry. As I moved to Sydney two years ago to accept the pastorate at WSCCC, it dawned on me that such craving for more is rather universal among this unique male group, and it is one that has not been addressed by the usual discipleship attempts in local Chinese churches.

What is absent is a theologically and pastorally sound way to impart spiritual growth into the life of these men in the church. The Church both in the West and the East has started to face and address this dreadful scenario. In the book *Church Next*, Eddie Gibbs and Ian Coffey comment, “For several decades, the church has relied on greater sums of money, better techniques, bigger numbers and facilities, and more impressive credentials as the means to influence society at large. These elements have failed us; in our efforts to serve God, we have crowded out God himself.”

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1 Eddie Gibbs and Ian Coffey, *Church Next: Quantum Changes in Christian Ministry* (Nottingham, UK: InterVarsity, 2001), 42.
This description of the state of the Church is both alarming and insightful in that the embedded theology of such a model of doing church is that the programs and ministries have become the main foci of what pastoral leaders do. A Singaporean megachurch pastor, Edmund Chan, widely considered a veteran discipleship leader among the Asian and Chinese churches, remarks, “There is no greater disaster in the spiritual life than that of a restless and under-nourished soul.”\(^2\) The concern he has for the spiritual life of the Church is valid because it seems to have lost the art of soul care. To put it another way, the Church has become too occupied with its business, and there is no time to take care of the spirituality of its members. The ministries that have kept church members and leaders busy all of a sudden become more important than the God who seeks the transformation of his people. This has squeezed out the time and energy that should be given to the nourishment of people’s spiritual lives.

Ministry leaders are called to nourish and care for the spiritual well-being of the Church. The lost art of soul care, as Chan urges, must be urgently restored.\(^3\) It is the indispensable task of the ministry and pastoral leaders to engage in enlightening the Church regarding the need for the nourishment of the souls and in providing spiritual guidance. In the past few years of my ministry, I have had a growing conviction that the Chinese churches in Australia need to redeem their primary cause to strengthen the spiritual formation of their future leaders through spiritual direction. This ministry project, in particular, aims to enable young Chinese fathers at WSCCC to experience

\(^2\) Edmund Chan, *Built to Last: Towards a Disciplemaking Church* (Singapore: Covenant Resource, 2001), 111.

\(^3\) Ibid., 112.
spiritual transformation in their busy daily lives. This will take place through practicing
the Christian contemplative disciplines in the context of regular one-on-one and group
spiritual direction to better sensitize them to the presence of God.

This project, consisting of three parts, presents a ministry plan that introduces the
contemplative spiritual practices and encourages young fathers to practice them with
spiritual direction so that they recognize God’s ongoing presence in everyday life. To
achieve this goal, the ministry of spiritual direction will be provided to each man
individually, as well as through a spiritual direction group. The group dynamics will
address the deep yearning of the men for companionship, mutual support, and peer
mentoring that provide impetus for consistent practicing of the disciplines for growth.

The first part of the project, Chapter 1, examines the socio-economic and cultural
challenges facing young Chinese fathers in Sydney. This chapter discusses the fact that
the advancement of communication technology further complicates the immediate
context by demanding a round-the-clock response. This section also describes the
contextual background of WSCCC and presents the needs of this group of young fathers
who desire intimate relationship with God but who struggle to experience spiritual
breakthrough.

The second part is grounded in theological reflection. Chapter 2 offers a literature
review which looks into the challenges and opportunities of spiritual formation and
discipleship among evangelicals, and explores the need for a restored and practical
church model for today. It seeks to provide direction as to how embracing and practicing
the contemplative spiritual disciplines leads to an enriched spiritual vigor for those
leading busy lives. Chapter 3 lays out the biblical and theological foundation for
experiencing spiritual transformation through recognizing and living in God’s presence, upon which the practice of a Carmelite monk also provides insight. This chapter discusses the pastoral theology of spiritual direction and its contribution towards spiritual formation, together with the practices of the recommended spiritual disciplines.

Part Three presents a ministry plan informed by theological investigation. Chapter 4 envisions a theological paradigm of contemplative spirituality that empowers busy fathers to experience God’s ongoing presence and embrace daily life as a sacred call. The chapter articulates the goals and provides plans to teach, familiarize, and resource these men to engage in various spiritual disciplines in the context of a retreat and a spiritual direction group. Chapter 5 presents the implementation plan and describe the resources and development tools required for both the author as the primary developer and facilitator as well as the participating young fathers. The project concludes with the assessment and evaluation process required for the successful implementation of this initiative.
CHAPTER 1
COMMUNITY AND MINISTRY CONTEXT

This chapter considers the socio-economic and cultural forces that pose significant challenges to Chinese fathers in Sydney, Australia. The rise of the internet and social media culture poses further complications and strains people’s already overextended lives. This chapter also describes the history and dynamics of WSCCC and its influence on these men’s spiritual formation. Finally, it discusses the needs of the young fathers who show a genuine desire but struggle to experience an intimate relationship with God.

The Socio-Economic Challenges in Sydney, Australia

According to the statistics from the last Australian census,

There were 5.3 million migrants in Australia, which means one in every four (26 percent) Australian residents was born overseas. Australia’s migrant population is relatively large when compared with other Western nations. Taken as a proportion of the population, Australia has a larger migrant population than does New Zealand (23 percent), Canada (21 percent), the United States of America (13 percent) and the United Kingdom (13 percent).¹

This poses both opportunities as well as threats to those who call Australia home. Of all the major cities, Sydney enjoys vibrancy and liveliness as the largest city in Australia, and it has been attracting migrants from other countries who aspire to make a new life there.\(^2\) It has been noted by academics that the migrants who reside in Sydney need to exert greater efforts in order to assimilate well and thrive in such a competitive environment.\(^3\)

High Living Cost and Extended Work Hours

Population increase is now widely known as one of the contributing factors to the housing price surge. It has been reported that Sydney is the second least affordable city in the world according to a housing affordability report released recently.\(^4\) A typical Sydney house would cost more than one million dollars, which is 12.2 times the annual average household income in the city. That means it takes an average household more than twelve years to save up the required sum in order to secure a home. By all means, buying one’s own home in Sydney seems an impossible task.

The home ownership struggle and the general high living cost in Sydney are pushing both parents in a typical family out into the workforce. Not only that, many have


resorted to having the main breadwinner to take a second or third job to maintain the family living standard. Still, others need to work longer hours for various reasons and the *Better Life Index* indicates that in Australia a significantly larger proportion of men than women work very long hours. This is clearly a prevalent phenomenon in WSCCC, especially among parents with young children. Chinese fathers in the Cantonese congregation usually complain that it has deprived them of precious family time with their children, a quality marital relationship, as well as personal, social, and spiritual space.

**Sydney Roads and Traffic Congestion**

In 2013, Sydney was “ranked as the seventh worst in the Western world for road congestion.” People would be spending an additional forty minutes for each hour travelled in their vehicles. It has been further reported that “based on a thirty-minute daily commute, that adds up to a staggering ninety-two extra hours spent at the wheel in bumper-to-bumper bedlam each year, enough to cause both engines and tempers to overheat.” That means, on average, people lose approximately two hours each week being caught in traffic. To make the matter worse, light rail construction in the central

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8 Ibid.
Sydney area has forced closure of many parts of the roads since 2015.\(^9\) This has caused even more havoc to the already short road supply in the metropolitan area. Sydney Metro Northwest, comprising the North West Rail Link, is the government’s attempt to tackle the mounting traffic congestion problem in Sydney, but this gigantic project will take another few years to complete.\(^10\) Until then, it cannot be expected that there be any easing to the current road conditions. The impact of heavy traffic can be observed and felt by almost everyone. For committee or other church business meetings held at WSCCC during weekday evenings, it is not uncommon for many people to arrive late due to traffic. Families struggle to make up for the loss of this precious time because “congestion is causing sufficient delays and unpredictability in enough places.”\(^11\)

Priority of Children’s Education

Asian parents generally put a high priority on their children’s academic performance. Amy Chua of Yale Law School famously coined the term “tiger mother” in 2011 while relating how she raised “her American-born daughters according to strict


Chinese traditions”\textsuperscript{12} so that they could succeed in life through rigorous educational training. Karen Wang of the University of Technology in Sydney points to the fact “that Asian-Australian parents placed higher academic expectations on their children, than white-Australian parents.”\textsuperscript{13} She continues, “Chinese parents see their children’s future as really relying on good academic results and getting into a top university.”\textsuperscript{14}

The trend is that many Chinese couples, Christians and non-Christians alike, actively seek housing near the catchment area of academically strong public schools so their children can have access to these schools. Some choose to pay substantial tuition rates to get their young ones into prestigious private schools. After-school tutoring has also become a more common phenomenon for children as young as seven or eight years of age due to the introduction of the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) tests.\textsuperscript{15} In my previous and current pastorates, I have witnessed young parents who have been extremely busy in order to provide a good education for their little children. It has led to a vicious cycle of taking more time to work and having less time for personal, relational, and spiritual development. The reality is that young families are often occupied by care of children, exhausting work, and attainment of


\textsuperscript{13} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid.

financial stability. They are struggling to find more time and energy for other important if not urgent needs, namely their own spiritual formation and walk with the Lord.

The Impact of the Internet and a Social Media Culture

The rise of the internet and a social media culture has transformed how everyone works, lives, and relates with one another. This technology is a double-edged sword. It strengthens but at the same time stresses many who rely heavily upon it.¹⁶ Those who have been born within or immediately before the new era are the ones caught up in such a whirlwind.

The Power of the Digital Technology

The advancement of digital technology is seen as a blessing in the modern world – increasing work efficiency and productivity, providing instant and worldwide communication, as well as giving the opportunity to access valuable information round the clock. At the same time, the rise of such technology, especially the internet and social media, has posed undeniable complications and demands upon the already overextended lifestyles of people today.¹⁷ Without realizing the effects of technology upon our lives, it can lead to catastrophic outcomes. Daniel Sieberg sets up a graphic allegory by explaining that “this technology invasion has not been like a nuclear explosion but more


¹⁷ Ibid.
like a slow invasion of an ant colony. This technology invasion has been systematic, silent and is destroying many parts of our lives.”

Digital technology is now affecting all areas of our lives, including family, personal, social, and spiritual aspects. Clinical psychologist Archibald Hart and his daughter Sylvia Frejd, who is a digital researcher, recently wrote a book together addressing how technology is shaping the relationships of the modern world. They note that “life in the digital world is causing us to lose our depth – our depth of thinking, contemplation, feeling, and emotions, as well as depth in our relationships and work.”

One of the main culprits is due to the rewiring of the human brains when users rely heavily on digital technology. It is believed that as a result of over-using technology, the brain’s six systems would suffer. Those who belong to the younger generation are more prone to this disorder because they were born within the digital era or immediately after its arrival. It gives rise to grave concern for Chinese professionals who interact, work, and live in this digital atmosphere.

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20 Hart and Frejd highlight the six brain systems – pleasure system, tranquility system, memory system, learning system, attachment system, and spiritual system – that could be affected by the overuse of technology and the possible extent of such an impact. Hart and Frejd, *Digital Invasion*, 62-71.

Double Life and Digital Workforce

It has been observed sensibly that “the digital social media that now dominates our lives tends to foster more self-centeredness than deeper connections.”²² This loss or lack of deeper connection between married couples in particular has caused concern among counsellors and family therapists, as their clients are increasingly battling depression, suicide attempts, and affairs.²³ Many were caught up recently by the leaks of members’ information from a leading online dating website, Ashley Madison, which promotes extra-marital affairs and has nearly forty million users worldwide. Josh Duggar, a traditional marriage and family advocate who is married with four children, painfully made this confession after his account on the website was made public: “I am so ashamed of the double life that I have been living and am grieved for the hurt, pain and disgrace my sin has caused my wife and family, and most of all Jesus and all those who profess faith in Him.”²⁴ It was reported, through the leaks, that Sydney has the third highest number of active accounts (251,813) while the neighboring Melbourne has the sixth highest number (213,847) globally.²⁵ A large number of the accounts based on their email association have been found to be linked with Australian universities, government

²² Hart and Frejd, *Digital Invasion*, 93.


²⁵ Ibid.
departments, law and order services, as well as local councils. Alarming, this is just the tip of the iceberg if one considers other less popular sites or digital avenues that promote this kind of destructive lifestyle.

Technology has also intruded into the workplace. A report commissioned by the Australian Communications and Media Authority in 2013 has suggested that half of Australia’s workforce, classified as “digital workers,” used the internet to complete work while on the go and were happy to continue such work pattern. The study also found that more men worked remotely than women. A dire revelation showed that “many were squeezing extra work into their home life or while travelling.” It is widely assumed that this tendency would only intensify rather than diminish in today’s world and therefore blur the boundaries between work and life even more. The challenges for the fathers of young families keep mounting and the implication does not look good for them who have family responsibility, church involvement and other obligations.

Social Media: Friend or Foe

By spending more time online for work and social relationship through computers, tablets, and smartphones, people are seemingly becoming more connected in terms of their virtual lives but they are detrimentally being separated in real life. Social media, which is considered to be connecting and extending people’s social lives, is not

26 Ibid.


28 Hart and Fredj, *Digital Invasion*, 95.
making people happier or more contented. Hart and Frejd point out that social media “can make a user think that his or her virtual friend is happier than him or her,”\textsuperscript{29} thereby causing more dissatisfaction with one’s own life.

It is important to remark that the internet and digital technology are not inherently evil. When used wisely, social media would be a blessing, but it never replaces physical touch and face-to-face communication.\textsuperscript{30} It is not a substitute for a personal visit and friendly physical touch that are yearned for eagerly among human beings. The ministry challenge for this newer generation is that they be more cautious when utilizing social media for interaction, connection, and communication. They need to discern when to use it and when to give it a pause for the nourishment of their soul, relationship, and general well-being. Ministry leaders need to take this into account when devising plans for this generation’s spiritual formation.\textsuperscript{31}

**The History and Dynamics of WSCCC**

After a brief glimpse of the socio-economic and cultural landscapes that are shaping and affecting the new parents, particularly Chinese Christian fathers living in Sydney, it is important to turn to another scene which has made up a large part of their spiritual formation. A local church is the people of God called out and gathered for

\textsuperscript{29} Ibid., 99.


spiritual purposes (1 Cor 1:2; Rv 1:11). To better understand the spirituality of the Christian men targeted in this research, an understanding of the dynamics and history of WSCCC is of great significance.

A Brief History of WSCCC

The WSCCC website states, “WSCCC was established in 1978 as a branch of the Chinese Christian Church (CCC) Milsons Point. It was only the third Chinese church in Sydney, and was set up with the vision to reach out with the gospel of Jesus to the inner western suburbs.” About twenty people, including children, set out and developed the church, which came to be autonomous of CCC in 1982. “Over the following years, Cantonese, Mandarin, and English services developed, and currently there are six separate services.” These six services include two for each language group, which meet every Sunday in two locations.

In accordance with the mandate to fulfill the Great Commission, WSCCC believes in church planting and has planted three other churches in subsequent years. Being non-denominational, WSCCC has had “a rich heritage of evangelical teaching from the Bible throughout its history.” It has also embraced a strong inclination towards theological training and equipping of its members for practical ministry. As a result, many from the church have become ministers in and beyond Sydney. Nearly twenty members have gone on to become pastors of local churches around Sydney, with another

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33 Ibid.

34 Ibid.
ten or so ministering full time in campus ministry or school chaplaincy, and seven families currently serving as missionaries in Asia.

Evangelical Tradition

Scot McKnight describes four pillars of evangelical identity, which are “the Bible, the cross as the place of atonement, the necessity of personal conversion, and an active Christian life both in missions/evangelism.” WSCCC prides itself on its evangelical identity, stressing the priority of studying, preaching, sharing and living out the Bible as the very word of God. The current ministries of the church’s Cantonese congregation point to the fact that it focuses on providing biblical teaching and knowledge in order to produce a Christ-centered community as a result of personal conversion. The next paragraph outlines the current ministries and activities of the Cantonese congregation according to its Annual Ministry Report.

Sunday service is always a sermon-focused worship service. Adult Sunday school stresses book-by-book study of the Bible weekly. Men’s Fellowship systematically provides Bible and topical lessons. Ladies Fellowship’s main activities include Bible study, topical lessons, and prayers for one another. Care Group Ministry puts strong emphasis on Bible study, sharing, and prayers for one another. Young Adults

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37 The sermon in the Cantonese service typically takes up more than half of the entire service time, with between two and three traditional hymns sung throughout the service.
Fellowship is scheduled with mostly Bible study and occasional outings. Young Couples Fellowship’s primary focus is on a monthly topical talk with biweekly Bible study. Evangelism Explosion Ministry is an evangelism training program offered to members aimed at reaching out to people with the gospel. Incarnational Evangelism Ministry is a monthly friendship event with a special interest-based, non-religious talk, followed by a gospel talk. Weekly Prayer Meeting gathers church members for praying over a well-prepared checklist of prayer items. Discipleship Class is the church’s biweekly education program that studies the Bible topically.

Apart from the regular meetings at the church, many members attend seminars and Bible study classes organized by outside organizations, such as Bible Exposition International\(^{38}\) and China Graduate School of Theology\(^ {39}\) on a regular basis. Biblical knowledge and gospel-oriented activity are of paramount significance. It can be observed that WSCCC is truly evangelical in nature – being primarily word-centered.\(^ {40}\)

**Attractional Model of Ministry**

Brad Blocksom gives a simple and clear comparison between the attractional and the missional models of ministry. Being attractional is asking people to come and hear


the gospel, whereas being missional is about going and bringing the good news to them.\textsuperscript{41}

The ministry approach at WSCCC is perceived to be that of an attractional model. Over the years, evangelistic endeavors such as the Chinese New Year celebration, mid-autumn festival, Easter and Christmas events, as well as other occasional gospel evenings have run in the same fashion of trying to gather crowds of non-believing friends and family members at the church.\textsuperscript{42} On the other hand, the pastoral leaders have devised various discipleship and training programs in a similar pattern, and committed members of the church are expected to participate in most, if not all, of these classes, workshops, and seminars so that they learn to be mature Christians.\textsuperscript{43}

During the last few years, WSCCC has started to consider being more missional in its ministry approach, and the church has established a Local Mission Committee, which serves to bring the church out into the community and touch lives for Christ. In fact, neither the missional nor the attractional approach is necessarily meritorious on its own. Chuck Lawless points out correctly that the Church should embrace both attractional and missional approaches: “We move outside the church to live among the lost, take the light to them, share life with them, and also invite them to corporate

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\textsuperscript{42} West Sydney Chinese Christian Church, \textit{Annual Ministry Reports 2014-2016} (Strathfield, NSW: West Sydney Chinese Christian Church, 2014-16).
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worship that is biblically sound and culturally aware.”44 It is not enough to simply draw crowds in without going out to be and share life with them.

