

Liberty University John W. Rawlings School of Divinity

Spiritual Disciplines for Men in a Medium-Sized Church

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

by

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THE DOCTOR OF MINISTRY THESIS PROJECT ABSTRACT

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The problem is that the men of Freedom Fellowship Church in Canyon, Texas, do not have adequate training in the spiritual disciplines. Training in the spiritual disciplines would offer to the men in the church the proper leadership instruction that would give them the tools necessary to accomplish this goal. If the men of the church receive instruction in the spiritual disciplines, they will be able to utilize them in their daily lives. The men will, in turn, be able to use the spiritual disciplines in leadership positions in the church with confidence in being able to increase the spiritual growth in their family as well as other church members. The research methods used will be to offer teaching to twenty men of the church over a six to eight-week period on the spiritual disciplines. There will be a pre-test and post-test given to measure the strengths and challenges of the teaching. The writer believes that by conducting this project with the men's group, discovering the findings will help other churches with their men's group in teaching the spiritual disciplines. Leaders and laity will learn that practicing the spiritual disciplines in their lives will encourage spiritual resiliency. When the leaders and laity start practicing the spiritual disciplines, it will present to the younger men the importance of practicing and modeling the spiritual disciplines.

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Abbreviations

DMIN	<i>Doctor of Ministry</i>
LUSOD	<i>Liberty University School of Divinity</i>
ESV	<i>English Standard Version</i>

Chapter 1

Introduction

The pastor of the church that the writer attends was having a meeting when the conversation turned to the men of the church desiring to have more participation in ministry leadership opportunities, which can include mercy ministry, youth ministry, praise and worship team, as well as outreach ministry. The men of the church felt that they did not have adequate training in such disciplines, such as reading their Bibles, prayer, fasting, study, solitude, submission, worship, guidance, and confession. The pastor expressed to the writer a desire to begin training the men of the church in these ministry leadership opportunities. The writer is a chaplain serving in a local hospital with advanced training in the spiritual disciplines with several graduate degrees and a wealth of experiences in ministry settings. The chaplain has served in mercy ministry, such as working in a hospital, and can help the men in developing these skills. The chaplain has served also in first responder roles and can provide training to the men who feel called to serve in this type of ministry in the community. The pastor wishes to decentralize the ministry of the church and share it with the men. The training of the men will equip the men to be able to carry out these ministry leadership opportunities. Peter Scazzero writes in “The Emotionally Healthy Church” stating, “When we devote ourselves to reaching the world for Christ while ignoring our own emotional and spiritual health, our leadership is shortsighted at best.”¹ When the men of the church begin to engage in ministry they will become stronger Christians because they are not only engaging in the word of God, but they are also putting it into action. Thomas A. Kempis says it well when he writes, “But because I am still weak in love and imperfect in virtue, I need to be strengthened and comforted by Thee; therefore, visit Thou

¹ Peter Scazzero, *The Emotionally Healthy Church: A Strategy for Discipleship that Actually Changes Lives* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), Kindle, 27.

me often and instruct me with Thy holy ways of discipline.”² The men will experience the love of God when they begin to participate in ministry.

John Piper writes, “The goal of spiritual leadership is that people come to know and to glorify him in all that you do.” Spiritual leadership is aimed at not so much at directing people as it is in changing people.³ Psalm 127:1 states, “Unless the LORD builds the house, those who build it labor in vain. Unless the LORD watches over the city, the watchman stay awake in vain.”⁴ The men of the church must realize in their hearts that God is the one that builds them up in faith using the spiritual disciplines such as study, prayer, meditation, confession, and many others. The men want to put their faith and trust in God to make their work beneficial to Him and they all have unique gifts and abilities and the purpose of these gifts is what Ephesians 4:12 states, “to equip the saint for the work of ministry for the building up the body of Christ.” The men in the church have specific gifts for the “work of ministry” and these gifts should be used in ministry to one another. Each one of the men must assess their divine calling from God including their gifts and talents. The men need to realize these spiritual gifts in Romans 12:4-8 and live them out in the body of Christ. The spiritual disciplines will empower the men to minister out of their unique personalities and talents. The project will train and equip the men to use these talents and gifts to change, through the power of the Holy Spirit, while glorifying God with the talents and uniqueness that He has given each of them.

² Thomas A. Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ* (Translated by William Benham: A Digireads Book, 2011), 91, www.dgireads.com Kindle.

³ John Piper, *The Marks of a Spiritual Leader*. (<https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/the-marks-of-a-spiritual-leade>, January 1, 1995), para.2.

⁴ Unless otherwise noted, all biblical passages referenced are from the *English Standard Version* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008).

Ministry Context

The church that the writer used for the research is in the Panhandle of Texas in a small community of approximately 14,000 people. The town has a medium-size university that is the primary source of income for most of the citizens. The church has a membership of two hundred people with an average attendance of about 150 on Sundays. The church began in 1986 and was named Canyon Christian Church. Five years later, the church was renamed Freedom Fellowship Church after dropping out of the Independent Christian Church denomination. The Freedom Fellowship Church then became non-denominational. The pastor, Darren Dye, has been the lead pastor for over twenty-five years. The church is active in the community, providing clothes for the needy as well as an annual back-to-school program for low-income citizens, providing backpacks and school supplies.

The reason Freedom Fellowship Church exists is that people need God. The church desires to connect people to God through His presence and His Word.⁵ New members have two nights of learning the history of the church and their individual gifts by taking a personality inventory. They also learn what is expected of new members and areas to serve. When new members choose to participate, they sign a commitment form and then on a Sunday morning are formally recognized and welcomed by the pastor along with the church as new members.

The church believes that the Bible is the Word of God written by God through men. The authority of the Bible is the ultimate, final, and eternal Word of God. The Bible is the all-inclusive guidebook on how to live a godly life practically. The church stands on the Word of God such as 2 Peter 1:20-21, which is about how God spoke the words of the Bible through

⁵ Freedom Fellowship Church, *Connections* (Freedom Fellowship Church New Member Orientation Manual: 2017), 2.

prophets and through humans and 2 Timothy 3:16, which explains that all Scripture is inspired by God, useful for teaching, preparing and equipping.

The keyword in the church is “connecting.” Freedom Fellowship believes in community life the way God intended it through the teaching in Acts 2:42-47. The church met corporately in Acts, and this is the model that Freedom Fellowship Church follows in connecting people to a relationship with God. The church wants members to connect. God often relates to His people in groups. Individualism, as the church states, is promoted to a point where it is unhealthy. The church desires for all members to come together every Sunday to encourage and love one another.⁶ The men who participate in this activity will experience the power of the Holy Spirit in their lives and will feel called in their hearts to go out of the walls of the building and begin sharing the good news with others in their family and community. “Being God’s servant evokes a master/slave relationship, a relationship of obedience in which we submit to God.”⁷ Paul, speaks about being “bondservants and slaves” in (Col 3:22-23). During the time when Paul wrote this letter, the people were subjected to harsh slavery and were forced into servitude. The Apostle now calls on the church to treat one another with dignity and respect. The men are to work energetically in their service to God.