There is no doubt that the attractional model might have worked well in the past for WSCCC, but it is high time to revisit the ministry philosophy if it seeks to reach and disciple the younger generations. Jared Wilson reveals perceptively that the newer generations “are less and less interested in programmatic, consumeristic approaches to spirituality like those found in attractional churches.”45 As the core ministry of the Church is to ensure “all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ” (Eph 4:13), the ultimate concern is therefore not limited to “growing big” but also “growing up.”46

Dichotomy between the Secular and the Sacred

The teachings of the Cantonese congregation of WSCCC center upon accepting the life-giving gift of Christ seriously – his death and resurrection.47 The church also emphasizes unreserved commitment to the Great Commission of sharing the good news

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and strict denial of worldly pursuits and pleasures. Gradually, binary thinking has
developed among the long-time committed church members in that there is a division
between the sacred and the secular. With this mindset permeating the church, faithful
members have been taught to be concerned more about reading the Bible, sharing the
gospel, and doing the work of the Lord than, for example, enjoying a sunny afternoon
with friends over a cup of coffee, watching television, or even reading a book leisurely. A
clear and obvious distinction has been made between what is spiritual and what is
common.

Richard Rohr, a Franciscan friar, insightfully observes that “organized religion
today too often offers easy and false dichotomies to its own mass membership. . . . It
gives them a sense of certitude, clear authority, and control over all the confusing data.”48
This may have shown why the spiritual/ordinary, sacred/secular, and faith/life
dichotomies have been accentuated throughout the history of the Christian Church. In one
sense, duality is not essentially evil in nature as it is needed very much in management,
policy, and procedure. Despite that, it is a saddening reality where many Christians on
one hand proclaim that God is sovereign over all things in life, but on the other hand they
do not envision a Christian life that enables them to comprehend the challenges and
difficulties found in life. Worse still, there is a lack of understanding of how faith matters
in everyday life, family, and the workplace. As is clear among the Cantonese members of
the church, the result is a functional dualism that heightens a secular/sacred dichotomy,

48 Richard Rohr, The Naked Now: Learning to See as the Mystics See (New York: Crossroad,
2009), 36.
and this dichotomy is actually diminishing the ability of congregants to live out their calling in the whole of life.

In an article discussing the spirituality of Chinese adults, theologian John Chan asserts that spirituality and vitality are inseparable.⁴⁹ Jesus has come to give abundant life (Jn 10:10), which incorporates the totality of human life inclusive of their spiritual essence. Hence, spirituality cannot be lived in a secluded and safe vacuum within the four walls of the Church. It has to be based on humanness and lived in the ordinariness of life. To anchor the spiritual life in the real world, Chan urges Chinese Christians to earnestly discover the sacred in the secular context.⁵⁰

**The Yearning for Spiritual Growth among Christian Fathers**

In addition to the above, the Christian fathers at WSCCC have been struggling on many fronts. Demanding ministry involvement is one of those that frustrates them. When they fall short of vibrant spiritual growth, excessive guilt prevails and becomes debilitating. At the core of their humanity and spirituality, they starve for authentic and life-giving companionship.

**Church Involvement and Spirituality**

Most of the young fathers who are part of the Cantonese congregation have confided to me on various occasions that they want to become better Christians, serve God more, and live a more holy life. Notwithstanding, they have struggled to remain in a

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⁵⁰ Ibid.
close relationship with God owing to life’s many demands. Most of them seem to have mistaken church involvement and ministry participation for spiritual maturity. An ongoing conversation recently in a social media group of the Cantonese fathers\(^5\) revolves around the theme that spiritual maturity should be reflected in what one does (and how frequently) for God, for example, sharing the good news of Christ. From what they know, there seem to be limited ways to express one’s love for God and manifest a mature spirituality other than serving the church more and attending church more regularly.

Peter Scazzero, a seasoned church minister, is quite right as he reflects on this dilemma in his book, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality*, in which he writes, “Being productive and getting things done are high priorities. . . . Praying and enjoying God’s presence for no other reason than to delight in him was a luxury.”\(^5\) Under the current teaching and atmosphere at WSCCC, to show oneself to be a committed disciple of Christ, there appears no better way than to serve more, work more, and do more for God. Certainly this has permeated the thoughts of these Christian men. This “doing” or “serving” mentality is undeniably rooted very deeply and needs to be re-examined.

Spirituality is where the world and human life intersect, according to John Chan.\(^5\) Most adults spend a majority of their time working and participating in the community.

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\(^5\) In early 2015, one of the leaders started a WhatsApp group named “Men of Steel” which consists of the Cantonese fathers.


Living life outside of the church walls is where spiritual maturity usually happens. But church involvement and gatherings exist for a good reason. These should provide opportunities for the men at WSCCC to vent about their struggles, reflect upon the lessons learned in their workplace and homes, and be empowered to flourish in daily life. The primary ministry initiative of this project is to examine and explore an alternative that is as sacred and godly as those that have been advocated primarily in evangelical churches for years.

A Guilt-Driven Mentality

It is worth noting that a guilt-driven mentality alongside the doing and serving mindset has been embedded in the spirituality of the Cantonese congregation. It has been a recurring theme in many conversations I have had with the members of the congregation, young and old alike. Strong guilt exists in those who, for example, miss spending time in daily devotions or making time to join a church event. One of the young fathers initiated a discussion about his experience lately after a group of Christians doing street evangelism offered to pray for him near his workplace. That experience was to him both heart-warming and guilt-inducing. He felt cared for and loved when other Christians unknown to him extended a kind gesture of prayer and concern. At the same time, this prompted him to think that he did so little for God who had done so much for him, and he felt ashamed. Another man immediately came into the group conversation and shared a similar feeling of shame and fear as he reasoned that he has ignored the Great Commission for over twenty years now. Sadly, this is an all too common sentiment found in the mind of these men.
In 靜觀傳統與生命成長, Ekman Tam maintains that serving God and others should flow naturally out of a spiritually transformed life. Taking part in ministry, missions, and service to others is a natural byproduct of spiritual formation.\textsuperscript{54} It is important to note that there is a fine line here. An act of service driven by guilt or fear may look very similar on the surface to the one motivated and sustained by a healthy, loving spirituality, but the core and the effect on the one who serves is entirely different. The Apostle John aptly states that “there is no fear in love . . . the one who fears is not made perfect in love” (1 Jn 4:18).

As opposed to a guilt-induced spirituality, M. Robert Mulholland precisely defines a healthy spirituality as “a process of being formed in the image of Christ for the sake of others.”\textsuperscript{55} The formation process is initiated by God for his people to be conformed to Christ’s image (Rom 8:29). The last part of the definition in particular helps to demystify the idea of an individualized and self-absorbed religion. Genuine spiritual formation will inevitably lead to service, for “there can be no wholeness in the image of Christ which is not incarnate in our relationships with others, both in the body of Christ and in the world.”\textsuperscript{56}

\textsuperscript{54} Ekman Tam, 靜觀靈修與生命成長 (Contemplative Spirituality and Human Development) (Hong Kong: Christian Contemplative Spirituality Institute, 2014), 68-69.

\textsuperscript{55} M. Robert Mulholland, Invitation to a Journey: A Road Map for Spiritual Formation (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993), 12.

Longing for Spiritual Companionship

Not only is the outward relational aspect of spiritual formation important, that is ministry to others, but the inward and reciprocal relational aspect is also of vital significance. This pertains to the mutual edification through companionship. Robert M. Hicks, in *Uneasy Manhood*, describes several underlying barriers to male friendships, including their aversion to revealing emotion and the absence of role models. He observes the following predicament facing many men: “On the one side, they have deep-seated needs for friends, but on the flip side, there are many binds for men in both initiating and cultivating deep relationships. Many are left looking for the friend they can never have, or the friend they thought they once had, while they face a host of factors making friendship uneasy.” In his doctoral dissertation on ministering to Chinese men, Wai-Ming Lee explains that traditional values make competition extremely fierce among men who are conditioned to compete but not to form friendship. However, companionship and friendship are yearned for by men as much as by women, but those needs are usually expressed differently and met in unique ways. Lee suggests that one of the viable ways for building up male friendship is through activity, such as sports and teamwork. Having a beer in a bar, for example, may also bring the men together because deep down there is an unquenchable thirst for companionship.

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58 Ibid., 43.

59 Wai-Ming Lee, 雄心萬丈度中年 (*Midlife Ascent: Man's Growth and Goal*) (Hong Kong: Alliance Bible Seminary, 2005), 73-77.
As mentioned slightly earlier, there is a social media group among the Cantonese fathers, and it is rather remarkable that different individual members would often initiate, discuss, and respond to issues raised in the group. Topics including finances, fatherhood, spirituality, and social and economic issues are often vibrantly discussed with heartfelt and honest comments. Moreover, during the last two monthly meetings of the Married Couples Fellowship, it was suggested that men and women separate and share during the second half of the meeting. The outcome is that most of the men highly value the listening ears and supportive attitudes they have found during that sharing and prayer time.

Chinese counsellors, academics, and pastoral leaders seem to agree on the needs for and benefits of men-only groups to address this longing. In 男性輔導新貌, Raymond Au and Lap-Wong Tsang affirm that men can truly build up friendship more freely in a men-only setting.60 Tak-Hong Man points out that men-only groups can fill the vacuum of men’s relational and emotional needs.61 Patrick Kung encourages churches to consider setting up men-only groups for those over forty years of age.62 After all, men-only groups are merely a platform for much deeper things to happen – to enable Christian men to be spiritually transformed by the work of God’s Spirit. Ekman Tam writes that through spiritual friendship, there is mutual support and edification to nurture Christlikeness in

60 Raymond Au and Lap-Wong Tsang, 男性輔導新貌 (An Overview of New Counseling with Men) (Hong Kong: Breakthrough Ltd., 2007), 141.


each other. Such friendship or companionship will doubtlessly lead to sharing of burdens, encouraging one another, as well as taking part in retreat and solitude.\textsuperscript{63} It is evident that the men at WSCCC, just like many others, have a great longing for companionship, and this paves the way for a pilot project to establish a spiritual direction group for the men in order to address their spiritual dryness, help them revive deadened spirituality, and provide a channel for mutual support. Next, attention is given to some currently available literature on the topic so that all who are on a similar spiritual quest are better informed of the way forward.

\textsuperscript{63} Ekman Tam, 孤獨．獨處．友情：塑造自重融和的生命 (Loneliness, Solitude, Friendship: Toward a Life of Self-Affirmation and Connectedness) (Hong Kong: Tao Fong Shan Christian Centre, 2008), 183-184.
PART TWO

THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter entails current study and theory on each of the project’s major themes. Several works by prominent scholars and practitioners of Christian spirituality are outlined and evaluated for articulating the relationship between the current available literature and this research study. This section explores the challenges and opportunities of spiritual formation and discipleship among evangelicals as well as the need for a revamped and practical ecclesiological model in today’s world. It then provides guidance as to how embracing the contemplative spiritual disciplines will lead to an enhanced spiritual vitality of those leading a busy life. Lastly, in order to shed light on a viable ministry strategy for fathers at WSCCC, the chapter discusses the uniqueness of providing spiritual direction to enable them to experience transformation.

Rediscovering Spiritual Formation

Spiritual formation may be interpreted rather diversely and differently by various traditions and faith communities. The following considers the writings of two theologians who are representative of their respective theological persuasions. Some common themes emerge as they discuss spiritual formation as learning Jesus’ way of life and his way of
thinking in one’s present life. In addition, spiritual formation involves transformation of life and character at a deep level on a day-to-day basis.

*The Divine Conspiracy* by Dallas Willard

The main thesis of Willard’s book, simply put, is discipleship. It seeks to reconstruct a clear picture of what it means to be a Christian and what life with Christ should look like, through a deep reflection on the Sermon on the Mount and Jesus’ in-depth discussion of what life in his kingdom is like. *The Divine Conspiracy* serves as a unified guide to how Christ followers live in the kingdom of God in this present life.

In the first section of his book, Willard discusses life in the kingdom through God’s love shown to his people and their reliance upon Jesus. As the king of the kingdom of heavens, Jesus has presented the reality of the kingdom and what it entails for his followers to live in it. In the second section, the book focuses primarily on the Sermon on the Mount, which illustrates and depicts the kind of person who is blessed to live in the kingdom, instead of the widely held view of a list of new laws or rules leading to legalism, which Jesus is strongly against. The third section encompasses the call for genuine discipleship and Christlikeness. The aim of discipleship is forging a loving relationship with God in Christ.

One of the greatest lessons from this book is that Willard urges all to rethink what the Great Commission is about and what it does in terms of spiritual formation. Contemporary churches are adept at fulfilling part of the Great Commission by going and making converts or recruiting new church members. What these churches have failed to do is to nurture and form them into disciples of Jesus. A disciple, or student, of Jesus is
someone being with Jesus, learning his way of life, and striving to become like him. It is a journey of life transformation. But as Willard indicates, “the current gospel . . . becomes a ‘gospel of sin management.’ Transformation of life and character is no part of the redemptive message.”¹ The result is that churches including WSCCC are filled with people professing to be Christians who may even regularly attend church, but unfortunately they are not genuine disciples. If people do not truly want to become disciples, they miss the opportunity to be formed into Christlikeness in God’s kingdom here and now. A key liberating and compelling thought from Willard’s book is that life in the kingdom of heavens is easily accessible and available to all regardless of status, experience, or possession. Further, Willard points out, “The current gospels, left and right, exhibit the very same type of conceptual disconnection from, and practical irrelevance to, the personal integrity of believers. . . . And both lack any essential bearing upon the individual’s life as a whole, especially upon the occupations or work time and upon the fine texture of our personal relationships in the home and neighborhood.”²

When the gospel as presented and proclaimed does not deal with transformation of character and impacting life on a day to day basis, not only will Christians fail to become apprentices of Jesus and learn his way of life, but they would also find, sooner or later, that church is irrelevant and that the resources of God’s kingdom for life on earth are non-existent. The fact that WSCCC has been losing young adults is illustrating this alarmingly. To provide remedy to the present situation, it is the church’s responsibility to


² Ibid., 64.
convey the ways and means to spiritual formation – changing people’s hearts to come into harmony with the will of God. Jesus’ teaching is not about a law, but to bring about the rightness of the kingdom heart. On the whole, this work presents a comprehensive examination and analysis of the Church’s situation, and at the same time it offers great insights on discipleship and spiritual formation for modern-day Christians.

*The Naked Now* by Richard Rohr

In *The Naked Now*, Richard Rohr offers the enlightenment which people have looked for in other world religions without realizing that such insight can be found in Christianity from the very beginning. Rohr’s plea is that Christians are to embrace the naked now – the Real Presence or the kingdom of God. To do that, they ought to learn from the mystics who have a non-dualistic mindset, a rich and thriving interior life, and a simple desire to live by faith and love in the face of paradox, which life always presents.

Rohr first discusses the mindset that easily leads to dualistic or polarity thinking which then gives way to false dichotomies in most religions, including good/evil, in/out, right/wrong, us/them, and this/that. Dualities are a stumbling block to genuine spiritual formation. “True spirituality,” Rohr asserts, “is not a search for perfection or control or the door to the next world; it is a search for divine union now.” He then argues that Christianity’s quest to such union with God is offered by Jesus as a non-dualistic thinker who understands and affirms the non-polarity thinking by conversions of heart, mind, and emotions. When referring to the kingdom of God, Jesus does not have in mind a

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3 Ibid., 67-69.

4 Rohr, *The Naked Now*, 16.
particular geographical location, nor does he refer to the afterlife. What Jesus refers to, according to Rohr, is a way of seeing and thinking now. Rohr writes, “The kingdom of God is the naked now – the world without human kingdoms, ethnic communities, national boundaries, or social identifications.”5 Lastly, Rohr goes on to explain that mystics, who are the ones with a non-dual, undivided, or contemplative mind, have learned to embrace paradoxes and contradictions in life and faith, including those that can be seen in Christian doctrines and church dogma.6

Rohr proposes an illuminating perspective on the reasons why and how Christians have been bogged down in dualistic thinking when he writes, “With dualistic minds, it is always one or the other – it can never be both.”7 In reality, one can see this very often as Christians are caught off guard while trying (yet failing miserably) to explain many hard-to-comprehend doctrines. Jesus is both divine and human. Mary is both a virgin and a mother. Christ followers live both in the physical world and in the spiritual world. Those at WSCCC can surely benefit from such a paradigm shift. To unmask the paradox of non-dualistic thinking, they need to learn to live with the paradox and embrace the mystery, ambiguity, and uncertainty about the divine and everything life presents to them in all its complications and fullness. What Rohr has offered in his book is learning to gaze at the sacredness of life without dualities. He explains, “To see rightly is to be able to be fully present – without fear, without bias, and without judgement.”8

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5 Ibid., 101.
6 Ibid., 144-149.
7 Ibid., 69.
8 Ibid., 63.
Another great insight by Rohr is about the spiritual formation of the pastoral leaders. Ideally, pastoral leadership is the agent to provide resources and equip members for spiritual formation. However, as Rohr points out, “when so many become professional church workers without going through spiritual transformation at any deep level, religious work becomes a career, and church becomes something one attends.” As a result, he states, “too many clergy study religion and Scripture before they critique their own lens and process. They see without examining their way of seeing.” If spiritual formation is about seeing rightly and correctly, then pastoral ministry and spiritual leadership are about nurturing others to see rightly and correctly. Pastors and church leaders need to rediscover this lost tradition or way of seeing and thinking before being able to lead their faith communities towards deeper union with God. The task may look daunting when it involves the transformation of pastoral leaders, but there is hope because “Jesus came to model the full integration for us.” The new seeing or contemplation as modeled by Jesus is being present and attentive to oneself, the Divine, and everything the Divine encompasses.

**The Role of Spiritual Disciplines in Spiritual Formation**

Spiritual disciplines play significant role in spiritual formation. When practiced, spiritual disciplines become means for Christ followers to experience God’s transforming work in their lives. Several evangelical authors recommend an array of spiritual disciplines.