The church has small groups called Life Groups that come together every week like the believers in Acts 2:42-47, where they met together in homes for “breaking of bread.” The small settings are essential for the church because these offer the members the opportunity to journey together in learning God’s Word. When small groups come together, they learn to serve. God

⁶ Freedom Fellowship Church, *Connections*, 3.

⁷ Richard Foster, *A Year with God: Living out the Spiritual Disciplines*, ed. by Richard Foster, compiled by Julia L. Roller, 1st ed. (New York: HarperCollins, 2009), Kindle, 119.

called the church to invest time and talents together and to fulfill a person's kingdom purpose. When small groups meet on a journey, they discover, share, heal wounds, and stick together through good and bad times, and lives are changed. The main reason for group time is to read Scripture together and then discover God's presence and have lots of fun.

The church desires for believers to be Spirit-filled and Spirit-led. The Holy Spirit gives life to the new believer; then the new believer is baptized. The church teaches through Acts 1:8 about the power of the Holy Spirit and walking by the Spirit (Gal 5:16). Church members learn about their gifts from the Holy Spirit, and they know that their skills from God do make a difference. Faith is vital in the church and learning to trust in God helps the members realize how much He loves them. Dallas Willard states, "The ultimate freedom we have as human beings is the power to select what we will allow our minds to dwell upon."⁸ The men in the church who begin to focus their minds on the Word of God will be able to change and make progress in their own lives. "We all put off the old self, corrupted by various deceitful cravings and learned behavior patterns of the cultures, worldviews and social environments we learned from the world. Now, we are learning from Christ, being renewed in the spirit of our minds."⁹

New members are encouraged to take a "personality inventory"¹⁰ test that will help them identify their strengths and weaknesses. The person then can learn how to grow in God and overcome weaknesses. The critical part of the personality inventory is that the person can learn

⁸ Dallas Willard, *Renewing the Christian Mind* (New York: Harper Collins, 2016), 3, Kindle.

⁹ Thom Wolfe, *The Universal Disciple: Discipleship Pattern* (New Delhi, India: University Institute Pub., 2010), file:///C:/Users/scott/AppData/Local/Packages/microsoft.windowscommunicationsapps_8wekyb3d8bbwe/LocalState/Files/S0/199/Attachments/The%20Universal%20Disciple%20by%20Thom%20Wolfe. 6, pdf.

¹⁰ Marita Littauer and Florence Littauer, *Wired That Way: The Comprehensive Personality Plan* (Grand Rapids: Revell, 2006), 1.

and realize that a person has a redemptive gift from God. God has rescued the new believer from what His son did on the cross. God calls the people to use the gift in them to build His kingdom.

The church offers several places to serve, such as providing for needy people in the community. The ministry is called “Freedom House Outreach Center,” which touches families in the community in practical ways such as giving Christmas gifts away, and backpacks for going back to school in the fall.

Members can serve in mercy ministries by visiting the sick in hospitals, homes, and nursing homes. Mercy ministries at Freedom Fellowship Church encompass these types of ministries. The church believes that each of the members have been given “redemptive gifts where the soul is expressed through our personality. It is God’s design that our spiritual nature is expressed through our redemptive gift.”¹¹ God has given us different gifts for doing certain things well. According to Romans 12:3-8, these different gifts include prophecy, serving, teaching, encouraging, and giving. The place of worship has an active children’s and youth ministry. Men’s and women’s groups meet every week in the church for reading the Bible, prayer, and fellowship. The congregation has numerous fellowship dinners during the year. The members also sponsor a variety of missions locally, nationally, and internationally. The church supports the local food bank as well as raising funds to build water wells in countries that do not have clean drinking water. A vibrant worship team offers those who have the talent to play instruments, sing, and operate sound and media. There are opportunities to serve, such as door greeters, foyer and sanctuary hosts, and stewards.

The writer, who is a chaplain, has been a member of the church for approximately four years. The chaplain works in a veteran’s hospital, serving as a staff chaplain to the veterans who

¹¹ Freedom Fellowship Church, *Connections*, 19.

come for medical treatment. He has worked for twenty-eight years in the veteran's hospital. He is a veteran himself, having served approximately fifteen years in the United States Army. Part of the fifteen years was serving as the Regimental Chaplain for the Texas State Guard with the rank of major. He is Board Certified with the National Association of Veteran Affairs Chaplains. The chaplain plans on retiring in the next ten years and will return to the local church where his ministry originated and serve the members of Freedom Fellowship in Canyon, Texas.

The purpose is to help the men of the church learn to depend on God in the mercy ministry. Jesus said, "Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me" (Matt 25:40). Jesus was teaching the disciples (all believers) that the church is called upon to help the neediest among the brothers. The spiritually transformed hearts of the men will be the evidence of their compassion for the "least of these." People move through the day, participating in daily routines, and interact with brothers and sisters in Christ as well as those who are not Christians. The aim is for the men of the church to follow scripture, love fellow Christians, and use good behavior with others outside of the church. The men will learn how to live their faith in both the church as well as the public. Studying the spiritual disciplines will equip the men of the church to honor those in the workplace, family members, and strangers. The small groups discussed above provide ideal situations to learn the spiritual disciplines. The men of Freedom Fellowship Church desire to do ministry, and this will start in the home. The spiritual disciplines will help the men to conduct ministry in their own homes. Ministry in the home takes front row compared to jobs and the church. "The external dimension of Christian experience is the outward expression of the inward spirituality. It is the Christian reality being manifest in everyday life."¹² Hollinger points out the importance of "living out" the Christian life

¹² Dennis P. Hollinger, *Choosing the Good: Christian Ethics in a Complex World*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 11.

in the midst of the situations that God places us in.¹³ The men will learn that once they read the Word of God, then they will be called upon by the Spirit of God to “go make disciples of Christ” like Jesus commanded in Matthew 28:19-20.

The men of Freedom Fellowship desire to do ministry in the church. Christians should serve others in the church. When the men serve in the church, they are performing as bright representatives of Christ Himself for other believers. Practicing the spiritual disciplines will equip the men to lead small groups, be guides, work at a local homeless shelter, and do short-term evangelism in another town, state, or country. The spiritual disciplines will also cause the men of Freedom Fellowship Church to want to take their ministry outside the walls of the church.

The transformation of the men of the Freedom Fellowship Church will be the goal of practicing spiritual disciplines. In 2 Timothy 2:2 Paul writes to Timothy, “what you have heard,” pass this onto “faithful men.” The mistake will be that if the men of Freedom Fellowship Church hear the message and do not go out and pass this onto others, then they will not be doing discipleship.

When the men of Freedom Fellowship start to practice the spiritual disciplines, they will wonder if a change is indeed taking place in themselves and whether others see it in them. Dallas Willard comments about where the spiritual change takes place, and where is the most need for it in a person’s life? He writes that it is in the “inside or the hidden area life that God sees and that the Christian is not able to even see this in themselves without the help of God.”¹⁴ As Willard

¹³ Hollinger, *Choosing the Good*, 11.

¹⁴ Dallas Willard, *Renovation of the Heart: Putting on the Character of Christ* (Colorado Springs, NavPress, 2002), Loc. 1472, Kindle Edition.

puts it, “if people were able to see themselves for who they are, they would immediately go into denial.”¹⁵ Paul wrote to Timothy about how much of a sinner he was, and that is why Jesus came into the world to save him as well as everyone else (1 Tim 1:15). Christians must trust the Bible if they desire to change their lives. Paul confessed his sins and believed that to be a Christian leader, confessing one’s sins leads to transformation. The confession, which is a spiritual discipline, will help the men of Freedom Fellowship to develop themselves into effective leaders in their homes, church, and world. Another critical part of the spiritual formations for the men will be mentoring, which will be discussed later in this paper.

Problem Presented

The problem presented exists because the men of Freedom Fellowship Church of Canyon, Texas, do not think they are qualified to carry out ministry on their own. Many of them still believe that the pastor is the one who should, for example, do the praying because he is the most qualified in the church to do so. The pastor wants to decentralize the ministry of the church and delegate more of it to the men of the church, who will then train their families, church, community, state, country, and world. The church members desire to experience more of God and this can be accomplished by encouraging them to rely on Him as a close friend. Jesus said in John 13:34, “love one another: just as I have loved you, you are also to love one another.” The writer wants to use the talents that the church sent him out to share as a chaplain and in turn, give them back to the church that he loves. Practicing the historical disciplines provides an environment of doing ministry instead of just being in ministry.

The problem researched helped a limited number of men in the church and trained them in the spiritual disciplines. These men now can train other men in the church. Since becoming a

¹⁵ Willard, *Renovation of the Heart.*, Loc. 1481, Kindle.

chaplain, the author has realized the importance of the spiritual disciplines. The spiritual disciplines have formed in the writer to the point that reading the Bible every morning after waking up is routine. The writer also prays continuously, especially when making rounds in the hospital.

The spiritual disciplines, when practiced as a way of life, develop the person into the image of God. God created man in His image (Gen 1:26-27). In the New Testament, Paul writes, that Christians are to become the likeness of Christ (2 Cor 3:18). God intentionally created human beings for company and conversation partners. When people study one of the spiritual disciplines through the Scriptures, they enter this conversation with God, and over some time, these people are formed into His image. The word “transformation” becomes the goal of spiritual disciplines.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this Doctor of Ministry thesis project was to educate the men of Freedom Fellowship Church of Canyon, Texas, so that they would have a clear understanding of the spiritual disciplines. The pastor wished for the leadership of the church, which is composed of men, to have a clear understanding of the spiritual disciplines and to receive instruction, which will fulfill the purpose of addressing the problem. The project provided for an eight-week training opportunity for the men to study the spiritual disciplines, put them into practice, and enhance their spiritual resiliency.

Many church members are complacent with the ministry because they are only bystanders and not directly involved with the church. The consequences for complacency in church members is that they are unhappy and stop attending or attend another church. Once the church members started using the spiritual disciplines, they began having confidence to use them

in other settings. Spiritual self-care is vital for all church members and for those who seek a lifelong commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ. The pastor, as well as the men of the church, helped the writer with this problem.

There is ample research in using spiritual disciplines. It would be helpful for those chaplains as well as pastors who have retired or planning retirement to realize the talents that they have gained from working in this field and offer that back to a local church. The writer has been reading resources from such authors as Richard Foster, Dallas Willard, and others who have been pioneers in the field of spiritual formation by using the spiritual disciplines. The writer read journals, biblical commentaries, relevant dissertations, and themes precisely related to the topic.

Basic Assumptions

The men's names at the church were kept anonymous in this project. The writer longed for the men to feel more open, free, and honest about sharing their true feelings. Recognizing the pastor's concern about tension in the men's group, the writer presumes that by teaching the men on the spiritual disciplines, the pressure has eased and gave the men more confidence in themselves to carry out the ministry that God has called them to do. The writer is committed to using the research gathered to improve the ministry's capability of the men's group at the church. Working with a sample of twelve men in the church will be representative of the whole. The writer assumes and believes that this is the evidence that is presented and will move ahead with the research.

Definitions

Board Certified Chaplain: Requires possession of a Master of Divinity; completion of four units of Association for Clinical Pastoral Education (ACPE)-accredited Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE). Current Ecclesiastical Endorsement from an endorsing body recognized by the

Department of Veterans Affairs. Three years of full-time professional ministry experience.

Completion of an interview by a peer review panel to ascertain competency in pastoral, personal, and professional areas.¹⁶

Complacency: Describes people who are self-righteous in their definition of themselves. They are smug or arrogant enough to believe that they do not need to know anything because they feel that they have all the answers and no longer need any more instruction.

Confession: Admission, declaration, or assertion of one's self.¹⁷

Corporate: A "group or community" of people who are engaging and participating in spiritual disciplines that call for joining in an activity.¹⁸

Disciple: One who follows Jesus, is being changed by Jesus, and is committed to the mission of Jesus. As a result, a disciple loves God and loves others. Knowing about and following Christ is only part of what it means to be a disciple.¹⁹

Means of Grace: Individual spiritual practices also help believers to become receptive. Personal prayer, meditation, times of silence, journaling, retreats, and fasting all bring their attention to the opening of our hearts or the action of grace.²⁰

¹⁶ *National Association of VA Chaplains*, (Dayton VA Medical Center Chaplain, 4100 West Third Street Dayton, OH 45428): 2018, <https://www.navac.net/board-certified-chaplain>.

¹⁷ *The Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*, s.v. "complacency (*n.*)," accessed January 28, 2020, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/complacency>.

¹⁸ Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of The Disciplines* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1988), 175.

¹⁹ Jim Putman, *Real-Life Discipleship: Building Churches That Make Disciples* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2010), Kindle Edition.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 16-20.

Mentoring: The definition of “*mentoring*” takes on various shades of meaning depending upon who is using the term. Many authors, both secular and religious, provide adequate definitions. For this project, the writer has used the definition by Chuck Lawless wherein he defines biblical mentoring as “a God-given relationship in which one growing Christian encourages and equips another believer to reach his or her potential as a disciple of Christ.”²¹

Mercy Ministries: Practical, Christ-dependent, Christ-exalting steps to relieve suffering now and forever through Christ, especially among those who have the fewest resources.²²

Spiritual Disciplines: Those practices that contribute to the personal and communal growth of believers in the Church. A few examples are Bible reading, prayer, meditation, service, and confession. They have been practiced throughout the history of the church and continue to develop and change into different forms. Spiritual disciplines are exercises unto godliness, are only activities undertaken to make Christians capable of receiving more of His life and power without harm to themselves or other²³

Spiritual Self-Care: The exercise of building personal faith and resiliency, reinforcing spiritual well-being. Self-care honors God through nurturing and protecting the body, mind, and spirit with their limits and desires.²⁴

²¹ Chuck Lawless, *Disciplined Warriors: Growing Healthy Churches that are Equipped for Spiritual Warfare* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2002), 122.