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9 Ibid., 37.
10 Ibid., 63.
11 Ibid., 69.
disciplines within the contemplative stream that heighten the awareness, attentiveness, and responsiveness to God. The daily offices of prayer, lectio divina, silence, and spiritual direction stand out as the key contemplative practices that make up a more balanced curriculum towards spiritual development.

*Listening for the Soul* by Jean Stairs

Theologian and pastoral leader Jean Stairs reveals through her book, *Listening for the Soul*, a deep need in many modern-day churches and faith communities – people’s souls have been crying out for love, support, and care, but their longing is still largely unfulfilled. They need credible caregivers who can listen attentively and offer spiritual guidance to them as they navigate through the storms of life. Written with the Protestant circle in mind, Stairs offers workable solutions to the current situation where pastoral responses to such yearning are inadequate.

Stairs highlights the importance of listening for the soul as a valuable yet often overlooked approach to pastoral care. Listening as an act of soul or spiritual inquiry opens doorways for people seeking pastoral care to be aware of the holy in the ordinary life and work. By encouraging contemplative living and by teaching contemplative prayer among congregation members, Stairs believes “such pastoral care has the potential to be both preventative and restorative in nature,”¹² as it helps foster a lifestyle of living and resting in God. To enable and strengthen such awareness of the divine in daily life, Stairs introduces the idea of soul companionship – a lay spiritual guidance platform – which is

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founded on the basis of the two disciples on their way to Emmaus according to the gospel of Luke (Lk 24:13-35). Towards the end of the book, Stairs cautions against a reductionist approach to pastoral care if Protestant churches move towards substituting spiritual direction for pastoral care; she urges that pastoral care and spiritual direction should retain their distinct identities and autonomous practices.

Stairs’s observation of the state of the Church’s overall spirituality is quite accurate: “The church seems too much in appearance like the world – too busy, too tired, too involved, too demanding, too unstable, too spiritually impoverished, too leadership deprived.”13 It is therefore not unusual to see that average church members and leaders alike are caught struggling on many fronts as if in an ongoing battle. Owing to such impoverishment and overextension, many are simply “unable to discern what leads to a balanced life and what leads to burnout and long-term disability.”14 The dreadful reality facing Christians of this present generation is that the frenetic lifestyle has eroded the capacity to be attentive to the voice and presence of God. It has taken a huge toll on spiritual formation for modern-day Christ followers who desire to mature into Christlikeness. This calls for a sincere reflection and examination of our theology for spiritual formation.

As the title of the book suggests, readers cannot but notice the word “listen” many times throughout the book. Stairs is adamant that no one should overlook the importance of listening. Pastoral leaders ought to embrace the discipline of listening – knowing what

13 Ibid., 1.

14 Ibid., 3.
and how to listen – and facilitate such contemplative listening in their pastoral relationships with congregants. Stairs offers perceptive insight on the purpose of contemplative living, stating, “It is not most people’s first inclination to look for God in their daily issues and concerns, and without someone attuned to listen on the wavelength of spiritual longings and to assist in the process of recognizing holiness, the spiritual dimension is missed.”¹⁵ The recognition of the holy or divine presence in everyday life is the goal and purpose of contemplation. Hence it demands urgent attention from church leaders nowadays to foster a contemplative mind in Christ followers so that they can recognize the spiritual longing and divine involvement in all of life’s undertakings, such as daily work and even household chores. This plea for a contemplative spirituality has been neglected for a long while and should be one that evangelical churches make an effort to recover sooner rather than later.

_Noticing God_ by Richard Peace

Among numerous spiritual disciplines Christians can engage in as they attempt to carve out space for God’s working in their lives, there is one Richard Peace calls the “spiritual discipline of noticing God.”¹⁶ In _Noticing God_, Peace unpacks what it means to make a conscious practice noticing God in one’s daily life. He outlines various ways one can experience and recognize God’s presence, namely, “in mystical encounters, in the

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¹⁵ Ibid., 29.

ordinary, in the still small voice, in the power community, in the written Word, in creation and culture, as well as in the church.”

The book is structured around seven ways of finding, hearing, or noticing God. While each can be on its own, most of them are intertwined, and together they present a collective invitation to respond to God for life’s transformation. Mystical encounters (or dramatic experiences, as some would better understand) are one of the venues people come to notice and see God’s fingerprints in a miraculous and dramatic way, although these cannot be always expected. The second way is noticing God in the ordinary, where the Jesuits can impart some wisdom about the God of daily life. Next, there is the still small voice through which God often extends his invitation to his children. The fourth way is about finding God in other people by the power of community. This focuses largely on certain aspects of the Benedictine rule, namely mindfulness and hospitality. The fifth means of hearing God revolves around the written word. While there is no doubt about the significance of reading God’s word, how one encounters God through meditating on his word needs to be revisited. Then, Peace also touches on the challenging concept of noticing God in creation, culture, and creativity. Lastly, God can be found at church, in corporate worship, through sacraments, spiritual practices, teaching, service, and retreat.

Throughout the book, Peace has done a very fine job by anchoring the foundation of spiritual formation on God’s initiative, that is, God is active, available, at work, and desirous of our attention. Peace claims that all who are born of God should share a

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17 Ibid.
persistent urge for “God’s habitual presence,”\(^{18}\) but a belief in God and an encounter with his presence are radically different things. The reason why Christians do not have frequent encounters with God is not that God is in hiding. The issue actually rests with them. Therefore their task is to “learn to notice God in God’s various manifestations and then to respond to the God we meet.”\(^{19}\) This two-step manner – noticing and responding to God – is pivotal to transformation to Christlikeness.

Peace also remarks that noticing God in the community is vital to spiritual formation. The contemplative spirituality as expressed in the Benedictine tradition suggests that God can be found in other people, as Christians become mindful of God, who is everywhere in our dealing with and providing hospitality to others. It is beneficial to realize that in order to cultivate mindfulness of God throughout the day, “two spiritual practices in particular seek to foster this awareness of God’s presence: the daily offices of prayer and *lectio divina.*”\(^{20}\) On the discipline of *lectio divina*, Peace elaborates rather succinctly its development, purpose, and outcome: “over the years *lectio divina* has assumed various shapes and forms, but at its heart is a slow, meditative reading of Scripture that leads to the pondering of certain words or phrases out of which prayer to God flows, ending in contemplative silence before God.”\(^{21}\) Evangelicals, such as WSCCC, are known to emphasize approaching God through rigorous study of his written word, usually with an analytical and critical mind. Such typical means of reading and

\(^{18}\) Ibid., 13.

\(^{19}\) Ibid., 17.

\(^{20}\) Ibid., 71.

\(^{21}\) Ibid., 72.
studying God’s word does help a reader to consume biblical information, but God’s people need a balanced approach, which *lectio divina* can offer in order to experience transformation. This practice is discussed again in future chapters as one of the major themes of this project.

*Emotionally Healthy Spirituality* by Peter Scazzero

In *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality*, Peter Scazzero puts forward what he believes to be the missing link in fostering a holistic Christian spirituality: “the pathway to unleashing the transformative power of Jesus to heal our spiritual lives can be found in the joining of emotional health and contemplative spirituality.”22 The premise of this book is that without emotional health, there can be no spiritual health either. The two are inseparably woven. To be thriving and healthy disciples of Christ, Christians need to be concerned with managing emotions and nurturing their spiritual lives.

The first part of the book, which incorporates the first three chapters, looks at the symptoms and causes of emotionally unhealthy or immature spirituality. Simply put, the “doing” mentality, dualistic thinking, the compartmentalized lives of many Christians, and the usual emphasis of more church-related activities as means of discipleship are not producing mature Christians, particularly when emotional development is entirely left out. The second part, which includes the remaining seven chapters, outlines pathways towards a spirituality that is emotionally healthy. The paths include awareness of oneself as a key to one’s relationship with God, recognition of the sinful and destructive patterns of the past, an embracing of life’s unavoidable grief and loss, the development of a

rhythm of rest and silence to move into God’s presence habitually, and an ordering of our lives around a cohesive Rule of Life for personal and interior growth in God.

Scazzero’s work is a much needed integration of emotional wellbeing and contemplative spirituality, which the usual means of spiritual formation and discipleship in churches fail to address. Some Christians have a passion for God, are committed to being faithful members of a church, participate in a home or fellowship group regularly, serve with their talents, and by all means are usually considered spiritually mature. Nevertheless, when faced with interpersonal conflicts, more often than not they are shown to remain trapped at a level of spiritual immaturity. According to Scazzero, “work for God that is not nourished by a deep interior life with God will eventually be contaminated by other things such as ego, power, needing approval of and from others, and buying into the wrong ideas of success and the mistaken belief that we cannot fail.”

When it comes to making of disciples for Christ, pastoral leaders cannot neglect the fact that they are handling the whole life formation for God’s people.

Another outstanding insight offered by Scazzero is the way to be carried in God’s presence throughout the day with the observance of the Daily Office (otherwise known as Divine Office or fixed-hour prayer). Many committed Christ followers would insist on having a quiet time or devotions at least once a day to be drawn to God’s love and word, but then they become distracted and forget that God is active in the rest of the day. To Scazzero, “stopping for the Daily Office . . . is not meant to add another to-do to our already-busy schedules. It is the resetting of our entire lives toward a new destination –

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23 Ibid., 32.
God.” Setting apart small units of time during a day for prayer, Scripture reading, and meditation is crucial to a thriving spiritual life since times of Daily Office are like “ropes that lead us back to God in the blizzards of life. They are anchors for living in the hurricane of demands.” This is particularly relevant and helpful for this ministry project as its goal is to enable busy fathers at WSCCC to remain in God’s presence while they battle through innumerable demands.

**Spiritual Formation through Companionship and Direction**

The role of spiritual direction in cultivating Christlikeness is indispensible. As the following writers suggest, spiritual formation happens within a communal context because recognizing God’s activity in one’s everyday life usually requires a companion, namely a spiritual director. Spiritual direction or companionship is an ancient relational discipline that has been at the disposal of the Church for centuries, although its spirit and practice needs to be rediscovered by evangelicals today.

*Spiritual Mentoring* by Keith Anderson and Randy Reese

The basis of *Spiritual Mentoring* relates that genuine spiritual formation can happen to any Christians. They are the ones who are willing to take part in a formational journey with others who desire to attain spiritual maturity. Keith Anderson and Randy Reese further point out that for a spiritual mentoring relationship to take place, it ought to

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24 Ibid., 155.

25 Ibid.
be a “triadic relationship,” which involves a mentor, a mentoree, and God the Spirit who already is at work in people’s lives.  

This book is an invaluable source for understanding the process of spiritual mentoring and direction that is both contemplative and practical. With the help of such ancient guides as Augustine of Hippo, Ignatius of Loyola, John of the Cross, and so on, Anderson and Reese describe five movements in the dynamics of spiritual mentoring. These movements include how to begin a mentoring relationship, development of trust and intimacy between mentor/director and mentoree/directee, the nurture of the spirit of responsiveness and teachability, when and how to exercise grace, and empowerment as the goal of spiritual mentoring.

Anderson and Reese have diagnosed accurately the issue at stake. They observe, “Spiritual formation, education of the heart, in other words, requires something more than traditional Western forms of instruction. It requires a mentorship of the heart, a relationship with a teacher of life who is able to convey what was learned from the teacher’s own faithful mentor, a way of life that is formed, not merely instructions that are given.”  

Their analysis of the present situation is spot on. To form or transform a heart, Christians need to learn from Jesus’ approach in calling the people for response – an approach that frees their imagination, prepares ears and eyes, and requires hearts to respond. Moreover, a close examination of the pedagogical method Jesus took in his teaching reveals that “Jesus’ style of instruction embodied a pedagogy that invested life


27 Ibid., 17.
in the learner through an incarnation of the message being taught.”²⁸ The disciple-making approach has since evolved over the millennia. When pastoral leaders evaluate most of their teaching and discipleship programs today, especially in Chinese churches in Australia, it is not surprising to find that most of the activities have been shifted to a lecture-based format.

In the last couple of decades, there has been a spike in the amount of literature written on the subject of spiritual mentoring and direction. This speaks of a resurgence of interest to return to the more ancient and biblical way which would aid the spiritual formation process. However, many in Protestant circles are still wary about the Catholic roots of spiritual formation, and this is particularly true among Evangelicals. Anderson’s and Reese’s remark hence is illuminating when they state, “The practice of spiritual guidance has always been part of Protestant spiritual practices, although the language of spiritual direction has not always been a major part of Protestant vocabulary.”²⁹ Clearly at WSCCC, the spirit of direction and mentoring has always been present, for example, in the form of adult Sunday school, home or cell group, fellowship gathering, and discipleship training. Spiritual guidance takes place in most of those instances where a teacher or leader is responsible for the guiding and directing of his or her members’ spiritual quest by teaching the Bible and spending time together in discussion and prayer. What is required though is to rediscover and explore the essence of spiritual direction for contemporary practice so as to arouse and direct people’s hunger for God.

²⁸ Ibid., 16.
²⁹ Ibid., 25.
This work of Henri Nouwen, *Spiritual Direction*, has been put together by two of his students, Michael Christensen and Rebecca Laird, who used Nouwen’s course notes with his unpublished reflections and writings to bring forth the book. The basic premise of this book can be summarized by a statement in the preface: “The goal of spiritual direction is spiritual formation – the ever-increasing capacity to live a spiritual life from the heart. A spiritual life cannot be formed without discipline, practice, and accountability.”

Given the title, this book is not about giving spiritual direction, but rather a glimpse into the underlying basics of a fruitful spiritual direction relationship. “Spiritual direction,” writes Nouwen, “is a relationship initiated by a spiritual seeker who finds a mature person of faith willing to pray and respond with wisdom and understanding to his or her questions about how to live spiritually in a world of ambiguity and distraction.” Nouwen further suggests that there are three classic and particularly useful disciplines which make space for God to work in our lives. The disciplines include “the discipline of the Heart, the discipline of the Book, and the discipline of the Church.” The bulk of the book is then organized around these practices. Within this general framework, Nouwen

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31 Ibid., vii.

32 Ibid., xiv.
gives assessments of the essential foundations of Christian spirituality, including “introspection, contemplative prayer, devotional reading, meditation, and community.”

The pervasive mentality within the evangelical circle has been that Christ followers study hard, pray hard, and serve hard in order to seek, love, and repay God for what he has done for humanity. This undoubtedly requires tremendous energy in the pursuit on the part of believers, and has been the main struggle facing the Christian fathers at WSCCC as outlined in Chapter 1. But Nouwen paints a picture that sheds light on an effortless spiritual quest. He explains, “A truth about the God to whom we pray is that God is seeking us. We do not find God, but God finds us. . . . The question is not ‘How am I to find God’ but ‘how am I to let myself be found by God?’” This captures Nouwen’s conviction that, in spiritual direction, one is to discover means to enable such recognition of a God who actively shows up in everyday life, work, friendship, marriage, community, and church life.

This inevitably also shifts the paradigm of Christian ministry because, according to Nouwen, ministry naturally flows out of one’s identity in Christ who works creatively and redemptively in each of his children. Nouwen contends, “You have to trust that if you are the son or daughter of God, a healing power will go out from you and people will be healed. . . . Ministry is the overflow of your love for God and others.” This is a liberating perspective as spiritual leaders consider how to spur already overstretched Christian professionals for continuous growth and further commitment for ministry.

33 Ibid., xiv-xvii.
34 Ibid., 81.
35 Ibid., 131.
Therefore instead of asking, challenging, and even burdening them to invest more time for Bible seminars and participation in various ministries, leaders need to take a leap of faith and trust that the power of Christ is at work. Spiritual direction is then a journey of discernment where spiritual companions “help people discover that they already have something to give.”

**認識靈修指導 (Understanding Spiritual Direction) by Ekman Tam**

This is a sequel to Ekman Tam’s previous book on spiritual direction. As a practitioner and scholar, Tam has introduced contemplative spirituality to the Chinese Christian communities in Canada, Australia, and several Asian countries. For almost twenty years, Tam has been devoted to training pastors and lay leaders to become spiritual directors in various Chinese Christian circles. While his previous book on spiritual direction is arguably the first of its kind written in Chinese and made available to Chinese Christians around the world, the latest book focuses on the same theme but includes new perspectives, and is written with a wider Chinese readership in mind.

Tam begins by distinguishing what seem to be overlapping yet rather different pastoral care ministries: counselling and spiritual direction. The main reason is that spiritual direction has only emerged in the last twenty years within Chinese Protestant circles, and has usually been mistaken as another form of pastoral counselling.

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36 Ibid., 10.

37 Ekman Tam, 認識靈修指導 (Understanding Spiritual Direction) (Hong Kong: Christian Contemplative Spirituality Institute, 2017), viii-xi.

38 Ibid., 1-2.
Therefore a precise and succinct differentiation is required early on in the book. Tam explains that counselling focuses more on resolving inner struggles and offering practical help to those who receive counselling, whereas spiritual direction aims to nurture and improve the relationship between God and those who seek direction. Tam further points out that while modern counsellors are certified through a certain kind of education, spiritual directors are confirmed by the Christian community, which testifies that they possess a gift of spiritual companionship. If such differentiation is correct, this implies that there could be many spiritual directors already in churches who may or may not be using these gifts. The ministry of spiritual direction is a much needed one because it deals with the overarching concern of the Church – nurturing the God-human relationship.

In his book, Tam reckons the image of God is of utmost significance when it comes to spiritual direction, for it forms the foundation of and steers the ministry. He has identified three main themes. First, God is incarnational (Ex 3:7-8; Jn 1:14; Rv 21:3). This signifies that God is actively seeking his people for union and he can be found in ordinary life. Second, God is life-giving (Jn 10:10), and his desire is to heal, restore, preserve, and develop life. This thought enables people to respect and cherish life, health, as well as restoration. Third, God is loving (Ps 136). God’s incarnation and life-giving actions originate from his love. Spiritual direction furnishes all those involved with a means to receive God’s love and be givers of his love.