²² John Piper, *Doing Mercy to the Brothers of Jesus and the Broken Neighbor* (<https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/doing-mercy-to-the-brothers-of-jesus-and-the-broken-neighbor>, October 3, 2004), para.4.

²³ Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of The Disciplines*, 156.

²⁴ Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices that Transform Us* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2015), Kindle, 70.

Spiritual Formation: Involves an inward journey of the heart. The first task is to look within, reflect on life, and seek God and God's activity right there. People who identify and articulate the movements of their inner lives can slowly remove obstacles to seeing and responding to the presence of grace in their day-to-day experiences.²⁵

Transformation: Follows Galatians 2:19-20, where a dramatic and real change in the person's life occurs. People see that they are the "old" persons they once were. Instead, Jesus Christ has made these people Christ-directed.²⁶

Veterans Affairs Chaplain: Provide religious, spiritual, and pastoral care to veterans receiving inpatient or outpatient care from VHA facilities and deliver care for their families.²⁷

Limitations

The writer/researcher chose twelve men to participate in the instruction taught over eight weeks during the summer. Training in the church is normally during the fall and spring, but with the training taking place in the summer, the men were able to take advantage of further discipleship training. Some of the men that started had unforeseen problems that interfered with their participation, and subsequently, had to miss or drop out.

The paper did not cover all the spiritual disciplines. The purpose of the teaching material was to offer a simple theology of the spiritual disciplines and specific instruction in ten spiritual

²⁵ Andrea M. Dean. "SPIRITUAL FORMATION AND GRACE," *Compass* 49, no. 1 (Autumn, 2015): 16-20, <http://ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/docview/1685997074?accountid=12085>.

²⁶ David A. desilva, *Transformation: The Heart of Paul's Gospel* (Bellingham, WA: LexhamPress.com, 2014), 11.

²⁷ Department of Veteran's Affairs, *SPIRITUAL AND PASTORAL CARE IN THE VETERANS HEALTH ADMINISTRATION* (VHA DIRECTIVE 1111, Transmittal Sheet 2016): Veterans' Health Administration Washington, DC 20420, 3.

disciplines: inward disciplines, which include meditation, prayer, fasting, and study. Outward disciplines include fellowship, submission, and service. Finally, corporate disciplines included worship, confession, and guidance were discussed. The writer did not discount the other disciplines, but for this study, the disciplines that were selected were the most important for the local church and this discussion because they are foundational.

For this project, the writer desired to mentor a core group of 12 men. There are several reasons for this focus. First, the writer wished to focus on the men because they lacked spiritual growing and serving. Second, the pastor and writer wished to implement a more robust strategy of a church-wide mentoring program with many mentoring groups using the spiritual disciplines. Another reason for starting a mentoring program in the church is that it will allow others to observe and learn what mentoring entails, using the spiritual disciplines and attainable goals.

Delimitations

The men ranged in various age groups from 18 to 80 years old, working in various professions, including professional and labor. The group encompassed leadership, laity, as well as those in college. The men met weekly for approximately two hours, one time a week at members' homes. Further, the writer delimited the group to men because of the potential depth of the mentoring relationship and the inappropriate appearance of mixed-gender mentoring. The writer delimited the core group to a size of 12 participants for two reasons. First, a minimum of 12 was a significant number of men for a church this size. From May to July 2020, the church averaged 105 in worship on Sundays. There is a minimum of 12 because of the self-limiting nature of having only one mentor to work with the participating men.

Thesis Statement

If the men of the church receive training in the spiritual disciplines, they will be able to utilize them in their daily lives. The learning of the disciplines has solved the problem of the men of Freedom Fellowship Church of Canyon, Texas in believing they are now qualified and confident in themselves in doing ministry. The spiritual disciplines have grown the men spiritually in their relationship with Jesus Christ. Learning the disciplines has empowered the men with more faith in themselves in doing ministry. The training has educated the men and given them a clear understanding of how the spiritual disciplines will equip them to do ministry. Richard Foster writes that the “spiritual disciplines are an inward and spiritual reality, and the inner attitude of the heart is far more crucial than the mechanics for coming into the reality of the spiritual life.”²⁸ The research showed that when the men turned to the Holy Spirit, they experienced a change in their inner attitude, which in turn changed their hearts towards God. Foster points out in the study guide to the book, “These disciplines open us to the good life...not to make life miserable, but joyful, not to put us in bondage, but to set us free, not to confine but liberate.”²⁹ The spiritual disciplines have a goal of forming them into the image of God.

Those who lead on their own will have difficulty changing leadership styles because it becomes too uncomfortable in making these changes. The same is true for the men. They were comfortable just letting the pastor be the central person that did the ministry in the church and not themselves. Once the disciplines became a way of life in the church by both the pastor and men, then a decentralized approach to ministry was possible. When the men of the church begin

²⁸ Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* (San Francisco: Harper & Row: 2018), 3.

²⁹ Richard J. Foster, *Study Guide for Celebration of Discipline* (Hagerstown, New York: Harper & Row, 1983), 1.

taking on ministry leadership opportunities, they are participating in God’s call on their lives. Leadership in the church can now distribute ministry among those in the church that have the gifts and talents to make them occur. In turn, the church is growing and allowing others in the church to accomplish more ministry opportunities. The men are called upon to be “watchmen” over the flock. Brian G. Hedges, writes in his book *Watchfulness*, “Yet watchfulness is as necessary to a healthy spiritual life as meditation and prayer.”³⁰ Hedges stresses to his readers that, “watchfulness,” which is a spiritual discipline is an important exercise in moral vigilance and watchful prayer.³¹

The spiritual disciplines offer the Christian a journey into wholeness in the image of Christ for the sake of others by a spiritual means.³² The men of the church have begun this journey by practicing the spiritual disciplines as a means of grace to grow their spirituality. Research has shown that the spiritual disciplines, when practiced as a way of life, will deepen their walk with the Lord and, in turn, enrich their lives with others in the church, home, and community and, in turn, nurture one’s wholeness with Christ.³³ The spiritual life does not need to be private in such a manner that the person wants to maintain control of this relationship with God and does not allow transformation to take place.

The disciplines call for the person to do something when going on this journey with God. The person who is in the presence of the Lord is shaped into the image of God. Richard Foster says, “we rest in the knowledge that the discipline itself is only a means to a deeper life, not the

³⁰ Brian G. Hedges, *Watchfulness: Recovering a Lost Spiritual Discipline*. (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2018), loc. 124, Kindle.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 124-125, Kindle.

³² Robert M, Mulholland, *Invitation to Journey: A Road Map for Spiritual Formation* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 1993), 75.

³³ *Ibid.*, 76.

life itself.”³⁴ The Psalmist writes, “Deep calls to deep at the roar of your waterfalls, all your breakers and your waves have gone over me” (Ps 42:7). The Psalm reads that at times waters are competing with one another in their unruliness. “To approach God is to approach an unfathomable depth of reality and truth that, like the sun in the sky, is too intense, too bright to look at, but that nevertheless brings meaning and coherence and beauty to everything else. God is a mystery.”³⁵ The spiritual disciplines offer a person a guide on this journey in life. The pastor and writer wanted to help the men to realize that often, Bible reading, prayer, and celebration cause a person to feel the presence of God. Then at other times, life becomes harsh and it goes out of control. Foster says that the believers will learn to give up control of their lives to God and realize that the church can stay connected to the source of life through the spirit.³⁶ The Holy Spirit is what binds the church together and the men are the ones who are called upon to hear Him and connect the other men as well as church members to Him. In Brother Lawrence’s book he writes “That we ought to give ourselves up to GOD, with regard both to things temporal and spiritual, and seek our satisfaction only in the fulfilling of His will.”³⁷ The men of the church are learning from the Holy Spirit that ministry calls for a person to give of themselves for the service of God. Chris Webb writes, “God is creating a community of love. That is his fixation and passion. He is shaping and molding a community of loving people in which he himself can dwell.”³⁸ The men of the church have been called to have a passion for God and to love the

³⁴ Richard J Foster with Kathryn A. Helmers, *Life with God: Reading the Bible for Spiritual Formation* (New York: Harper Collins: 2008 by Renovare), 136.

³⁵ Stephen D. Boyer and Christopher D. Hall, *The Mystery of God: Theology of Knowing the Unknowable* (Grand Rapids: Baker Pub., 2012), LOC. 148, Kindle.

³⁶ Foster with Helmers, *Life with God: Reading the Bible for Spiritual Formation*, 137.

³⁷ Nicholas Herman, *Brother Lawrence* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1666), 2, Kindle.

people as He loved them. The men of the church have a primary calling on their lives. George Hillman writes, “The primary calling is to a living and dynamic relationship with God. The primary calling for all believers is to God. The functional call is how we live out our primary calling.³⁹ The purpose of the men in the church as well as all of the members is to have a relationship with God through His Word and then in turn as believers, to share that with others.

³⁸ Chris Webb, *God-Soaked Life: Discovering a Kingdom Spirituality* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2017), 7, Kindle.

³⁹ George Hillman, “Calling and Spiritual Formation,” in *Foundations of Spiritual Formation: A Community Approach to Becoming Like Christ*, ed. by Paul Pettit (Grand Rapids: Kregel Pub, 2008), 198.

Chapter 2

Conceptual Framework

The spiritual disciplines offer to the follower of Jesus Christ the good life and not with will power, riches, reputation, and freedom from all power. The spiritual disciplines when practiced will enable the men not to give up. The Bible teaches that God desires a full life with abundance, which comes from provisions, position, and individuality. Individuality here means that God makes the person unique and original. The spiritual disciplines are a means of receiving God's amazing grace. A thorough literature review was presented, describing 10 of the spiritual disciplines, in length. In particular, the spiritual disciplines will be the inward disciplines, outward disciplines, and corporate disciplines. The theological and theoretical foundations will also be discussed in this chapter to round out the conceptual framework.

Literature Review

Theology of the Spiritual Disciplines

According to Don Whitney, in his book "Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life," God will grant Christlikeness when Jesus returns until then we are to grow toward it.⁴⁰ The Bible offers a life with God for individuals who spend time reading it and applying it to their daily lives. The spiritual disciplines offer people the opportunity to spend time participating in divine activities that will transform their lives. Reading the scriptures has the power to "renew the mind" (Rom12:2) so that individuals can discern and understand what God desires in their lives.

Absorbing the Word of God into Christ-followers and then applying it to their daily lives will then transform their spirit into God's Spirit the way He chooses. John Ortberg writes on

⁴⁰ Donald Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for The Christian Life* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2014), 2, Kindle.

spiritual transformation by saying that it cannot be, as he says, “orchestrated.”⁴¹ Ortberg points out that the disciples followed Jesus around, and in turn, they learned from Him.⁴² The disciples provided an example to follow Jesus in our daily lives, which means learning the spiritual disciplines. Jesus trained the disciples and will do the same for the men of Freedom Fellowship Church. The men in the church need a leader to guide them as Jesus led with the disciples. Helping the men to develop a plan of being disciplined by using the spiritual disciplines will empower them to go into a ministry that God has planned for their lives.

Marshall Welch wrote an article about how spiritual formation impacted a small men’s group and how he emphasized that “spirituality” is relational.⁴³ Marshall speaks about the challenge that men’s groups face when building relationships, which may affect their relationship with God.⁴⁴ Marshall goes on to point out that one of the reasons these relationships have had difficulty in growing is many traditional formats of worship and adult education have not adequately met men’s needs in this area.⁴⁵ Learning and teaching new worship formats for men can become a challenge for the leaders who lead men’s groups.

In another article Mary Rynsburger and Mark A. Lamport emphasizes the same argument in that small groups affect spiritual growth in both men and women’s groups. Small groups are

⁴¹ John Ortberg, *The Life that You’ve Always Wanted* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), Kindle, Loc. 2980.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Marshall Welch, "Manifestation of the Spirit: An Investigation on the Impact of a Curriculum and Small Group Spiritual Direction on the Spiritual Formation of Protestant Men," *Pastoral Psychology* 62, no. 1 (2013): 97, <http://ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/docview/1266990639?accountid=12085>

⁴⁴ Ibid., 86.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 88.

easy to form, and they allow the men in the group to get to know one another quickly as opposed to a large group.⁴⁶

Klaus Isler says it best when he speaks about following the Holy Spirit's lead, which means implementing Romans 8:5-11, which warns about "setting the mind on the flesh" instead of the "spirit."⁴⁷ Setting the mind on the flesh means focusing on the sinful human nature and disregarding the will of God. The key to having a successful small men's group is to be led by the Holy Spirit, which will grow them spiritually.

Character Transformation

According to 2 Corinthians 5:17, "if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has died; behold, the new has come." Christ has redeemed the people who now live for Him and living for others, effected by the power of the Holy Spirit. The small men's group will grow by the power of the Holy Spirit for Christ and others around them. Dallas Willard writes that true character transformation starts, for believers, when taught to believe in the pure grace of God and is continually assisted by it.⁴⁸ Without these actions taking place in the believer, the transformation will not take place in a person. Changing one's heart from the inside is the work of the Holy Spirit, and the spiritual disciplines in a person's life, according to Richard Foster, change the inner attitude.⁴⁹ When people read the Bible regularly, the Holy Spirit grows their hearts, which in turn will transform their minds and make them into a new creation. Don

⁴⁶ Mary Rynsburger and Mark A. Lamport, "All the Rage: How Small Groups Are Really Educating Christian Adults Part 1: Assessing Small Group Ministry Practice: A Review of the Literature," (*Christian Education Journal* 5, no. 1 (2008): 116+, Gale Academic Onefile (accessed November 11, 2019). https://link-gale-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/apps/doc/A178258282/AONE?u=vic_liberty&sid=AONE&xid=7c2d8399.