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39 Ibid., 18.
40 Ibid., 20-21.
41 Ibid., 28-33.
Tam asserts that spiritual experience is not necessarily mystical and usually occurs in normal, daily life. Nevertheless, there is potential for an everyday experience to become a spiritual one if the individual is aware of the spiritual dimension of his or her mundane daily experience (Ps 27:13; Acts 17:28). Spiritual experience, according to Tam, is an invitation from God to evoke a desire to respond to God, thereby encouraging spiritual growth. This is a great news for the Christian men at WSCCC who live and work in the world for the most part of their lives. Their challenge is to discover the God who “fills everything in every way” (Eph 1:23).

Strictly speaking, spiritual direction is not a biblical concept, but Tam believes that Luke 24:13-35 is among the best biblical narratives to describe the dynamics of spiritual direction between director and directee. In the story, Jesus, as the living word and spiritual guide, has enlightened the written word for his disciples. Hence throughout the process of spiritual direction, it is imperative that the spiritual director accompanies the directee as he or she listens and responds to God’s word. So while spiritual direction is still an emerging concept among Chinese evangelical churches, the Emmaus story, along with other Old Testament and New Testament passages (1 Sm 3:1-10; 2 Kgs 2:1-14; Acts 9:26-28; 16:1-3; and 2 Tm 3:10-11) should lay down a solid basis for theological reflection that enriches the understanding of spiritual direction.

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42 Ibid., 40-41.
43 Ibid., 70.
44 Ibid., 74-75.
Limitations of the Reviewed Literature

While the reviewed books provide great wisdom and provoke thoughts on the subject matter, none of these addresses the unique Australian setting, and in particular the needs of Chinese men currently living in Australia. Although principles are more or less the same and human needs are rather universal, the urge for distinctive strategies and means that are relevant to the people in this day and age should be heeded. It would be appreciated more, for example, if Willard had provided practical teaching materials to strengthen local churches in their pursuit of forming Jesus’ apprentices. On the other hand, although Rohr’s and Nouwen’s arguments are drastically insightful, evangelicals are typically wary of Catholic writers and their teachings. The introduction to contemplative spirituality by Peace, Scazzerro, Tam, and so on are also likely met by skepticism. Contemplative disciplines, such as lectio divina and centering prayer, are at risk of being abused or misused. Spiritual direction is still in its embryonic stage, at least within evangelical Chinese churches. Thus evangelical pastors and leaders ought to be sensitive about bridging the gap between the Catholic and the Protestant traditions when they introduce concepts and practices that are widely considered to be Catholic. This calls for a contextualized study of a biblical, theological, and practical integration of contemplative spirituality, which is the focus of this project’s next section.
CHAPTER 3

A THEOLOGY OF SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

The aim of this chapter is to provide a solid basis for the ministry initiative – to empower the Chinese Christian men at WSCCC in their daily lives. It lays out the biblical and theological foundation for experiencing spiritual transformation through recognizing and living in God’s presence, upon which the life and practice of a Carmelite monk will also provide insight. The chapter then articulates an ecclesiology that, while respecting the tradition and uniqueness of WSCCC, urges for a paradigm shift which enables transformation in daily life. In addition, this chapter outlines four contemplative spiritual practices that seek to enable spiritual transformation to inner Christ-likeness. Finally, there is a discussion on the pastoral theology of spiritual direction and its contribution towards spiritual formation.

Spiritual Transformation by Practicing the Presence of God

At the end of his gospel, the Apostle John describes his motive for writing:

“These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name” (Jn 20:31). The life in and with Jesus is the source of spiritual transformation that all can experience, regardless of their age,
gender, and ethnicity. While it is the work of God to give life through Jesus (Jn 6:33; Rom 8:2; Col 3:3), Christians are called to “live by faith in the son of God” (Gal 2:20). The avenue to tap into this abundant life with God is to realize that he is present with his creation as Peace notes perceptively, “God is already present. Our challenge is to notice that presence.”

This section first considers Jesus’ invitation for all to remain in him, and the implications of this in regards to how spiritual transformation to Christ-likeness is attainable. It then turns to Paul the Apostle to ascertain how his teaching provides hints to experience God’s presence through unceasing prayer. Lastly, this section discusses Brother Lawrence’s model of spiritual transformation by practicing the presence of God.

An Invitation to Experience God’s Presence: John 15:1-7

Jesus’ allegorical address about the relationship between the vine and branches is sure to shed great insight on noticing and practicing God’s presence. Indeed it is one of the biblical premises on which the thrust of this project rests. In John 15, as part of his farewell discourse, Jesus discusses several significant relationships of the disciples. According to New Testament scholar Merrill Tenney, this chapter can be divided into three parts: the disciples’ relationship with Jesus (15:1-11), their relationships with each other (15:12-17), and their relationships with the world (15:18-27). This part of the project looks at the first of these relationships. To remain in Jesus is considered the primary theme of his invitation for all – including the disciples whom Jesus spoke to

1 Peace, Noticing God, 19.
directly and the future generations of disciples. To illustrate the significance of this union, Jesus employs the parable of a common motif of the ancient world, namely fruit-bearing vines.

The vine imagery will quickly draw one’s attention to the Old Testament where Israel, the covenant people of God, is portrayed as a vine. However it has failed to bear good fruit (Ps 80:9-16; Is 5:1-7; Ez 15:1-8; 17:1-21; Hos 10:1-2). In contrast to that, Jesus is the “true” vine which sustains, nourishes, and gives life to all its branches. The branches, in response, need to remain in the vine in order to live and bear fruit. As mentioned in Chapter 1, the impoverished spirituality of the Christian fathers at WSCCC is likely a result of mistaking more church involvement for greater spiritual vitality. This biblical metaphor of the vine solely giving vitality to its branches speaks loudly and corrects this misconception. One word stands out in the passage and indeed is a word favoured by the Apostle John. Translated as “remain in” is the root verb μένω which means to stay, abide, dwell, or be present in a given place or relation. It is worth noting that the word appears twice as often in John’s writings – his gospel and his other epistles – as in all other New Testament books combined.³ It is apparent that at the core of the Johannine theology is that of the incarnational and relational Christ who dwells among humankind (Jn 1:12-14; 14:20; 1 Jn 4:15; 5:11-12).

In his commentary on the gospel, Don Carson points out that the imagery found in John 15 “suggests incorporation, mutual indwelling, fruitfulness.”\textsuperscript{4} Although the notion of mutual indwelling might have already been introduced in John 14, the one in this chapter is portrayed in a vine metaphor common in the literature of Palestinian Judaism,\textsuperscript{5} the idea being that “the branches derive their life from the vine; the vine produces its fruit through the branches.”\textsuperscript{6} It is therefore crucial for the branch to remain in the vine as the source of life because “no branch can bear fruit by itself” (15:4). Remaining, or not remaining, in the true vine brings about one of the two consequences for the branch, that is, either bearing much fruit or being thrown away and withering (15:5-6). Just as the life of the vine pulsates through the branches, the transforming life of Christ pulsates within his people. Without such vital union, there is no formation, and indeed transformation, of life at all. New Testament commentator Leon Morris is quite right to point out that “the allegory of the vine brings before us the importance of fruitfulness in the Christian life and the truth that this is the result, not of human achievement, but of abiding in Christ.”\textsuperscript{7}

For the constant flow of life from Christ to eventuate in his people, Christians must be attached to the life source through God’s word and prayer (15:7). Tenney understands that “to remain in Christ and to allow his words to remain in oneself means a conscious acceptance of the authority of his word and a constant contact with him by


\textsuperscript{5} Ibid., 513.

\textsuperscript{6} Ibid., 514.

\textsuperscript{7} Leon Morris, \textit{The Gospel According to John} (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 593.
prayer.”\(^8\) That, for all Christians, means a regular discipline of Bible reading and study, as well as remaining in communion with God through prayer in order to cultivate a lifestyle of constant abiding in Christ.

**Experiencing God’s Presence through Unceasing Prayer**

As the human author of the many New Testament epistles, the Apostle Paul’s writing on continual abiding in Christ is illuminating. Paul seems to understand the constant abiding by means of prayer. He modeled a disposition of constant prayer (Rom 1:8-10; Eph 1:15-17; 1 Thes 1:2-3; 2 Thes 2:11-12) and taught Christians to pray continually (Rom 12:12; Col 4:2-3; 1 Thes 5:17).

The call to pray continually is often understood by some to be talking or communicating to God in one’s waking moments without ceasing and therefore considered humanly impossible. Without properly mastering what this entails, it could lead to an extra sense of guilt in addition to what has already been experienced by the Christian men at WSCCC because they reason that they have not done enough. It should be noted that the adverb “continually,” ἀδιαλείπτως, in Paul’s letter to the church in Thessalonica, is a hyperbole, as argued by commentator Gene Green, “that yields a sense similar to the Lord’s command to his disciples that ‘they should always pray and not give up’ (Lk 18:1).”\(^9\) As physically insupportable as it may seem, praying continually should not be taken to mean nonstop prayer. It is rather “constantly recurring prayer growing out

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\(^8\) Tenney, “John,” 351.

of a settled attitude of dependence on God.”\textsuperscript{10} The main thrust is then on persevering in prayer\textsuperscript{11} even when one does not feel like doing since such incessant prayer is the “only way to cultivate a joyful attitude in times of trial.”\textsuperscript{12}

This can be seen in Paul’s other exhortations, for example, to the Christians in Colossae and Rome. Translated as “devote . . . to prayer” (Col 4:2) or “be . . . faithful in prayer” (Rom 12:12) is the root verb προσκαρτερέω, which means to continue steadfastly, attend continually, to persevere, and not to faint.\textsuperscript{13} It is a recurring theme in Paul’s theology of prayer that “hope, endurance and prayer are natural partners.”\textsuperscript{14} Systematic theologian John Murray rightly states that “prayer is the means ordained of God for the supply of grace sufficient for every exigency and particularly against the faintheartedness to which affliction tempts us.”\textsuperscript{15} Douglas Moo also concurs that “our ability to continue to rejoice and to bear up under our tribulations is dependent on the degree to which we heed Paul’s challenge to persist in prayer.”\textsuperscript{16} While God’s resources are always accessible for his people, the responsibility as well as initiative to “approach God with freedom and confidence” rest with them (Eph 3:12).

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext[11]{F. F. Bruce, \textit{1 and 2 Thessalonians} (Waco, TX: Word, 1982), 124.}
\footnotetext[12]{Thomas, “1 Thessalonians,” 869.}
\footnotetext[14]{Douglas J. Moo, \textit{The Epistle to the Romans} (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 779.}
\footnotetext[15]{John Murray, \textit{The Epistle to the Romans} (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), 132.}
\footnotetext[16]{Moo, \textit{The Epistle to the Romans}, 779.}
\end{footnotes}
Timothy Keller discusses in *Prayer* the practice of daily prayer. He believes Paul’s teaching of praying unceasingly in 1 Thessalonians 5:17 to mean that “we should, if possible, do everything all day with conscious reference to God (1 Cor 10:31).” There is nothing too big or too small for God. He wants to be involved in everything concerning his dear children. German pastor and theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945) laments that Christians often “pray for the big things and forget to give thanks for the ordinary, small (and yet really not small) gifts.”

In another Pauline epistle, just as the Philippian Christians were urged “in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God” (Phil 4:6), WSCCC’s Christians are also urged to develop a life of prayer. Keller articulates it well: “This kind of spontaneous and constant prayer during the day should be a habit of the heart. We will never develop it, however, unless we take up the discipline of regular, daily prayer.” The discipline of regular prayer is not just once a day or restricted to certain occasions, but it is supposed to be a daily rhythm of prayer. As a non-denominational church, WSCCC might not possess rich theological heritage, but it is hoped that a historical paradigm, particularly that of Nicholas Herman (widely known as Brother Lawrence), can help shed more light on remaining in God and practicing unceasing prayer.

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Brother Lawrence and his Practice of the Presence of God

Nicholas Herman was born to a peasant family in 1611 in Lorraine, France. His family’s poverty forced him to join the army so he could live on a small stipend. However, having been wounded during service, Herman was left with no choice but to retire from the army and assume a lowly job. Growing weary of his painful life, he thought of retiring to the desert but soon doubted “the wisdom of his decision to live in the desert.”20 After considering the aspects of mutual edification, exhortation, and protection against individual whims offered by living within a Christian brotherhood,21 by the age of forty (approximately), Herman became a lay brother of the Discalced Carmelite Order in Paris and took the name of “Lawrence of the Resurrection” or Brother Lawrence.22 As he was given work at the monastery kitchen, Brother Lawrence started to develop a spirituality of being always in God’s presence among tiresome chores of cooking and cleaning. It is interesting to note that the kitchen job was not his desire to do, but he remained there for fifteen years until his leg injury forced him, yet again, to take a different path by assuming another job in the monastery, that of repairing sandals.23

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20 Brother Lawrence, The Practice of the Presence of God (1693; reprint, Springdale, PA: Whitaker, 1982), 78.

21 Ibid.


23 Ekman P. C. Tam, 基督徒靜觀靈修 (Christian Contemplative Spirituality) (Hong Kong: Christian Contemplative Spirituality Institute, 2014), 13-14.
For Brother Lawrence, his “heartfelt goal was to think of nothing but God.” He maintained a strong belief that “all spiritual life consists of practicing God’s presence, and that anyone who practices it correctly will soon attain spiritual fulfillment.” Nevertheless, for many spiritual seekers in the hectic and demanding world, remaining in God’s presence constantly is much easier said than done. Brother Lawrence graciously and hearteningly reassures his readers that “the practice would eventually cause our efforts to become a pleasurable habit that we would do without thinking.” He suggests some practical tips in correspondence with a sister in the Lord that “during your meals or during any daily duty, lift your heart up to Him, because even the least little remembrance will please Him.” Also by seemingly echoing what the Apostle Paul said to the Athenians in Acts 17:27, Brother Lawrence affirms that “He’s nearer than you can imagine.”

Brother Lawrence’s example illustrates vividly that, as David Benner writes, “To know God we must think of him, not simply about him . . . We must learn to spend time gazing on him, being still before him and focused on him.” Evangelical churches such as WSCCC can certainly learn a lot from the example and thoughts of Brother Lawrence as they desire to bridge the chasm between the sacred and the secular. There is no such

24 Lawrence, The Practice of the Presence of God, 15.
25 Ibid., 29.
26 Ibid., 21.
27 Ibid., 33.
28 Ibid.
29 David Benner, Sacred Companions: The Gift of Spiritual Friendship & Direction (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002), 33.
sacred/secular or spiritual/ordinary gulf because “the most effective way Brother Lawrence had for communicating with God was to simply do his ordinary work.”

Brother Lawrence did his daily work, and in fact everything, out of genuine love for God. He wrote, “Never tire of doing even the smallest things for Him, because He isn’t impressed so much with the dimensions of our work as with the love in which it is done.” House chores, mundane work, and boring duties in daily life do not diminish one’s ability to experience and commune with God. Instead, these open up more avenues, other than regular church meetings, to ensure that Christ “becomes more familiar to us, and His presence becomes a natural thing.”

Michael Raiter, a famous Australian evangelical leader, evaluates the impact of mysticism on evangelicalism in his award-winning book, Stirrings of the Soul. In it, he critically appraises the offering of contemplative spirituality and discredits Brother Lawrence’s theology observed in The Practice of the Presence of God due to its little reference to Jesus Christ. In all fairness, Brother Lawrence’s book gives its readers a glimpse of his secret of prayer as he carried out kitchen chores and lived an ordinary life in the monastery. It is not intended to be a theological paper or even a manual prescribing the way of life in a monastery. Nonetheless, Raiter cannot but uphold that “one of the great appeals of Brother Lawrence’s classic is that it advocates a spirituality for the

30 Lawrence, The Practice of the Presence of God, 20.

31 Ibid., 21.

32 Ibid., 50.

ordinary and everyday. One can realize this divine presence anywhere and everywhere.”34 For someone to learn to realize and practice God’s presence, Benner discerns that Brother Lawrence’s “secret is alarmingly simple; it entails a loving turning of his eyes toward God at all times.”35

As it has been discussed in this section, spiritual transformation to inner Christ-likeness must be grounded in Jesus’ call for all to remain in him through God’s word and prayer, just as the branch remains in the vine in order to bear fruits (Jn 15:4-5). By the same token, Paul’s theology of prayer specifies that humans constantly abide and remain in Christ through unceasing prayer (1 Thes 5:17-18). His teaching on “praying continually” grows out of a “settled attitude of dependence on God.”36 Such dependence, as part of the spiritual formation process, must be nurtured and is further illustrated by Brother Lawrence’s disciplined disposition to lift up his heart to God in his everyday life.

**Towards a Theology of Transformation in Daily Life**

WSCCC’s theological roots derive from evangelicalism, but, as explained in Chapter 1, the means of spiritual formation for its members is skewed towards doing, studying, and serving. Prayer is often reduced to a task to be done and completed, while Bible study becomes mostly an intellectual exercise, and ministry becomes a way to prove one’s spiritual status and maturity. A renewed theological paradigm is therefore

34 Ibid., 162.


36 Thomas, “1 Thessalonians,” 869.
needed to foster a life-giving spirituality that echoes the psalmist’s firm conviction, “For with you is the fountain of life; in your light we see light” (Ps 36:9).

As a way forward, the *Deeper Experiences of Famous Christians* may provide great insights. In the book, British author James G. Lawson (1874-1946) details various biographical sketches of people, such as George Whitefield, Dwight Moody and Charles Finney, whose lives have been touched by God to desire more intimate and loving relationship with him. Lawson’s proposition in the book is that these experiences of people from different centuries and countries point to the fact that a genuinely deep Christian experience with God can be attained. He further suggests that their deep experiences were a result not just of the working of the Holy Spirit, but also their commitment to go deeper into their hearts and souls to discover true spirituality instead of outward forms, actions, and sacraments. By digging deeper and going beyond the standard outward forms, rituals and “the old way of the written code” (Rom 2:29; 7:6), it is endeavored that the leadership at WSCCC rethink the basics of the usual spiritual formation means, namely prayer, Bible study, and church ministry to empower the newer generations to experience daily transformation.

Prayer Life: From Saying Prayer to Prayers of the Heart

Donald Whitney addresses in his recent work, *Praying the Bible*, the common problem on prayer faced by Christians. He relates a story of a little girl praying bedtime prayers. “Her parents had taught her the classic bedtime prayer for children that begins, ‘Now I lay me down to sleep.’ One night she thought, ‘Why does God need to hear me

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say this again?’ So she decided to record herself saying the prayer, and then she played
the recording each night when she went to bed.” Whitney observes piercingly that “we
can be talking to the most fascinating Person in the universe about the most important
things in our lives and be bored to death.” The issue at stake, he argues graciously, is
not the people who pray, but how they pray.