⁴⁷ Klaus Isler, *Living into the Life of Jesus* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2012), Loc.114, Kindle.

⁴⁸ Willard, *The Spirit of The Disciplines*, 20.

⁴⁹ Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 3.

Whitney emphasizes that “work” is required if a person wants to be transformed by the Holy Spirit.⁵⁰ Foster discusses what he calls “mechanics” because many people do not have any idea on how to go about practicing the spiritual disciplines. The mechanics, however, cannot be counted on to change the heart. The small men’s group can be most effective and helpful with one another to study God’s word, and amid that assembly, transformation takes place in their hearts by the power of the Holy Spirit. Men coming together sincerely, no matter what level of education each possesses, making a “covenant together” to build up one another will result in “spiritual maturity.”⁵¹ This character transformation comes about because of the Holy Spirit in an individual’s life. The new Christian then starts their new life according to what Paul wrote which says, “Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience...” (Col 3:12). The life of the new believer in Christ has these qualities lived out daily in their lives. Walk worthy is the trigger term for putting off the old life and in turn walking a life that is commendable of a true follower of Christ.⁵² The men of Freedom Fellowship just like the believers in Colossians will live a holy lifestyle and live up to what they are in Christ.

Spiritual Life

Character transformation works when a person lives a spiritual life, which means living moment by moment through God’s perspective.⁵³ In his letter to the Galatians, Paul says, “until Christ is formed in you” (4:19). When a baby forms in the mother’s womb, there is anguish and

⁵⁰ Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for The Christian Life*, 45.

⁵¹ Rynsburger and Lamport, "All the Rage: How Small Groups Are Really Educating Christian adults Part 1," 116+.

⁵² Wolfe, *The Universal Disciple*, 6.

⁵³ Ortberg, *The Life that You’ve Always Wanted*, 144.

pain; likewise, suffering happens when the person who has the spirit formed in the believer. The new believer is in anguish and pain because transformation is taking place in their lives. The new believer struggles with the old sinful life and starts taking on the character of a new creation. People who want to grow in their spiritual lives must decide to obey God with the information they have received and then either commit to the spiritual life or reject it. Leslie Scanlon says it well when she writes about how important it is for those in the group to “take steps toward one another and God that is intentional.”⁵⁴ The men’s group needs to be deliberate about the reason for coming together to live out the spiritual life that will have meaning and purpose for God. The men will grow in their relationship with God as well as with one another. The spiritual life for the men’s group, will be successful, when the participants turn to the scriptures, and then submit to the Holy Spirit.⁵⁵ When a group of men comes together to read and study the scriptures, they will build relationships with God and with one another. The church needs to support a relational environment where spiritual growth can occur among the men of Freedom Fellowship Church and true discipleship lives out through love and care.⁵⁶ True believers are supposed to do the Christian life together where they will grow spiritually mature.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Leslie Scanlon. "Ancient & New: PRESBYTERIANS AND SPIRITUAL PRACTICES," Presbyterian Outlook (Jan 09, 2017): 12, <http://ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/docview/1939739406?accountid=12085>.

⁵⁵ Adam P. McClendon, *Paul’s Spirituality in Galatians: A Critique of Contemporary Christian Spiritualities* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2015), Kindle, 23.

⁵⁶ William James Putnam, *Real Life Discipleship: Building Churches that make Disciples* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2010), Kindle, 626.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 689.

Inward Disciplines

The inward disciplines described are those practices of the spiritual life that work through reflecting on one's being, thoughts, and feelings. Four inward disciplines are meditation, prayer, fasting, and study.⁵⁸

Meditation

Meditation is a spiritual discipline that, practiced over time, allows for individual reflection on God's Word. Don Whitney emphasizes the importance of scripture memory for meditating anytime and anywhere.⁵⁹ John Ortberg suggests that it is essential to "immerse yourself in a short passage of Scripture—perhaps a few verses. Read it slowly."⁶⁰ In his second letter to Timothy, Paul writes, "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work" (2 Tim 3:16-17). God's Word is breathed out through His Holy Spirit and has as its purpose to "train, equip, and complete." Building a habit of meditation creates a rhythm that enhances one's daily spiritual life. David C. Mathis writes, "Fashion rhythms that help you revolve around having God's incarnate Word, by God's gospel word, through God's written word."⁶¹ Meditating on God's Word builds into a person's life, a tempo that is more than just a tradition, but instead of a deviation from the norm. Meditation for the men's group will be the new normal as the participants are transformed into what God desires in their lives. The Psalmist speaks about the one who is "happy," saying, "but his delight is in the

⁵⁸ Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 12.

⁵⁹ Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for The Christian Life*, 41.

⁶⁰ John Ortberg, *The Life that You've Always Wanted*, 2791.

⁶¹ David C. Mathis, *Habits of Grace: Enjoying Jesus through the Spiritual Discipline* (Wheaton: Crossway: 2016), Kindle, 40.

law of the LORD, AND on his law, he meditates day and night” (Psalm 1:1-2). The writer of the Psalm is speaking of developing a habit of walking, sitting, and meditating. Meditating on God’s Word will help the men’s group to follow His Word day and night; this becomes more than a duty, but a calling of God on a person’s way of life.

Prayer

Prayer is a spiritual discipline that has been effective in educating the men of the church and, in turn, fulfilled the purpose of addressing the problem. The men of Freedom Fellowship Church needed to learn to pray with discipline through practice. Foster emphasizes the importance of prayer as a valid spiritual discipline and a way that God can speak deep within a person’s spirit. Foster wrote that it is important to realize his contribution to this movement and how it has influenced many in the spiritual disciplines.⁶² Foster’s writing is essential to readers because he has emphasized the importance of the spiritual disciplines to readers and students alike. Willard,⁶³ along with Whitney,⁶⁴ speaks about how prayer, means speaking to God, which will help the men to receive instruction on this spiritual discipline. Mentoring will be a good practice to create a relationship with the men and help them feel more confident about learning to go to God with their prayers and concerns. Prayer could be a form of meditating. Meditating is done in silence by oneself. Matthew 6:6 speaks about “going into your room and shutting the door and pray to the Father in secret.” Meditation is an activity practiced alone, but prayer is an activity that can be both solitary and corporate. Prayer can and should happen during meditation along with Bible study.

⁶² Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 30.

⁶³ Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of The Disciplines*, 184.

⁶⁴ Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for The Christian Life*, 80.

For the men of the church, praying together has become an essential spiritual discipline; this is where it took the cooperation of the group members to arrange their schedules in such a manner that the men could meet. During this time, it is helpful to ask for prayers for one another as well as praying together.⁶⁵ Luke 11:11 records how the disciples asked Jesus to show them how to pray communally; this became a teaching point for the disciples as shown where Luke again records in Acts 1:14 and 2:42 “all devoted themselves to prayer.” Prayer is a crucial part of spiritual growth, and God wants to make sure that his followers view this as a primary activity of their spiritual lives. According to Adele Calhoun, “Right discernment arises out of a relationship with God in prayer. Prayer founded on the reality of the Holy Spirit’s presence within us. Jesus makes it clear that the Holy Spirit is our Counselor and Guide into God’s will and ways.”⁶⁶ Connecting through prayer to the Holy Spirit in a typical method provided for the men’s group a special bonding with one another as well as God.