WSCCC’s weekly prayer meeting has suffered declining attendance, and this
decline was followed by a major overhaul to turn it into a bi-monthly event with different
styles and input shared by the eight-member pastoral leadership team. The previous
format was that of checklist-type prayers to be said in a group, and when everything had
been faithfully covered and earnestly prayed for, the meeting would finish. The renewed
form, for the time being, undoubtedly has breathed some fresh air into the ministry, but it
is too early to conclude whether it will retain people and sustain their enthusiasm in
group prayer. Jesus speaks clearly that the heavenly “father knows what you need before
you ask him” (Mt 6:8). While it is true that the prayer requests of Christians are an
acknowledgement of their dependence on God, the way they pray and the way prayer is
understood need to be explored further.

As Rohr discerns well, “social and public prayers hold groups and religions
together, but they do not necessarily transform people at any deep level.” Even if people
keep coming to the bi-monthly prayer meetings, it does not guarantee that their spiritual
lives could be transformed. Jesus often condemned the religious leaders for their pursuit

38 Donald Whitney, Praying the Bible (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 15-16.
39 Ibid., 12.
40 Rohr, The Naked Now, 72.
of outwardly righteous deeds (Mt 23:25-28). Ministry enthusiasm and religious activities are not always equal to life transformation. On a personal level, for Christians to enjoy and thrive in their prayer lives, which is communicating with the all-loving, all-powerful, and all-knowing God, a new perspective should be taken into consideration. The prayer of the heart or the prayer of quiet needs to be rediscovered.

Benner remarks in *Sacred Companions* that “progression in the school of prayer is understood as . . . movement from prayer of the head (verbal prayer) to prayer of the heart (prayer of loving attunement to God’s presence).”  

Historically, various forms of prayer in the contemplative stream are known to help Christians’ practice of prayers move from the head to the heart. The “Jesus Prayer” and centering prayer are exemplary of prayers of the heart which are characterized by their simplicity and enable the pray-ers to get “into a state of awareness of God as the bestower of mercy upon us.”  

Although such prayers may bear “resemblance to the Eastern meditative forms that employ mantras,” Stairs reasons that they have their “own strand of development within the Western mystical movements of Christianity.”

Chinese theological educator and president of Alliance Bible Seminary in Hong Kong, Ka-Lun Leung, warns all students of prayer against the uncritical acceptance and elevation of the prayer of the heart or contemplative prayer as the most supreme and highest form of prayer.  

Likewise, Raiter shares a similar uneasiness in his writing:

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43 Ibid.

“Even more of a concern is the suggestion that a higher, or more intimate form of prayer is the prayer of few words, or even wordlessness.”45 To their arguments and concerns, it is important to note first that no serious and humble proponent of contemplative prayer can say that it is the only (or the best) way of prayer. Second, the purpose of the prayer of the heart is to complement, and not compete with, the prayer of the head or verbal prayer. As such, there is no need to debate which one is the better or higher form.46 The essence of the prayer of the heart is to encourage a loving gaze upon God and a spirit of contemplating his work (Is 65:17; Ps 27:4; Rv 1:18; 22:12), which are often sadly missed in the verbal prayers so prevalent in Protestant churches. Benner sums up well the objective of the prayer of the heart: “Although such prayer should never be expected to replace worded prayers, it will deepen them.”47 A later section in this chapter titled, “The Spiritual Practices for Transformation,” articulates certain spiritual disciplines to address this need for the men at WSCCC to deepen their verbal prayers.

**Bible Study: From Information to Transformation of Life**

The strength of the evangelical faith is on the Bible, as Foster states rightly that “evangelical faith is biblical faith.”48 Everything the evangelical community would dearly


46 Keller asks in his recent book, *Prayer*, a rhetorical question: “Which view of prayer is the better one? Is peaceful adoration or assertive supplication the ultimate form of prayer?” He believes the answer is not a simple either-or. He describes verbal prayer as a kingdom-centred prayer and the wordless prayer as a communion-centred prayer. He notes, “The Psalter affirms both the communion-seeking and kingdom-seeking kinds of prayer,” and “When we consult many of the greatest of the old writers on prayer – such as Augustine, Martin Luther, and John Calvin – we see that they do not fall neatly into either camp.” Keller, *Prayer*, 1-5.


48 Foster, *Streams of Living Water*, 221.
hold onto must be in line with the Scripture for it holds promises of blessings, truth, and freedom (Jo 1:8; Ps 119:9-11; Jn 8:32; 17:17). WSCCC identifies so strongly with this stance that, as outlined in the first chapter, most of its usual activities and ministries revolve around Bible and theology study. Foster asserts, “Scripture has primacy over other writings; primacy over church tradition; primacy over individual religious experience.”49 As a result, the study of the Bible is paramount and prevalent in everything evangelical churches do. However, sheer information and knowledge of the Bible does not necessarily lead to life transformation.

Eugene Peterson has come to understand why most Christians study the Bible for consumption of knowledge. He writes in Working the Angles that three forces have given rise to the current situation: the invention of (moveable type) printing by Johannes Gutenberg around 1440, the contemporary schooling system, and the conditioning of commercialization on people.50 Gutenberg’s invention is a backdrop that has molded people in the last few centuries into thinking that information easily accessible by books is under the reader's control. The schooling system and consumerism are more recent concerns. Contemporary schooling has shaped people, Christians and non-Christians alike, to be attentive primarily to information. Peterson points out with dismay, “We are habituated to looking for information when we read rather than being in a relationship with a person who once spoke . . . so that we could listen to what was said.”51

49 Ibid., 222.

50 Eugene H. Peterson, Working the Angles: The Shape of Pastoral Integrity (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 87-105.

51 Ibid., 95.

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Consumerism further embeds in everyone an acquisitive mode for impersonal information that “when we sit down to read the Scriptures . . . we want to find something useful.”\textsuperscript{52} The consumerist and utilitarian mindset turns any student of the Bible into one who is “no longer listening to a voice, not listening to God . . . becoming the person he is calling into existence.”\textsuperscript{53}

The word of God is not another book filled with historical information and dramatic narratives purely for study or human enjoyment. The Apostle Paul teaches that the Scripture is “God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Tm 3:16-17). The aim of Bible study then is not entirely about increasing the spiritual knowledge base, though it is necessary. The outcome of each and every Bible study, theological seminar, and Scripture exposition, according to Paul, is life change and renewal through knowing and experiencing God, if those means to spiritual formation are to remain faithful to the biblical teaching. Similarly, the Apostle John explains that with Jesus’ words remaining in the disciples, their lives will be nourished to the point that they bear much fruit (Jn 15:7-8).

When more Bible studies cannot produce fruit-bearing Christians at WSCCC, there is a kind of blockage that prevents this from happening. In \textit{The Critical Journey}, Janet O. Hagberg and Robert A. Guelich discuss this reality as they introduce the six different stages in the life of faith. According to them, people may move and progress

\begin{footnotes}
\item[52] Ibid., 98.
\item[53] Ibid., 98-99.
\end{footnotes}
onto the next stage as they grow in knowledge of and relationship with God. Hagberg and Guelich explain that, within evangelical churches, people are taught to learn and know about God mostly in a rational and intellectual way. But, they caution, “we do not experience God’s presence primarily in a rational way but in an experiential way.”\textsuperscript{54} The present challenge for the Christian men at WSCCC is how to impart life and genuine spiritual growth through the written word of God, whether studying, reading, or listening to it.

The Apostle Paul eagerly interceded for the Ephesians in order that they “may know him better” (Eph 1:17). However, knowledge about God is not adequate to quench the thirst of knowing God personally. More often than not, knowledge makes people arrogant and “puffs up” (1 Cor 8:1). In \textit{Prayer}, Keller admits that “we do not want just to know about God, but to know God, to seek his face and presence.”\textsuperscript{55} He goes on to quote Timothy Ward as saying, “To encounter the words of the Scripture is to encounter God in action.”\textsuperscript{56} Therefore theological truth discovered in Bible study or adult Sunday school is not unrelated to an experiential encounter with God, resulting in spiritual transformation. Keller’s plea that “we must experience the truth”\textsuperscript{57} is an important one that demands serious attention. As with the discussion on prayer life, specific spiritual disciplines that


\textsuperscript{55} Keller, \textit{Prayer}, 66.

\textsuperscript{56} Timothy Ward, \textit{Words of Life: Scripture as the Living and Active Word of God} (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2009), 48, as cited in Keller, \textit{Prayer}, 66.

\textsuperscript{57} Ibid.
are conducive to opening the Bible for life transformation are considered in a later section.

Ministry Focus: From Attending Church to Becoming Christ-like

In answering the question of when the kingdom of God comes, Jesus said, “The kingdom of God is within you” (Lk 17:21). Willard observes correctly that there is a fundamental mistake of Protestant churches which “aims to get people into heaven rather than to get heaven into people.”58 To Willard, this is perhaps the root of spiritual malnourishment as it fails to address the kingly rule of Christ in the heart of his people. Furthermore, the demands and obligations upon leaders and committed members to do ministry and support church-related events have adversely affected their spirituality. With busy ministries and back-to-back church meetings week after week, Christians easily lose sight of their primary life purpose of enjoying God in Christ and becoming more Christ-like for the sake of others. Various members of WSCCC have confided to me on different occasions that they cannot keep up with the church’s meeting schedule. Others have shared that even after turning up at countless church gatherings for many years, they are still struggling with family relationships and sinful habits. No wonder Willard laments, “They have found ways to be ‘Christian’ without being Christ-like.”59

Christian spiritual formation is not just about loyally attending church events. The aim of spiritual formation is for the people of God to become more Christ-like or to be “transformed into his likeness” (Gal 4:19; Rom 8:29; 2 Cor 3:18). Serious questions need


59 Ibid.

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to be asked if a certain meeting, ministry, activity, or group gathering inside or outside of the church can promote and foster that Christ-like formation process. For WSCCC, this reflection should happen sooner rather than later, or it is at greater risk of turning formation-eager disciples into burdened church attenders. There is a filter to help provide screening to determine whether or not certain ministry efforts, practices, and activities are instrumental to spiritual development. Willard lays out a VIM model, with “V” standing for vision, “I” being intention, and “M” for means.60

The vision of life in God’s kingdom now and forever has always been the primary incentive for God’s people to walk with him and grow in spiritual maturity (Ex 6:7; Lv 26:12; Ez 11:20; Mt 6:33). With Jesus declaring the kingdom of God at hand (Mt 4:17; Mk 1:14-15), it is the responsibility of the New Testament churches to envision this reality to evoke people’s intention to follow Christ in everyday life. With such intention in mind, one may start to appreciate the spirit behind the writing of William Law (1686-1761), a Church of England priest. In his book, A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life, Law challenges the average Christians to apply all their energy to mature in the spiritual life: “He, therefore, is the devout man, who lives no longer to his own will, or the way and spirit of the world, but to the sole will of God, who considers God in everything, who serves God in everything, who makes all the parts of his common life parts of piety, by doing everything in the name of God.”61

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60 Ibid., 59-63.

61 William Law, A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life (1729; reprint, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2009), 1.
Spiritual transformation is possible with clear vision, strong intention, and adequate means. God has been generous in supplying his people with resources, “divine power . . . and precious promises” in transforming their minds, hearts, souls, and bodies (2 Pt 1:3-4). There is then a need for the will to co-operate with that life-transforming grace from God to explore possible means for growth which is the focus of the next part.

The Spiritual Practices for Transformation

Willard rightly states, “Christ-likeness of the inner being is not a merely human attainment.”\(^{62}\) But, he adds, “well-informed human effort is indispensable.”\(^{63}\) Spiritual disciplines are undoubtedly God’s indispensable means to change human lives. During the last several decades, WSCCC has exerted significant effort in nurturing, equipping, and training its members for effective witness and service for God. Nevertheless, with evolving social, cultural, and technological influences, as well as an imbalanced emphasis on outward forms and rituals, the once effective spiritual practices that have been employed unquestionably over the years – more Bible studies, church meetings, classes, and programs – are now seen inadequate, if not entirely fruitless, in empowering the Christian men of the church.

Spiritual disciplines or practices, as understood by Willard, are “activities undertaken to make us capable of receiving more of his life and power without harm to


\(^{63}\) Ibid.
ourselves or others.” It is time to reinvent a curriculum of spiritual practices to enable Christians to receive more of Christ’s life. These practices must be anchored in the renewed theological paradigms, as derived from the previous section, for a deepened prayer life, the transformation of life through God’s word, and a shift of focus from attending church to becoming Christ-like. Several contemplative practices – such as those introduced in Chapter 2 by evangelical pastoral leaders and theologians including Peace, Stairs, Scazzero, and the like – are deemed vital in deepening and transforming people as they lead busy lives nowadays. These practices are fixed-hour prayer, contemplative prayer, lectio divina, silence and solitude, and will be discussed in greater length in this section.

Fixed-Hour Prayer

No human being can be thinking of God at all times or praying continuously without having their work or life interrupted. It is noted therefore that the people of God historically turn to recognize his presence through regular times of prayer. One of the biblical examples is the prophet Daniel, who prayed three times a day (Dn 6:10). Another paradigm is observed when the psalmist says, “Seven times a day I praise you for your righteous laws” (Ps 119:164). Those models represent the archetype of what is today called fixed-hour prayer, also known as the divine office or daily office. Phyllis Tickle, a respected author on spirituality, notes that “fixed-hour prayer is the oldest form of

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Christian spiritual discipline and has its roots in the Judaism, out of which Christianity came.”

The thirteenth-century Franciscan Bonaventure (1221-1274) writes to instruct the friars in regards to the official hours of prayer:

We give thanks to God by offering prayers and praise at specific times that commemorate his loving deeds on our behalf. Christ was born of the virgin Mary at night; in the morning, before his passion, he came before his judge. He also rose from the dead very early in the morning. He was scourged at about nine in the morning; this was also the hour at which he sent the Holy Spirit upon the apostles. Noon was the hour of the crucifixion; at three in the afternoon he died for us. In the evening, at supper, he gave us the sacrament of his body and blood.

As a result of that pattern, it is noted the fixed-hour prayer or divine office would encompass prayers at an early hour, at six, at nine in the morning, then at twelve noon, at three, at six in the afternoon, and then in the evening. As monasticism continued to spread, the practice of prayers at regular intervals began to develop. In *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life*, Law argues fervently for regular times of devotion and prayer during a normal day. He advises that any “devout Christian must at this time look upon himself as called upon by God to renew his acts of prayer, and address himself again to the throne of grace.”

The aim of such regularity of praying is perceptively highlighted by Stairs who

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67 Tickle, “About Fixed-Hour Prayer.”


69 Ibid., 191.
reasons, “Pressing the pause button on our work tests our thinking about the very nature of God. It tests our behavioral capacity to trust in the sufficiency and goodness of God.” While Stairs equates the pause with a test of one’s trust in God, which may be true, such regular practice that requires busy Christians to punctuate their work day with prayers helps re-focus their lives and vocation to God on an ongoing basis (Ps 46:10-11). This discipline is perceived to be especially important to help the Christian fathers cultivate a persistent attitude of prayerfulness in their busy daily schedule to practice God’s presence.

In response to the Apostle Paul’s exhortation to the early Church in Thessalonica to “pray continually,” New Testament scholar Scot McKnight construes Paul’s teaching in view of fixed-hour prayers. McKnight writes that “either Paul is exhorting us to be in a constant attitude of prayerfulness or (as I tend to think) we are to devote ourselves to the sacred rhythms of prayer. There is plenty of biblical support for either view, and one can appeal to Jesus’ example for both. Perhaps we should say, ‘we do not know’ and opt for both viewpoints.” As praying at fixed times has been a biblical and historical custom, the practice of regular intervals for devotion or prayer is an important one for all serious Christ followers to consider. Detailed plans to put this discipline into practice are discussed in later chapters.

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70 Stairs, Listening for the Soul, 120.

71 Scot McKnight, Praying with the Church: Following Jesus Daily, Hourly, Today (Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press, 2006), 27.
Another essential contemplative spiritual discipline is prayerful reading of God’s word. Evangelical Christians are perhaps known for their enthusiasm in coming to the Bible through thinking, reasoning, and analyzing its contents. The study of the word of God is important, as evidenced in WSCCC’s philosophy of ministry, but there is always a temptation for it to become some hard and cold knowledge that contributes to rigid legalism or literal worship of the Bible. The fact that many Christians come to the Bible through such an approach would usually result in impartial scholasticism without making a difference to their lives. Willard claims, “The Bible itself is God’s speaking preserved in written form,” thus Christians not only need to read and analyze the Bible, but they should also “nurture a listening disposition . . . to become passionate hearers of the word.”

As suggested by Peace, approaching the Bible in a transformative way is a two-part process. “Part one . . . is study – a left-brain analytic activity. Part two is conscious reflection – a right-brain creative response.” The lack of either one will lead to a stagnant spiritual life. What is needed therefore is a balanced way. The importance of introducing a right-brain responsive approach, lectio divina which is a practice of praying the Bible, cannot be underestimated. As an ancient approach to intimacy with God, lectio divina, also known as divine reading or spiritual reading, became “a regular practice in

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73 Peterson, *Working the Angles*, 87-88.

monasteries by the time of St. Benedict in the sixth century.” Lectio divina is a way of approaching the Bible as the word of God who desires to speak to his people. It helps evangelical Christians, such as those at WSCCC, move beyond cerebral religion in the era of knowledge, and it requires more right-brain activity and seeks to impart life into God’s people through their praying the Scripture and listening to God in silence.

The practice of praying the Bible in the contemplative tradition would call for a paradigm shift when it comes to the study of God’s word, which involves meditation and contemplation (Ps 1:2; 77:12; 119:15; 145:5). The meditation of Scripture is sure to complement the evangelical’s strength in study so that the word of God can go from the head to the heart. This is understood to be a particularly useful approach for enhancing Chinese men’s spiritual vitality, according to Lee. Christians brought up in the evangelical tradition, including the Christian men of WSCCC, should be introduced to this to complement the usual cognitive way of Bible reading and study. Part Three discusses in more detail the practical steps of lectio divina.

**Contemplative Prayer**

While the practice of lectio divina seeks to enable Christians to hear God through the written Scripture, one will note that the last movement of it leads to contemplating and resting in God’s presence, which is the core of contemplative prayer. Like lectio divina, contemplative prayer also has a long history. New Testament scholar Marcus Borg even suggests that “Jesus . . . likely practiced a wordless form of contemplation or

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76 Lee, 雄心萬丈度中年 (Midlife Ascent), 72.
meditation that was central to the Jewish-Christian tradition.” In Matthew 6, Jesus teaches explicitly how his disciples ought and ought not to pray: “And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites for they love . . . to be seen by men. But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your father, who is unseen” (Mt 6:5-6). The teachings have much to do with the disciples’ inner life and with clarification of intention of those who pray. Willard explains, “Without an inner life, our outer prayer will soon become superficial, ego-centered, and even counter-productive on the spiritual path.” Rohr understands that “what all of these teachings of Jesus seem to say is that we probably need ‘unsaying prayer,’ the prayer of quiet or contemplative prayer, to balance out and ground all ‘saying prayer.’”

Contemplative prayer is a kind of prayer that goes beneath the superficial and repetitive prayer requests, and, as Ekman Tam emphasizes, seeks to nurture a way of seeing the Christ who dwells inside every single one of his children. Unlike other forms of prayer, those who pray contemplatively are not to think about where to find God and they are not even to do things to make God show up, because practicing contemplative prayer tutors Christians to be aware and awake to see that God is already present. Contemplative prayer simply helps foster a lifestyle of reckoning, spotting, and relishing.

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78 Willard, Renovation of the Heart, 74.

79 Rohr, The Naked Now, 73.

80 Ekman Tam, 我的心渴慕祢: 靜觀靈修與修道精神 (My Soul Thirsts for You: Contemplative Spirituality and the Spirit of Monastic Life) (Hong Kong: Christian Contemplative Spirituality Institute, 2015), 127-135.
God’s companionship in one’s life. It aims at cultivating the reality of what Jesus said in John 14:20, “On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you.” Nouwen, in the introduction of the book, *Spiritual Direction*, portrays contemplative prayer as “the ancient discipline by which we begin to see God in our heart. Interior prayer is a careful attentiveness to the One who dwells in the center of our being.”

Skeptics are concerned that contemplative prayer would promote self-absorption with Christians being increasingly ignorant and indifferent to the needy world around them. Nouwen disagrees with that notion by saying, “Through prayer we awaken ourselves to God within us. . . It is by being awake to God in us that we can increasingly see God in the world around us.” Similarly, a Trappist monk and author on spirituality, Thomas Merton (1915-1968), believes that faithful practice of contemplative prayer empowers Christians to embrace the hurting and broken world through remembering and bringing the needy before the loving God. At the end of the day, contemplative prayer is not the only form of prayer, but this kind of wordless prayer helps foster stillness in one’s heart, realizing God’s ongoing presence and knowing God is in control. Without doubt, the fathers at WSCCC will carry on with verbal prayers, but it is hoped that by embracing contemplative prayer, their inner lives deepen and flourish. Through contemplative prayer, the verbal or saying prayers will make sense and mean what they are supposed to mean to God and to those who say the prayers.

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82 Ibid., xiv.
83 Tam, 我的心渴慕祢, 75.
Silence and Solitude

Chapter 1 outlines the modern-day demands for working professionals. As technology is getting more advanced, work commitments and other responsibilities are increasingly becoming more invasive into daily life through the use of computing and mobile devices coupled with the pervasiveness of social media. In an age such as this, time and space for busy individuals are hard to come by, whereas the spiritual disciplines of silence and solitude for Christians are becoming a luxury. To put things into perspective, the lack of silence and solitude would render Christians incapable of paying attention to the works and words of God. The spiritual discipline of solitude, which is withdrawal into privacy, is “generally the most fundamental in the beginning of the spiritual life,” claims Willard, and “it must be returned to again and again as that life develops.”84 On the other hand, the discipline of silence, which is abstention from talking, as noted by Whitney, helps “to focus your mind upon God.”85

Deep in the heart of the Apostle Paul’s teaching is for Christ followers to “set your hearts on things above . . . [and] set your minds on things above” (Col 3:1-2). As it has been true for Jesus (Mk 1:12-13; Lk 5:16; Jn 6:15) as well as Paul (Acts 9:9), silence and solitude are their major means to acquire spiritual vitality and ministry strength. It is noteworthy that silence and solitude go together, as Nouwen observes, “Silence is the


way to make solitude a reality.”86 Similarly, “the mark of solitude is silence.”87 This spiritual discipline duo provides undergirding to enable other spiritual practices to take root. Silence and solitude, which are categorized by Willard as the disciplines of abstinence,88 will make other disciplines (of engagement) more effective. For example, Thomas à Kempis (1380-1471) writes in his classic, The Imitation of Christ, “in silence and quiet the devout soul goes forward and learns the hidden things of the Scriptures.”89 In the same way, Bonhoeffer stresses wholeheartedly that “we keep silence solely for the sake of the word . . . to honor and receive it.”90 Therefore, WSCCC, with its intense evangelical leaning, ought to enable its members to appreciate what silence and solitude can offer in order for God’s word to take root and transform lives.

**Transformation through Companionship**

Not only do silence and solitude make the discipline of the word more fruitful, Whitney teaches his readers to “think of silence and solitude as complementary disciplines to fellowship.”91 With silence and solitude, fellowship goes deep and “involves talking about God and the things of God.”92 Often life transformation happens

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87 Bonhoeffer, Life Together, 78.

88 Willard, The Spirit of the Disciplines, 158.


90 Bonhoeffer, Life Together, 79.

91 Whitney, Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life, 225.

92 Ibid.
through fellowship with a God-ward dimension. This type of fellowship, also understood as spiritual friendship, is a notion profoundly embedded in the gospel. In the farewell discourse, Jesus told his disciples, “You are my friends if you do what I command . . . I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you” (Jn 15:14-15). The logic from Jesus’ words flows that all Christians are called to be his friends as they would do what he commands. The concept of spiritual friendship and companionship is further explored in the other parts of the New Testament as well (Rom 12:4-5; Gal 6:2; Phil 2:4; 1 Thes 5:14; Heb 10:24-25; 1 Jn 4:19-20).

As discussed in Chapter 1, the Christian men at WSCCC exhibit a strong longing for companionship. This section therefore discusses the pastoral theology of spiritual companionship or spiritual direction, as opposed to the broader concept of fellowship. It also follows on from Chapter 2 which suggests that spiritual formation usually takes place in a communal context of believers as they spend time together, as a spiritual discipline, to listen to one another, discern and recognize God’s presence in everyday life.

Spiritual Direction as an Art of Pastoral Care

It poses no small challenge for one to look for a literal definition or mention of spiritual direction and companionship in the Scripture. Tam notes that “spiritual direction, with its roots in monasticism, is a pastoral approach to soul care that emerged from the experience of the Christian community. It is, therefore, more a pastoral praxis than a biblical concept.”93 Although the term spiritual direction is nowhere to be found

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literally in the Bible, it is not uncommon to see many spiritual direction relationships in the Scripture, for example in the Old Testament between Moses and Joshua (Ex 17:8-16; Nm 11:27-30; 27:18-23), Eli and Samuel (1 Sm 3:1-10), Elijah and Elisha (1 Kgs 19:19-21; 2 Kgs 2:1-14), as well as in the New Testament between Jesus and disciples (Mt 4:19; Lk 6:40; Jn 8:31-32; 21:15-17), Barnabas and Paul (Acts 9:26-28; 11:24-26), and Paul and Timothy (Acts 16:1-3; Rom 16:21; 2 Tm 3:10-11). The spiritual directors in the biblical accounts helped the other persons, also known as directees, to listen, discern, and respond more fully to God. To put it simply, the primary focus of spiritual direction, according to veteran spiritual directors William Barry and William Connolly, “is concerned with helping a person directly with his or her relationship with God.”

It is worth noting Jesus has a particular approach in teaching and providing spiritual direction to his disciples. The gospel of Mark depicts Jesus’ example of spiritual guidance and discipleship in his earthly ministry where “he appointed twelve that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach and to have authority to drive out demons” (Mk 3:14-15). The “with him” life is crucial to the disciples’ radical transformation. It takes more than mere words, and is one that involves embodiment of the life-changing message in and with Jesus.

The forming of a spiritual friendship between a director and a directee is of paramount significance in the practice of spiritual direction. Spiritual direction is indeed spiritual friendship. Merton correctly points out, “The director is not to be regarded as a magical machine for solving cases . . . but a trusted friend who, in an atmosphere of

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sympathetic understanding, helps and strengthens us in our groping efforts to correspond with the grace of the Holy Spirit, who alone is the true Director in the fullest sense of the word.”  

A spiritual director, in the purest sense of the role, is simply a trusted friend. Accordingly, the ministry of spiritual direction seems fitting to address the yearning of the Christian fathers who desire to experience God in the context of like-minded companions. Spiritual direction, for the purpose of this project, further seeks to strengthen the men as they learn and practice the different spiritual disciplines already proposed in this project.

Critics may be concerned that the spiritual direction relationship might become abusive or domineering, thereby leading to deformed rather than transformed spirituality. Kenneth Leech, in the introduction of his book, Soul Friend, clearly states that spiritual direction is “one ministry among others.” It should also be noted that “directors play an important but quite a lowly and limited function within the wider context of pastoral care and theological formation.” As such, the means of spiritual direction, due to its complementary nature, does not necessarily lead to more Bible study classes, seminars, and workshops on theological issues as anticipated in the evangelical circle. Rather it could be a type of presence or accompaniment of a more experienced, wise, and accepting companion who walks alongside another in his or her life journey. Experienced pastor and missionary Tony Horsfall, who has worked to integrate contemplative

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95 Merton, Spiritual Direction, 5.


97 Ibid.
spirituality into the evangelical context, writes truthfully about the need of spiritual companionship: “There are times when understanding silence and accepting presence are far better responses than condemning voices, empty words and meaningless clichés.”

Group Direction as a Communal Journey to Transformation

Group dynamics are powerful means to spiritual formation. Acts 13:1-3 has a record of the Antioch church leaders gathering to worship, fast, pray, and discern the will of God. When a Christian group gathers to listen to God and seek to discern his will, it is perhaps one of the best gifts God has bestowed. Bonhoeffer writes, “Because God has already laid the only foundation of our fellowship, because God has bound us together in one body with other Christians . . . we enter into that common life . . . as thankful recipients.” Group spiritual direction makes the most of the offering of an accepting and supportive spiritual direction relationship. When combining spiritual direction with group dynamics, group spiritual direction morphs into a communal journey poised for spiritual transformation of its members (Heb 10:24-25).

Small groups (also known as life groups or cell groups) are often said to be mini-churches that exist within a more established church community. In my immediate ministry context, the Cantonese congregation of WSCCC, there are over twenty small groups that meet regularly for studying the Bible, sharing one another’s burdens, praying and supporting each other, and last but not least, partaking in a meal or light refreshment that concludes each gathering. Some of the groups would emphasize Bible study more,

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whereas others are skewed more towards providing pastoral care and fellowship. Small group ministry seems to be the very fabric of Christianity as it provides a platform for sharing, instruction, connection, and support. For that reason, Benner remarks that “the potential of small groups as a vehicle for spiritual accompaniment is enormous.”\textsuperscript{100} By effectively tapping into this existing structure of the organized church, the potential members of the spiritual direction group will find a certain familiarity and yet experience something deeper as they grow and mature spiritually. This will become a platform to share struggles and lessons as they practice the various spiritual disciplines suggested in the previous section.

Where there is no single way to operate spiritual direction groups, groups of this nature share several key features. First, questions raised and welcomed are much more significant than questions that are quickly met with firm answers. It is Jesus’ ministry approach to ask more questions than to answer (Mt 9:28; 22:42; Lk 6:46; Jn 21:17). Benner writes, “The spiritual journey inevitably confronts all of us with questions that need to be expressed and lived, not simply answered.”\textsuperscript{101} By being open to those who ask the questions, the spiritual direction group encourages the spiritual quest of individuals longing to explore and remain open to God.

Second, a spiritual accompaniment or direction group exists to facilitate prayerful listening to God (Jas 1:19). The prayerful listening or attentiveness to God is served well in an atmosphere of silence and stillness. It is advisable to begin each group meeting with

\textsuperscript{100} Benner, \textit{Sacred Companions}, 166.

\textsuperscript{101} Ibid., 167.
a lectio divina for it “orients participants to God and his word and establishes a culture that honours silence and attentiveness.” Listening well to one another is also of great importance. In *An Open Place*, spiritual directors Marlene Kropf and Daniel Schrock emphasize the importance of listening in any spiritual group which includes listening to the group, listening for desires, and listening for spiritual movements and patterns.

Third, the priority of a spiritual direction group should be on the sharing of spiritual experience. This is not to say that sharing of daily life experience is prohibited in group direction. Instead, the experiences of normal life usually have a spiritual dimension. Jesus is the master spiritual director who can draw out spiritual wisdom from everyday life (Mt 6:26-34; Lk 15:1-10). The aim of the spiritual direction group is to facilitate and assist its members to discern where God might have been in the recent past and “through the contemplative style . . . heightening prayerful attentiveness to God and each other.”

Lastly, love is the overarching motive and guiding principle for running a spiritual direction group (1 Cor 13:13). Seminary professor Simon Lee observes that, as opposed to the early Church example, such love and intimacy has often been missing in the institutionalized Church. A spiritual direction group ideally gives as much support and

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102 Ibid., 171.


acceptance as possible. Although advice and reproof might be needed at times, according to Benner, they are not generally offered in the group, and certainly not lightly.106

**Summary: Spiritual Transformation through Contemplative Spirituality**

This chapter has discussed that spiritual transformation is attainable by remaining in Jesus as the source of life through his word and unceasing prayer as taught by Paul the Apostle and modeled by Brother Lawrence. For God to transform lives, evangelical Christians need to go deep to renew and reform several overarching paradigms: from merely saying prayers to communicating to God from the heart; from gathering biblical information to transformation of one’s inner being; and from attending church to becoming Christ-like. This overhauled framework then calls for an introduction to contemplative spirituality with several of its essential practices, including fixed-hour prayer, *lectio divina*, contemplative prayer, silence, and solitude. The ministry of spiritual direction is pivotal in further sensitizing God’s people to his ongoing presence. By and large, this chapter has laid the foundation for Part Three, which is the plan and implementation of a pilot project to empower the Christian fathers at WSCCC to experience spiritual transformation.

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PART THREE

PLAN AND PRACTICE
CHAPTER 4
MINISTRY PLAN

After the theological reflection in preceding sections, this chapter outlines a concrete plan that enables Christian men at WSCCC to experience God’s presence in daily life. The chapter also articulates the goals and plans to help these men to engage in the spiritual disciplines. The ministry plan focuses on forming the spiritual direction group, which serves as a platform for peer mentoring and mutual support among its members. Lastly, to ensure effective implementation of the strategy, the chapter discusses the Cantonese pastor’s role as the resource provider, facilitator, and spiritual director of the group of young fathers.

Theological Implications of Contemplative Spirituality

Examining the community and ministry context in Part One reveals WSCCC’s evangelical leanings as a non-denominational church. A closer look at its theological heritage further reveals the church’s emphasis on producing Bible-believing, faithful, and selfless Christians for the gospel’s ministry. With WSCCC entering into a time of cultural and generational transition, the plan to introduce contemplative spiritual disciplines to the busy Christian men is proposed. The contemplative stream is deeply rooted in Scripture
with exemplars such as the psalmist longing and thirsting for God (Ps 42:1-2), Mary, the mother of Jesus, treasuring up and pondering the divine plan (Lk 2:19), and Mary of Bethany resolving to sit at Jesus’ feet (Lk 10:39, 42). The contemplative life – “to gaze on the beauty of the Lord” (Ps 27:4) – results in “the transformation of the entire personality into the likeness of Christ,” Foster writes, “more and more and more we take on his habits, feelings, hopes, faith, and love.”

The following sums up several theological implications developed from Part Two.

The first theological implication of contemplative spirituality is transformation by experiencing the presence of God. As Chapter 3 discussed, the biblical mandate is for Christians to remain in Jesus constantly. The “with him” life enables all his followers to lead a lively, vibrant, and fruitful life for the glory of God (Mt 15:1-8; Mk 3:14-15; Gal 5:22-23). The Apostle Paul has exhorted the early Christians to pray continually and give thanks in all circumstances (Rom 12:12; Col 4:2; 1 Thes 5:16-18). The historical paradigm of Brother Lawrence illustrates that God is not confined within the walls of the church, but his presence can be experienced everywhere. For the Christian fathers at WSCCC, God appears not only on the weekends when they gather for service, but his presence can be noted in the ordinary and even the most lowly of place. This calls for a radical shift of theological understanding that God is involved in one’s everyday life and that these men can communicate with and practice the presence of God both inside and outside of the church.

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1 Foster, *Streams of Living Water*, 51.
The second theological implication is the importance of embracing the theology of living from the inside out. In *The Divine Conspiracy*, Willard observes rightly the human tendency to embrace dogma and legalism, for they are predictable rules for life.\(^2\) Certainly, as Willard writes, “Jesus’ message must come to us free of the deadening legalisms.”\(^3\) Established forms and rituals such as prayer meeting, Bible study class, and church attendance should no longer be the acceptable outward behaviors against which church leaders measure that of a faithful and maturing Christian. WSCCC spiritual leaders ought to realize that spiritual and life transformation must come from the inside where the Spirit of Jesus Christ dwells (Jn 14:20). The life source of Jesus must pulsate within his people in order for them to desire God’s communion through prayer, studying and meditating God’s word for transformation, and experiencing him in community inside and outside of the church building. While regular church activities and regular devotional habits are some of the vehicles for growth, it is important to nurture in the Christian fathers a mindset that everyday life is also an avenue to meet the divine.

The third theological implication of contemplative spirituality relates to cultivating spiritual transformation through contemplative disciplines. Just as athletes require a regimen of exercises to keep them physically capable to meet the demands of the field, Christians need an array of spiritual exercises to make them attuned to God’s presence. Spiritual disciplines with a contemplative flavor are not new. In fact, regular times of prayer (fixed-hour prayer), meditating on God’s word prayerfully (*lectio divina*),


\(^3\) Ibid., 69.
contemplating and marveling at God’s goodness (contemplative prayer), and refraining from speaking and interaction with people (silence and solitude) are age-old biblical and early ecclesiastical customs. For evangelical churches such as WSCCC, these may not need to be introduced as new practices but must be rediscovered properly and applied contextually.