Fasting

Fasting is one of the inward spiritual disciplines that have the same similarity of abstaining from food for growing spiritually. Mathis says fasting’s goal is for the person to withdraw from eating a meal and instead to focus on God through reading the Bible, spending time in prayer, and practicing other disciplines. Mathis emphasizes that if the accent is on abstinence and a duty to perform, it will take only an iron will to accomplish this discipline.⁶⁷ Fasting should cause a person’s emotions to flow over with joy, not an obligation. Mathis

⁶⁵ David C. Mathis, *Habits of Grace*, 108.

⁶⁶ Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*, 100.

⁶⁷ Mathis, *Habits of Grace*, 117.

explains that fasting is for those who want more of God through desperation due to living in a fallen world, for those who want more of God through desperation due to living in a fallen world, fasting channels significantly and expresses the believer's love for Him.⁶⁸ Phillip Nation says that fasting does require a certain amount of "effort" and "will power" that a person is not comfortable in applying.⁶⁹ The body usually is accustomed to eating meals at designated times; fasting can cause, physical, mental, and emotional moods. Phillip Nation also points out that when a person participates in fasting, he or she should engage in prayer. Prayer helps Christ-followers to grow closer to God instead of just participating in dieting.⁷⁰ Whitney offers that fasting is a "radical" method of denying the physical body and focusing solely on God.⁷¹ Fasting is voluntary for believing Christians. The Gospel of Matthew records Jesus teaching about fasting: "And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their face that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you; they have received their reward. However, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face" (Matt 6:16-17). Jesus expected His followers to adhere to this discipline in their spiritual growth. The reward is that only God can see people's hearts in secret when they fast. Fasting, which is a physical hardship, should not be detected by anyone.

Study

"Study" is another spiritual discipline that has become effective in educating the men of the church. Francis Chan emphasizes studying the scriptures as far back as the book of Genesis,

⁶⁸ Mathis, *Habits of Grace*, 117.

⁶⁹ Phillip Nation, *Habits for our Holiness: How the Spiritual Disciplines Grow Us up, Draw Us Together, and Send Us Out* (Chicago: Moody Pub, 2016), Kindle, 85.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for The Christian Life*, 192.

to help the person learn the fundamental truths of how the Holy Spirit was active and present in the lives of the first believers.⁷² In a book written by Welch, he writes about how, for example studying Galatians 5:22-23 provides an “effective set of tools” for the reader to not only gain knowledge, but also for a men’s group to apply in relationships with one another as well as with families and other friends.⁷³ The men’s group gatherings have offered a safe place for the men to discuss their new findings in an individual approach that was supportive as well as nurturing.

The writer wanted to offer to the men of the church an inductive method of studying the scriptures. David R. Bauer and Robert A. Traina wrote a book in 2011 entitled *Inductive Bible Study: A Comprehensive Guide to the Practice of Hermeneutics*. They comment in their book, “The importance of adopting an inductive approach to the study of the Bible is based on the principle of suitability, which stands at the center of the very notion of method.”⁷⁴ They go on to say further, “Induction best suits the nature of the Bible, which stands outside of ourselves and has its own message to speak to us, a message that has its basis in, and emerges out of, its own social, linguistic, and historical context.”⁷⁵ The important part for the men to learn from the Inductive study method is to let the scriptures speak for themselves. The authors go on later to state, “one who has this inductive spirit is willing to acknowledge one’s own fallibility and to begin any interpretation with the statement, ‘I may be wrong, but this is my understanding and the evidential reasons for it.’”⁷⁶ The writer wanted to help the men to learn to study the Bible

⁷² Francis Chan, *Forgotten God. Reversing our Tragic Neglect of the Holy Spirit* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2009), Kindle, 596-599.

⁷³ Marshall Welch, “*Manifestation of the Spirit*,” 62.

⁷⁴ David R. Bauer, and Robert A. Traina, *Inductive Bible Study: A Comprehensive Guide to the Practice of Hermeneutics* (Baker Pub: Grand Rapids, 2011), Kindle, 467.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 503.

with the Spirit of God guiding them, but to also realize that they are imperfect and may have to change their mind on an interpretation at a later date.

Outward Disciplines

The discussion now turns to the outward disciplines, which are evident and visible. The outward disciplines are fellowship, submission, and service. Richard Foster speaks about how the inward self can become trapped by feelings and emotions that control the actions of a person because they do not have the “divine” directing their lives.⁷⁷ The outward disciplines, when practiced in the believer’s life, with Christ in the center of the person’s life and not themselves.

Fellowship

Fellowship has become the means of the men’s group to build brotherhood as well as the community. Fellowship allowed the group to cooperate by coming together to be in partnership while learning the spiritual disciplines. Dawson Trotman wrote about developing personalized means of accountability with this discipline that keeps them faithful.⁷⁸ Fellowship allowed the men’s group to bond with one another, which caused them to be responsible in following the disciplines. Trotman also emphasizes that men tend to be more consistent with their disciplines when they meet regularly.⁷⁹ Paul wrote to the church at Rome, “We who are strong have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to build him up” (Rom 15:1-2). Fellowship means that the men are working to serve one another and not bring pleasure to themselves. Jesus says in John 17:11b,

⁷⁷ Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 70.

⁷⁸ Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for The Christian Life*, 44.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 45.

“Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one.” Jesus prayed for a collective unity among believers with purpose, mutual love, and a complete togetherness as a mission. “A close-knit community enjoys a deep sense of interpersonal bonding. The formation of a close emotional tie between people, links their lives together.”⁸⁰ The men’s group should have as its “Group” aim to serve one another like Christ served the church, which was and still is total dedication.

Submission

The spiritual discipline of submission means that the men have surrendered to themselves and given control over to the Lord in their lives. The men’s group sensed complete transformation when they, as Nation puts it, “surrender to his love, grace, mercy, and salvation. That is the nature of submission.”⁸¹ Submission is hard, as it was for Jesus when he was in the garden of Gethsemane and was praying: “And going a little farther he fell on his face and prayed, saying, ‘My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will’” (Matt 26:39b). Matthew records that Jesus fell to his face in submission to his Father laying his life before the Father in a total posture of surrender (Matt 26:39a). Jesus had a loving covenant with his Father in heaven, and God wants the men’s group to have this experience in their lives as well. Submission has led to spiritual growth in the men’s group. Spiritual growth means for the group to align their will and freedom to God’s will and freedom, which means freely “submitting to one another out of love and reverence for Christ” (Eph 5:21). Paul wanted these new believers to submit to others according to the order established by God. Those

⁸⁰ Gordon Johnson, “Old Testament Community and Spiritual Formation” in *Foundations of Spiritual Formation, A Community Approach to Becoming Like Christ*, ed. Paul Pettit (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2008), 93.