The fourth theological implication is the journey towards transformation through spiritual direction. Although spiritual direction is not a scriptural injunction, it has its roots in the early Church practice, particularly monasticism. It is worth noting that the Scripture does provide some basis for dialogical and theological reflection which would enrich one’s understanding of spiritual direction.⁴ Spiritual direction is helpful in bridging the gap left in the usual discipleship means which mainly emphasize Scripture teaching and the transfer of biblical knowledge. Stairs explains that a spiritual director is a trusted friend “attuned to listen on the wavelength of the spiritual longings” of others and “to assist in the process of recognizing holiness.”⁵ Group spiritual direction addresses the need for a sense of shared journey with others since spiritual direction and “mentoring in the context of a group, as demonstrated by Jesus and Paul, [are] most effective because it meets the inherent relational needs of the disciple.”⁶ WSCCC’s strong emphasis on small group ministry does provide a platform for spiritual direction groups to eventuate.

Strategy Goals

Chapter 1 outlines the contextual challenges facing Christian men living in Sydney, Australia. The extended work hours, traffic problems, parenting tasks, internet culture, together with the church’s expectations of them as future leaders have deprived them of valuable time and space for personal and spiritual growth. For the ministry initiative to make an impact on their spiritual lives, the goals of the ministry plan need to be achievable and made sensitive to the men’s circumstances without creating an extra burden. In addition, the goals should encompass the cognitive, affective, and behavioral areas in order to be effective.

Central to the practice of spiritual disciplines is learning what the contemplative spiritual disciplines are and how they are exercised. To address this first cognitive goal, the Cantonese pastor will provide teaching through different means to enable the target audience to understand the nature of spiritual disciplines. First, a sermon series on spiritual disciplines will be preached during the weekend services; in this setting, the entire congregation, including the young fathers, will learn about the spiritual disciplines. In a twelve-week series, the Cantonese pastor will present an overview of the most common spiritual disciplines that can be seen in Foster’s *Celebration of Discipline* and Willard’s *Spirit of the Disciplines*.\(^7\) Second, as preaching is more monologic in nature, there is a need to involve the men in another setting for them to ask questions and process the information presented. Other teaching sessions will be provided in the first of two retreats for men, where the Cantonese pastor will focus more on the contemplative

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disciplines as introduced in Chapter 3 of the project, namely, fixed-hour prayer, *lectio divina*, contemplative prayer, and silence and solitude. Third, reading materials on those disciplines will be provided to the participants to further familiarize them with the spiritual practices.

The second goal is for young fathers at WSCCC to experience and embrace different spiritual disciplines. The purpose of this goal is twofold: behavioral and affective. Head knowledge does not necessarily lead to life transformation until there is also behavioral and attitudinal change. After providing teaching about various spiritual disciplines through preaching during weekend services and teaching in a retreat setting, the Cantonese pastor will encourage the retreat participants to taste and experience the contemplative disciplines. Ample guidelines and encouragement will be given alongside with actual time for practice and reflection, followed by question-and-answer sessions during the retreat. Moreover, during each subsequent spiritual direction group meetings, time will be given for practicing the disciplines, such as *lectio divina*, silence, and contemplative prayer. This will ideally develop an appreciation of the spiritual disciplines among the men.

The third goal is for Christian men at WSCCC to appreciate the dynamics of group spiritual direction. This project has established that there is a robust relational need among the Christian men at WSCCC. To address their longing for companionship, it is the goal of this pilot project to help them appreciate the group dynamics in group spiritual direction. Unlike a Bible study group or a typical men-only gathering, spiritual direction or accompaniment groups exist to foster a time of prayerful listening – both to God as well as to one another. The sharing of spiritual experience is essential and can only be
effective in an atmosphere of mutual support and acceptance. Guidelines will be provided and reinforced in relation to “what to do” and “what not to do” during the spiritual direction group.

The fourth goal is that through regular, personal, one-on-one meetings between the spiritual director and directees, the participants will be encouraged to continue practicing the spiritual disciplines in daily life. This is not intended to be an accountability check, but rather, through spiritual direction, the men will be guided to notice the working of God’s spirit as they practice (or fail to practice) the recommended disciplines. Failing to faithfully practice the disciplines does not warrant a warning or reprimand. Instead, support, encouragement, and discernment of the divine, together with a spiritual director, are pivotal to their growth and/or desire for growth. The group dynamics in the spiritual direction group also provide impetus for consistent practice.

**Ministry Content**

Willard urges passionately, “The greatest need you and I have, the greatest need of humanity in general, is renovation of our heart. That spiritual place within us from which outlook, choices and actions come has been formed by a world denying God. It must be transformed.” With the goals of this project clearly laid out in the previous paragraphs, this section provides a detailed strategy to address how the various disciplines are practiced. The aim is to facilitate the “renovation of heart” to create space for God’s transforming work in his people’s lives.

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Fixed-Hour Prayer

Scazzerro notes that “setting apart small units of time for morning, midday, and evening prayer infuses into the rest of my day’s activities a deep sense of the sacred, of God.”\(^9\) This is the purpose of fixed-hour prayer. While the biblical paradigms vary as to how often one should pray during a day, the Cantonese fathers at WSCCC will be encouraged to start small and make it achievable. Two or three times a day will be a good starting point. As confidence develops, they can then engage in this discipline as frequently as they can practically fit it in their usual daily schedule.

In regards to the actual activities during the fixed-hour prayer, Law explains that one cannot prescribe the use of any particular forms of worship or prayer in devotion because the essence of private devotion “should be under the direction of some form, but not so tied down to it, but that it may be free to take such new expressions, as its present fervors happen to furnish it with.”\(^10\) Participants will be exhorted to start to build into their daily schedules three timeslots for that purpose. During those regular intervals, they aim for something memorable and achievable, for example, thirty seconds or one minute of silence, or reciting in their hearts a Bible verse or phrase that they might have read earlier on that day. They can also spend a short while worshipping in song, using a breviary, *lectio divina*, or an arrow prayer that cultivates the disposition of being continually attentive to God. The idea is to use anything deemed suitable and practical until that helps form a new habit.

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\(^10\) Law, *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life*, 160.
This discipline will be introduced briefly during a twelve-week preaching series and more specifically to the men through a teaching session at the first retreat. Everyone is unique and if one requires something more concrete to follow, there are virtually limitless tools. Phyllis Tickle’s *Divine Hours* series provide excellent materials throughout the entire year, but a more concise version, *Divine Hours: Pocket Edition*, is recommended for the Christian fathers at WSCCC. Scazzer’s materials on fixed-hour prayer in his *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality* are also practical. The book has four easy-to-follow steps: silence and centering, opening prayer, Bible reading, and concluding silent prayer.

*Lectio Divina*

As discussed in Chapter 3, *lectio divina* is a way of approaching the Bible as God’s word. It is intended that the participants be introduced to and guided as they learn to practice this discipline in the two retreats and several spiritual direction group meetings. The Cantonese pastor will make use of a book called 神同在常同在 (*The Practice of Walking with God*) written by Wai-Man Yuen, a Chinese scholar in spirituality and president of Hong Kong’s Lectio Cultura Institute. Yuen’s book provides step-by-step guide to those who practice *lectio divina*. They are then encouraged to continue such practice as part of their daily devotion or daily office. God desires to speak to those who are ready to listen.

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There are four steps, or movements, as Ruth Barton calls them, in the whole *lectio divina* exercise.\(^\text{14}\) While it makes sense for the novices to realize the basic steps when they start out, for them to entirely enjoy the whole process of conversing and spending time with God, it should not matter whether the steps are followed in an orderly way. It is most important to experience the practice in moves rather than rigid steps.

The first movement is *lectio*\(^\text{15}\) – participants read a short chosen Scripture passage slowly and aloud if possible. They should allow themselves to silently be drawn to a certain word or phrase without analyzing, and consider it God’s invitation to hear his voice through that. This is not a time for Bible study to increase head knowledge. The second movement is *meditatio*\(^\text{16}\) – participants should read the same passage slowly a second time. This time they should reflect, pose questions, and explore thoughts about the word or phrase that is intriguing. They should ask further how that may connect with their lives on the whole. The third movement is *oratio*\(^\text{17}\) – participants should read the passage again and respond to God based on the thoughts, reflections, and ideas derived. They should pray in whatever and however way they feel led – praising, giving thanks, interceding, or simply resting in God’s presence. The fourth and final movement is


\(^{15}\) This outline of the process of *lectio divina* is paraphrased from Willard’s *Hearing God*, 48-51; Peace’s *Noticing God*, 99; and Barton’s “Lectio Divina.”

\(^{16}\) Ibid.

\(^{17}\) Ibid.
contemplatio\textsuperscript{18} – participants should rest and sit in companionship with God. This is an excellent opportunity to cease doing things for God and to simply enjoy being with him.

**Contemplative Prayer**

The purpose of contemplative prayer is to nurture a lifestyle of gazing upon God and being aware of his presence throughout the entire day (Ps 27:4). It seeks to deepen all verbal and mental prayers, which evangelical Christians are so used to in their spiritual endeavors. The Christian men at WSCCC will be introduced to the reading materials by Thomas Keating of Contemplative Outreach and Ruth Chang of Central Taiwan Theological Seminary.\textsuperscript{19} Chang teaches that the practice of contemplative prayer would follow perfectly after lectio divina because of its last movement being contemplation.\textsuperscript{20} Evangelical Christians will likely find it easier and more comfortable to enter in a state of contemplative prayer followed by reading and meditating on God’s word.

This discipline will be covered as part of the twelve-week preaching series on spiritual disciplines and then described in greater detail in the first retreat. The practice of contemplative prayer will be reinforced in several spiritual direction group meetings and the two group retreats. One contemporary method of contemplative prayer is centering prayer advocated by Keating, who is a Trappist monk and one of the principal teachers on Christian contemplative prayer. The steps for practicing contemplative prayer are

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{20} Ruth Chang, “歸心祈禱,”
outlined as follows. First, participants choose a sacred word or phrase – for example, “grace,” “Jesus,” “the presence of God” – as the expression of one’s intent to consent to the presence and action of God. Second, participants should be in a comfortable position with closed eyes to settle briefly. After a while, they ought to “silently introduce the sacred word as the symbol of consent to God’s presence and action.” If, during the prayer, participants are engaged with thoughts, feelings, and reflections, they should return gently to the sacred word as a reminder of God’s presence. Lastly, at the end of the prayer period, they ought to remain in silence for another while, and one may opt to close it with reading a concise Scripture passage.

Silence and Solitude

In this pilot project, the disciplines of silence and solitude are paramount and considered the overarching element to the successful practice of other disciplines. Peace writes that most of Christians’ experiences of listening to God point to the fact that “God tends to show up if we listen long enough in the silence.” To cultivate an appreciation for silence and solitude, there will be two three-day silent retreats, one at the start and another one at the end of the proposed ministry initiative. Teaching of the disciplines will be provided through the preaching series and during the first retreat. Participants will be encouraged as well to read the relevant chapter in Foster’s *Celebration of Discipline*.

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21 Keating, “The Method of Centering Prayer.”

22 Ibid.


and Tam’s 我的心渴慕祢 (My Soul Thirsts for You). The importance of silence and solitude will be emphasized through experiential learning in retreats and subsequent spiritual direction group meetings.

Retreat leader and spiritual director Jan Johnson highlights the fact that certain spiritual disciplines are more appealing to introverts, while others are attractive to extroverts. Although silence and solitude may be more comfortable for introverts, extroverts certainly benefit from them as well. Awareness and sensitivity to participants’ personalities is therefore needed when structuring the retreats. Various means for enhancing the participants’ awareness of God during the silent retreat will be employed. These may include lectio divina, silent walk (with a labyrinth if available), individual/group spiritual direction, centering prayer, communion, and reflection/journaling.

Spiritual Direction

Spiritual direction as a discipline may appear less demanding to directees because they generally assume a less active role, and spiritual direction meetings happen less frequently as compared to the several disciplines discussed previously. It is still helpful to familiarize themselves with the need, flow, and expectation of spiritual direction. They will be encouraged to read several pages of Tam's 我的心渴慕祢 (My Soul Thirsts for You) on the essentials of spiritual direction.

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25 Tam, 我的心渴慕祢 (My Soul Thirsts for You), 142-147.

26 Jan Johnson, Spiritual Disciplines Companion: Bible Studies and Practices to Transform Your Soul (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2009), 10-11.

27 Tam, 我的心渴慕祢 (My Soul Thirsts for You), 159-161.
It is part of the ministry project to establish a spiritual direction relationship between the Cantonese pastor as director and each participant as directee. The director will ideally meet with each directee once a month at a place suitable to all, for example, near the directee’s workplace, home, or church. Each spiritual direction session lasts forty to fifty minutes. While there is no set agenda and fixed format in each meeting, figure 1 depicts a pattern which can be followed.

1. Opening prayer (or time of silence)
2. *Directee to share and talk
3. *Director to respond, clarify, or ask questions about what has been presented
   (*This will appear to be a conversation between two friends, but the directee may do the majority of the talking while the director listens attentively and responds sporadically.)
4. Closing prayer (or time of silence)

Figure 1. Optional Agenda for Individual Spiritual Direction Session

Group spiritual direction is intended to take place monthly, but it depends largely on the availability of the members in the group. In case of busy professionals who have church responsibilities and young families to look after, it could happen only every six to eight weeks. Each group meeting should last approximately two hours. Concerning the format of the group, historically, group spiritual direction has assumed various shapes and forms, and there is no fixed or best format as to how such a group should run. Nevertheless, reflections from the Cantonese pastor’s experiential learning and some resources would suggest a format which makes sense to the evangelical community in figure 2.

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28 Kropf and Schrock, *An Open Place*; Benner, *Sacred Companions*. 
1. Opening prayer (or time of silence)
2. *Lectio divina* session
3. Time of prayerful silence
4. *One person to share and talk for up to fifteen minutes
5. *Time of prayerful silence
6. *Group members respond, clarify, or ask questions about what has been presented
7. *Time of prayerful silence
8. *The original presenter will talk and wrap up thoughts one last time after reflection
(*This cycle repeats for the second and/or third person to share if time allows)
9. Closing blessing

Figure 2. Optional Agenda for Group Spiritual Direction Session

**Target Population and Leadership**

This section identifies the leader and potential participants in this ministry project. The Cantonese congregation pastor of WSCCC will lead the project and provide teaching, resources, facilitation and spiritual direction to the participants. The potential participants will be the Christian fathers in their mid-thirties to early forties who regularly attend the Cantonese congregation and consider WSCCC to be their home church. The participants need to be married with at least one child and currently working full time (80 percent or more).

At the moment, there are about twelve men who fit into this category. Invitations will be given informally through usual meetings in the church. They will learn about the purpose, scope, and requirements of the project and be asked to prayerfully consider participating. The pilot project will be launched with at least six men agreeing to participate in it.

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If this ministry initiative is proven effective and empowering, there is a great chance to introduce this to the Mandarin-speaking and English-speaking congregations within WSCCC. It is observed that the Christian fathers in their midst share very similar, if not the same, contextual and spiritual challenges. It is hoped that they too will be empowered to experience God’s ongoing presence in everyday life.
CHAPTER 5
IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS AND EVALUATION

This chapter presents the implementation plan to enable the Christian fathers at WSCCC to experience spiritual transformation through their practice of contemplative disciplines and their receiving spiritual direction on an ongoing basis. It provides an overview and outline of the project, which is expected to run for approximately one year. This section also describes the resources and development tools required for both the Cantonese pastor as the primary developer and the participating Chinese fathers of the project. Finally, the chapter concludes with the plan for assessment and evaluation.

Pilot Project Summary and Timeline

As a way to embody Jesus’ teaching to abide in him (Jn 15:1-11), the pilot project envisions a biblically sound and pastorally practical approach that empowers busy Christian fathers to be sensitized to God’s presence in their daily lives. The ministry initiative employs several age-old spiritual disciplines from the contemplative tradition. These include fixed-hour prayer, contemplative prayer, lectio divina, as well as silence and solitude. In the context of practicing these spiritual exercises, the Christian men will receive spiritual direction regularly in a group and on an individual basis.
With the pilot project summarized as above, this section focuses on identifying the major activities and events that should take place to make the project successful. Due to unforeseen reasons, the project’s implementation needs to be delayed. Theological research and leadership development, however, have been underway. Plans for providing teaching and resourcing the participants, as well as launching the actual project, have also been put in place.

The theological research and training was completed in the second quarter of 2017. Intentional theological inquiry into the area of spiritual formation began as early as 2009 when the Cantonese pastor took, as part of his master’s degree, a course in Christian spirituality with the Australian College of Theology. The research has proceeded with the commencement of the doctoral studies with Fuller Seminary. Associated research was then carried out with courses in spirituality and ministry in 2014, spiritual mentoring in 2015 and spiritual direction in 2016. Apart from that, the Cantonese pastor has been enrolled, since early 2016, in a three-year graduate diploma in spiritual direction with the Christian Contemplative Spirituality Institute in Hong Kong. The entire theological research phase was completed in June 2017.

The teaching plan and resources will be developed during the third quarter of 2017. Resources will be developed while the preaching plan for spiritual disciplines is formulated. The Cantonese pastor will spend several months delivering a series of sermons on the general spiritual disciplines. At the same time, the preparation for reading materials and specific teaching on the four contemplative disciplines that will be used in retreats and group meetings will be completed by September 2017.
At the start of the fourth quarter, the Cantonese pastor will start approaching the Christian fathers about the intention of the pilot project and seek their participation in it. They will be given several weeks to prayerfully discern and then decide if they would like to participate in the research. Those who have agreed to participate in the ministry project will be invited to the first retreat to be scheduled in November 2017. The timing is designed to avoid Christmas because that is usually the busiest time of the year.

It is expected that shortly after the retreat at the end of 2017, the participants will start practicing the spiritual disciplines at their own pace. Individual spiritual direction will also commence by that time. In order not to overburden the busy fathers, the spiritual direction group is intended to start its first meeting in March 2018. It will be a bi-monthly gathering which meets for a duration of six months.

It takes time to form new habits and this applies to the practice of new spiritual disciplines as well. Therefore the pilot project is designed with this in mind. Participants have about nine months to learn and practice the disciplines in the context of individual and group spiritual direction. By September 2018, the last gathering in the form of a retreat will mark the completion of this group learning journey. This is where all participants will reflect and provide feedback and evaluation. It is is hoped that it will furnish insight as to the way forward.

**Leadership Development**

Fruitful ministry implementation rests with effective and competent ministry leaders. While God is the ultimate provider of all resources for godly living (2 Pt 1:3-4), the Cantonese pastor as project leader needs to tap into those invaluable resources to
ensure that the ministry is carried out faithfully for the best outcome. This section
describes his role as the project developer and spiritual director, and articulates the
ongoing training required. It also discusses the identification and development of future
leaders and possible multiplication of the project’s ministries.

Primary Developer, Facilitator, and Spiritual Director

The Cantonese pastor of WSCCC is called to provide pastoral care and spiritual
nurture to the congregants under his care. He has had a growing conviction that the
Christian men in the congregation require extra grace and assistance in order to thrive
spiritually in all the roles they assume, including that of a husband, father, worker, Christ
follower, and fellow Australian citizen. After many years of personal struggle, reflection,
and ministry, it is the Cantonese pastor’s passion to develop a workable plan to enable
them to experience fullness in Christ (Col 2:10) and excel in life. In the formative stage
of the project, it is imperative that the Cantonese pastor lead and steer the direction of the
ministry initiative. The plan requires him to strategize and usher in new ways for the
Christian men brought up in evangelical spirituality to appreciate the offerings of the
contemplative tradition.

The Cantonese pastor has come to appreciate the ministry of spiritual direction,
which was introduced by the senior pastor of his previous church. After exposure to
various writers on the topic, it is clear that serving as a spiritual director is a sacred call to
walk and accompany others on the journey. According to Barry and Connolly, spiritual
direction is “given by one believer to another [and] enables the latter to pay attention to
God’s personal communication to him or her, to respond to this personally
communicating God, to grow in intimacy with this God, and to live out the consequences of the relationship.”¹ The Cantonese pastor wholeheartedly wants to respond and embrace this call. As the spiritual director of the pilot ministry, he intends to regularly meet with the men individually and in a spiritual companionship group.

Training and Ongoing Development

This ministry initiative has been many years in the making, as noted in this project’s introduction. More directly it is a culmination of the Cantonese pastor’s study and research in the areas of spiritual formation, spirituality and ministry, spiritual mentoring, as well as spiritual direction in the last several years. All these studies have laid solid ground for renewed understanding of spiritual growth in the midst of modern-day challenges.

While the courses with Fuller Seminary provided more in-depth theological enquiry, the Cantonese pastor is also being equipped through the graduate diploma in Hong Kong in a more culturally relevant way with much required practical skills in spiritual direction. As such, it is envisaged that the giving of spiritual direction to the participants will coincide with his practicum in the graduate diploma. As it turns out, due to the deteriorating health and subsequent death of the main instructor of the Hong Kong program, the practicum component of the graduate diploma will not start until September 2017. This unfortunately pushes back the schedule of the pilot project to a certain extent, as can be seen in the timeline.

¹ Barry and Connolly, *Spiritual Direction*, 5.
Identification and Training of Future Leaders

The identification and training of potential leaders is certainly in view as multiplication of ministry is embedded in the mandate of the Great Commission and hence evangelical discipleship (Mt 28:19-20; 2 Tm 2:2). However at this stage, there is no concrete plan in terms of identifying and intentionally training up potential leaders as this is beyond the scope of this current project. The reason is simple. The most important task at present is to ensure that contemplative spirituality is accepted by rather conservative evangelical churches such as WSCCC. After this pilot project finishes and if it is proven to be effective, the subsequent goal will be training and equipping people to lead other groups for spiritual formation.

Resources for the Pilot Project

Several resources are pivotal to the pilot project. One of those includes the reading materials for the participants. There are many readily available guides and practical instructions on spiritual disciplines and spiritual direction. Chapter 4 discusses many recommended readings, including those by Phyllis Tickle, Peter Scazzero, Ekman Tam, Wai-Man Yuen, Ruth Chang, Thomas Keating, and Richard Foster. Participants will need to acquire the recommended books on their own. For those materials where only a small portion of the book is required, photocopies or scanned softcopies will be made available for reading and circulation among the participants.

Another key resource is the group meeting space. There will be two three-day retreats. The retreats are likely to be held in a retreat center during the weekend to minimize disruption to the participants’ work week. The total cost for each retreat is
considered affordable to the Christian men at around $400-500 for an all-inclusive stay. For those who have need for financial aid, the church’s board will be asked to provide funds for this purpose. Advance reservations need to be made as some of the retreat centers are in high demand.

Off-site human resources are also required for the retreats to run smoothly. All of the fathers have small children aged between one and six. With their wives working full time or part time, child-minding needs to be organized well for the participating fathers to feel relaxed and worry-free at the retreats. During the two retreats, play groups will be organized during the day time. This will provide an opportunity for the children to gather together for some fun time while the mothers take turns providing supervision; this would afford them time for errands or rest as needed.

As part of the ministry project, spiritual direction groups are likely to be held regularly. It is intended that the groups will meet at the church location for the sake of stability and continuity, and because WSCCC is in close proximity to the participants. Room bookings need to be made three months in advance as WSCCC is a popular venue among the wider Chinese Christian community. There will be no cost involved because it is used for and by its church members.

The last physical resource is the handouts. These include retreat schedules, spiritual direction agreement forms, and evaluation surveys, all of which need to be prepared beforehand. Both hard copies and soft copies will be made available for this technology-savvy generation.
Assessment and Evaluation

Evaluation is of paramount importance as it measures the effectiveness of the ministry initiative. Several considerations need to be taken into account when it comes to the assessment of a study project of a spiritual nature. It is hardly possible, if not entirely impossible, to quantify actions and behaviors because outward behavioral modification does not necessarily equate to spiritual growth. The design of the assessment thus leans towards a qualitative rather than a quantitative approach.

It should also be noted that field testing the pilot project will not start until after the completion of the writing. Therefore, this section depicts an appraisal plan but does not take qualitative data into account. For this project, evaluation will be in the form of questionnaires, observation, and interviews. The information gathered will then be assessed with the research goals outlined in Chapter 4.

Questionnaires

There will be two evaluation forms. The goal of the first questionnaire is to solicit comments and gauge effectiveness of the recommended spiritual disciplines for the spiritual growth of participants (see Appendix A). The goal of the second questionnaire is to gather feedback and evoke reflection on the ministry of spiritual direction (see Appendix B). These anonymous questionnaires will be distributed at the end of the ministry initiative and will be identifiable only by the principal researcher, who is the project leader.

Both Appendices A and B contain seven questions which evaluate the participants’ responses through a similar perspective. Question 1 to 3 of both forms
examine the participants’ overall experience in practicing different spiritual disciplines and in receiving spiritual direction, their reflection on the whole process, and whether they believe the ministry initiative has met their expectations. Question 4 points out each of the spiritual disciplines and asks open-ended questions so that the participants share how they are empowered to experience God’s presence. Question 5 invites respondents to ascertain areas of improvement for the ministry initiative. Question 6 identifies the motives of the participants in pursuing spiritual growth. Question 7 provides space for additional comments the participants may have.

Direct Observation

Observation is a tool often used for assessment in congregational studies. According to congregational study expert Scott Thumma, direct observation is “the first and perhaps the most potent method available to a congregational study team. . . . It is the conscious perceiving, recording, reflecting on, and analyzing all that happens at a congregational event.”

Observation will furnish another perspective in evaluating if the objectives of the research project have been met. Following each spiritual direction meeting, the spiritual director will take notes on a form created for this purpose (see Appendix C). This serves the purpose of stimulating analysis and reflection of the ministry provided. These notes will compose the body of observation data.

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Interviews

Written feedback is undoubtedly a good starting point to gain understanding into how well the participants understand and integrate what they have learned. Deeper thoughts and sentiments are, however, usually missed in this type of evaluation. Interviews are therefore useful in providing an avenue for further discussion by giving the participants an opportunity to share views and insights, which may otherwise be missed if their only voice is the feedback form.

There is another advantage as well. Interviewing the research participants, according to Thumma, is “one of the best ways to correct for the inadequacies of observation.” Interviewing will be scheduled individually to maximize the opportunity for open and honest responses. Supplementary comments obtained during the interviews can then be integrated into the overall report.

Measuring Goals

Chapter 4 depicts a number of goals for this study project. The first goal is to learn about the contemplative spiritual disciplines. It is expected that the participants will be able to comprehend and articulate various spiritual disciplines. They should also be able to realize that these practices are in line with biblical teaching and therefore in agreement with the evangelical conviction. Whether they can understand and put to use the different disciplines will be evident through questionnaires and direct observation.

The second goal is for the Christian men to experience and embrace the contemplative spiritual disciplines. This goal is both behavioral and affective.

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Participants should be able to relate their experiences and demonstrate whether they appreciate the help of practicing those disciplines in the questionnaires, spiritual direction sessions, and evaluative interviews.

The third goal of this ministry project is to enable an appreciation of the group dynamics manifested in the spiritual direction group. Groups of this nature, as discussed rather extensively in Chapter 3, are unlike most other church Bible study groups. A spiritual direction group seeks to foster prayerful listening, both to God and to each other. It is envisaged that this goal will be evaluated against the comments given in questionnaires, interviews, and observation during spiritual direction sessions.

The fourth and final goal is to encourage active and consistent practice of the spiritual disciplines among the Christian fathers. A vigorous spiritual exercise regimen is critical to one’s growth, according to Paul (1 Cor 9:25-27). The ability to be aware of God’s presence in daily life rests on an intentional and consistent practice of the disciplines that help one to be attuned to God’s presence and his ongoing work. The success of this goal is gauged via feedback forms and interviews.
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The letter of Paul to the Ephesians is a pertinent reminder for all Christ followers: “for we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do” (Eph 2:10). The ministry initiative laid out in this project seeks to be a proactive response to that. To be more specific, this project attempts to provide a feasible strategy for the Australian Chinese Christian men in the postmodern era so that they fully comprehend that they are God’s handiwork prepared to be impacting the world for Christ.

This project began by relating an episode about a married Christian man named Joshua who had been struggling to thrive spiritually. With the evolving societal, cultural, economic, and spiritual landscape in Sydney, Australia, Chinese churches have been under immense pressure to conform to these external forces while striving to infuse spiritual vitality to those who would call it home. In particular, WSCCC is faced with an imminent threat of a spiritual nature.

While many early middle-aged Chinese Christian men are still physically attached to WSCCC for different reasons, there is seemingly a spiritual exodus from the church. They cannot find spiritual empowerment in most of the church’s usual gatherings and activities, nor can they be strengthened to live their daily lives knowing God is present. The aim of this research is to enable these Christian fathers to experience spiritual transformation through practicing several contemplative spiritual disciplines that are instrumental in cultivating a consistent awareness of God’s presence and action.
A review of literature in the areas of spiritual formation and direction has helped to shed some insight for a way forward. Willard affirms that the Great Commission of Jesus is not about making converts but forming people into disciples of Jesus. To be spiritually transformed, people need to be with Jesus, learn his way of life, and strive to become like him (Mk 3:14-15; Rom 8:29). Rohr believes that spiritual formation is learning, like Jesus, to gaze at the sacredness of life without dualities, live with paradox, and embrace the mystery about the divine and everyday challenges. Writers including Stairs, Peace, and Sczazzer suggest practical ways to notice God in everyday life through *lectio divina*, the daily office, and contemplative prayer. According to Anderson, Reese, Tam and Nouwen, spiritual direction as an art of pastoral care involves a triadic relationship between God, a spiritual director, and a directee. Ideally, spiritual or pastoral leaders provide guidance to the directees to enable them to live in a world full of distractions and options.

It is the aim of this project to articulate a contemplative spirituality that is considered biblically sound, theologically solid, and ecclesiastically practical by evangelicals. The main theme of the project rests on biblical and theological grounds. Jesus has extended an invitation for all to remain in him in order to bear fruit for the glory of God (Jn 15:1-11). On one hand, being connected with God should be effortless because he has provided all heavenly resources for one to do so (Jn 15:2-3; 2 Pt 1:3-4; Jas 1:17). But on the other hand, this means a regular discipline of Bible reading and prayer, as the distinctive of evangelical conviction, to cultivate a lifestyle of constant abiding in Christ.

The Apostle Paul has understood such constant abiding by means of unceasing prayer (1 Thes 5:17). Since prayer is anchored in the connection between God and his
people, Paul teaches faithfulness in prayer (Rom 12:12) to inspire the establishment of a daily rhythm of prayer. Seventeenth century writer Brother Lawrence applied this in his daily routine by thinking of God whenever he could to rest in his divine presence. This has paved way for a theological paradigm of everyday spirituality for busy Christians.

The Christian fathers at WSCCC are encouraged to take part in the pilot project where they are guided, equipped, and resourced to practice various spiritual disciplines that sensitize them to God’s presence. First, fixed-hour prayer or daily office helps refocus people’s lives on God on a regular basis. McKnight interprets Paul’s teaching of praying continually in 1 Thessalonians 5:17 in light of fixed-hour prayer. Second, lectio divina fosters internalization and life transformation through meditation on God’s word and contemplation of his deeds (Ps 1:2; 77:12). Third, contemplative prayer seeks to ground all saying prayers because it tutors the inner life and clarifies one’s intention to pray to the heavenly father (Mt 6:5-6). Fourth, as demonstrated by Jesus, silence and solitude help one acquire the spiritual vitality and connection with God the father (Mk 1:12-13; Jn 6:15). Such spiritual discipline, according to Willard, is most essential at the outset of spiritual life.

Spiritual direction is the fifth and last discipline or ministry introduced in this research. It engages two persons to identify and notice God’s involvement in the whole of one’s life. While spiritual direction is not the only ministry towards spiritual transformation, it is of a significantly complementary nature that needs to be rediscovered and embraced by evangelicals alongside their usual discipleship endeavours, such as adult Sunday school, Bible lecture, theological seminar, and discipleship class. Group spiritual
direction is particularly vital, for it addresses the Christian men’s yearning for companionship and intimacy with other men.

While the research results remain to be seen as the project is awaiting the actual field test, there are several areas of future research interest. This project has targeted only the male participants of a particular age group at the moment, but mixed gender and intergenerational participants should be considered in future studies, as it brings about much needed diversity and wealth of experiences from the older generation to the newer generation. Another limitation in this present project is its lack of multiplicative dimension as identified in Chapter 5. It will be of tremendous research value to test the viability of multiplying this type of spiritual formation group in other similar settings. If the current project is proven effective, it could be extended to other congregations within WSCCC, namely its Mandarin-speaking and English-speaking congregations, because of their similar yet different contexts. It also can be tested in other Chinese churches in Sydney, and then Australia-wide. Last but not least, it is hoped that this project will be launched among pastors and church leaders because often they are the ones who have neglected their own spiritual growth for the sake of doing God’s ministry.

Pastoral leaders and lay people alike need to be empowered to experience God firsthand and draw nutrients from the “true vine” (Jn 15:1) before they can effectively bear fruit. It is both a biblical mandate and a genuine longing of those who follow Christ. As this project concludes, may the following prayer which the author has prayed daily for a number of years resound in those who constantly seek to be in God’s presence and make an impact in the world in which we all live:

My God, since you are with me, and since by your will, I must occupy myself with external things, please grant me the grace to remain with you in your
presence. Let me join you and you with me in everything, so that my being is nourished and my work might be the natural outflow of your presence to edify people and to better the world. Receive as an offering of love all that I am, all that I think, all that I say and do for you alone, in Jesus’ name. Amen.”

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1 This prayer is largely an adaptation of Brother Lawrence’s prayer, which he said at the beginning of his daily duties. Lawrence, *The Practice of the Presence of God*, 82.
APPENDIX A

Spiritual Disciplines Evaluation Form

Thank you for taking part in a journey towards spiritual growth. Please fill out this form which remains anonymous. None of the information will identify you by name.

1. What is your overall experience of practicing the recommended spiritual disciplines? What do you like about them? Have you obtained any help through your practice?

____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

2. Reflecting on the whole process of practicing the spiritual disciplines, what have you found helpful and what has been unhelpful?

____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

3. What were your expectations about practicing the disciplines? Were those fulfilled? Why?

____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

4. How have the following spiritual disciplines helped you with attending to God’s presence in your daily life?
   ● Fixed-hour prayer ___________________________________________________
   ● Lectio divina _______________________________________________________
   ● Contemplative prayer _______________________________________________
   ● Silent and solitude _________________________________________________

5. What other spiritual practices would you consider beneficial in assisting you to be attuned to God? Why?

____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

6. How do you determine if you continue practicing these spiritual disciplines? Why? What is the desire of your spiritual life?

____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

7. Other comments:

____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
Thank you for taking part in a journey towards spiritual growth. Please fill out this form which remains anonymous. None of the information will identify you by name.

1. What is your overall experience of spiritual direction? What do you like about spiritual direction? Have you obtained any help through it?

2. Reflecting on the whole spiritual direction process, what have you found helpful and what has been unhelpful?

3. What were your expectations about receiving spiritual direction? Were those fulfilled? Why?

4. How has receiving spiritual direction empowered your prayer life? How has spiritual direction sensitized you to God’s ongoing presence in all life circumstances?

5. What improvements need to be made to the direction process? What questions of clarification need to be raised to the spiritual director?

6. How do you determine if you continue receiving spiritual direction? Why? What is the desire of your spiritual life?

7. Other comments:
APPENDIX C

Spiritual Direction Observation Notes

Name of directee: ___________  Session #: ___________  Date: ___________


1. What were the main topics or themes on which the spiritual direction relationship touched?
   ___________________________________________________________________
   ___________________________________________________________________

2. What is the situation that the directee is currently undergoing?
   ___________________________________________________________________

3. What is the directee’s relationship with God?
   ___________________________________________________________________
   ___________________________________________________________________

4. What has been my advice to the directee in this session?
   ___________________________________________________________________
   ___________________________________________________________________

5. What has been my primary feeling and experience during the direction session?
   ___________________________________________________________________
   ___________________________________________________________________

6. What did I do or speak that was considered helpful or unhelpful by the directee?
   ___________________________________________________________________

7. Integrating the insights from all the previous sessions so far (if any), what have I observed about the directee’s current experience and situation?
   ___________________________________________________________________

8. What grace does the directee need in order to deepen his or her relationship with God? What grace do I need as a director?
   ___________________________________________________________________
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