⁸¹ Nation, *Habits for our Holiness*, Kindle, 169.

watching will realize the seriousness of the group when they become subject to one another. Godly submission is rooted in God's good and loving intentions for each one. God's kingdom, which will shape their choices, relationships, and careers, will be formed in men's groups.⁸² The men's group submitting over time to God and each another, will demonstrate godly wisdom.

Service

When the spiritual disciplines become incorporated into a person's life, then they become a mission. The spiritual disciplines became a means of grace. The "great commission" from Jesus in verse 19 of Matthew 28 says, "Go and make disciples," which is the command from the Lord. Jesus gave authority to the disciples for them to act on this commission and serve the community by His means of grace. David Mathis says that the "person will only go deep with Jesus until we start yearning to reach out."⁸³ Reading of the scriptures, prayer, and worship has only caused the men to want to share this good news with others in the church and community.

Leviticus 19:18 states that "you shall love your neighbor as yourself..." The believer is to adhere to the basic principle of the Old Testament law taught by Jesus and the Apostle Paul on how followers are supposed to treat one another. The Christian discipline of service is the way the world discovers the love of God.⁸⁴ The spiritual discipline of service shapes the person into a servant of God, who then extends this kindness to another person. Nation states, "Making disciples have the greatest of eternal implications."⁸⁵ The men's group would have long-lasting rewards for following God's direction. Nation also agrees with Mathis and Calhoun in that it

⁸² Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*, 82.

⁸³ David C. Mathis, *Habits of Grace*, 197.

⁸⁴ Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*, 145.

⁸⁵ Nation, *Habits for our Holiness*, 198, Kindle.

causes the person's relationship with Christ to be "deepened."⁸⁶ Don Whitney also says that the discipline of service should "come from within."⁸⁷ Serving from within has intrinsic rewards that are eternal.

Corporate Disciplines

The next set of spiritual disciplines is worship, confession, and guidance. Corporate means that these disciplines are within the men's group and community, which would be church membership.

Worship

Worship is a means of growing one's "affections," as Phillip Nation expresses it, to something.⁸⁸ Worship does not need to be a way of controlling one's actions but instead as an effective way of demonstrating love and respect for what God is doing and has done. Worship is a spiritual discipline that transforms one's relationship with God and asks believers to surrender their desires and will to Him.⁸⁹ The Apostle Paul calls this surrender "a spiritual act of worship" (Rom 12:1). The men's group should use worship, which also means devotion and adoration to God daily in such a way that when they are serving Him, they are worshipping Him as well.

Worship for many means singing songs in a service. In examining the act of Worship, it is more than just singing songs in a service, but also it is giving our affections to God in such a way that it communicates to Him that He is worthy of one's affection and devotion.⁹⁰ The spiritual discipline of worship means allowing God to transform the human spirit's corruption to

⁸⁶ Ibid., 199.

⁸⁷ Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for The Christian Life*, 144.

⁸⁸ Nation, *Habits for Our Holiness*, 29.

⁸⁹ Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*, 20.

⁹⁰ Nation, *Habits for Our Holiness*, 29.

godliness-back to the image of God, which is, according to Colossians 3:10, being “renewed” in knowledge.⁹¹ The discipline should have as its consequence to rekindle and refresh a “Person” when they are participating in the act of worship. The heart is the most critical part of worship. Worship comes from an attitude that communicates to God and others that the person loves God unconditionally. As Foster says, the ritual is essential, but the attitude or mindset must be the focus.⁹² Foster also points out that the study of scriptures precedes worship. “Study” helps the worshippers to know the person they are in love with and to remember all that He has done for them. Worship communicates to God that He is worthy. The author of this Psalm writes, “Worship the LORD in the splendor of holiness; tremble before him, all the earth!” (Psalm 96:9). Glory is due to His name with respect, and honor deserved because of God’s character.

Confession

Psalm 139:23-24 states, “Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me and lead me in the way everlasting!” The desire of confession to “surrender a person’s weaknesses and faults to the forgiving love of Christ and intentionally desire to embrace practices that lead to transformation.”⁹³ Surrender means to abandon a person’s values on what is right and to open up the way God wants a person to live. Confession is a declaration to God that the person wants God to examine his or her thoughts and listen to Him through the scriptures. The examination of the heart as a spiritual discipline becomes helpful to people who want to submit to the way God wants them to live.

⁹¹ Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for The Christian Life*, 56.

⁹² Richard Foster, *A Year with God: Living out the Spiritual Disciplines*, ed. by Richard Foster, compiled by Julia L. Roller, 1st ed. (New York: HarperCollins, 2009), Kindle, 95.

⁹³ Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*, 91.

John Ortberg explains that confession is not “an accounting procedure: ‘That sin was on the debit side of God’s ledger; now I have confessed it, and it got erased.’ Confession is not mechanical. It is a practice that, done wisely, will help Christians transform.”⁹⁴ Confession is not automatic, but over time this spiritual discipline becomes a ritual that is learned and then performed, allowing God to examine our hearts continually. The Psalmist requests that God “search me” or pursue my mind and heart to dig out the “wickedness” that clings to a person’s heart and pulls them down (Ps 139:23). Wickedness causes a person’s heart to be “grievous,” which means to have grief because of these thoughts. Confession allows God to put into practice by His Holy Spirit a routine of ejecting thoughts that are not His and transforming them into His thoughts, which are real and everlasting.

The men of the church learned that confession is self-disclosure and learning to practice the spiritual discipline of confession will benefit their spiritual growth. The group learned that confidentiality is essential and keeping the group small because only a few people will hear a person’s confession. Creating a safe space for sharing is vital in this discipline.⁹⁵ Welch comments that “an important component of spiritual formation is the collective power of fellowship in small groups as they incorporate the inward and corporate dimensions of spiritual formation.”⁹⁶ Sitting with a group of men reading scriptures and praying leads to confession and places the person in the path of Jesus, much like Zacchaeus did when he heard that Jesus was coming. Jesus’ presence was so much in Zacchaeus’ life that his heart changed at that moment, “And Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, “Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the

⁹⁴ John Ortberg, *The Life that You’ve Always Wanted*, 1912.

⁹⁵ Marshall Welch, “Manifestation of the Spirit,” 62.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 97.

poor” (Luke 19:8). Furthermore, if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold” (Luke 19:8). The Word of God has the power to transform a person in an instant and make them into a new person, just like Luke describes Zacchaeus. When he changed, Jesus declared that “Today salvation has come to this house...” (Luke 19:9). The gospel has the power to transform an individual “immediately.”

Guidance

According to Ortberg, it is one thing when a person speaks to God, but it is another thing to listen to Him and receive guidance from the Holy Spirit.⁹⁷ Guidance is a corporate spiritual discipline because when used, it can steer a person to the real “director or guide.”⁹⁸ Guidance comes from a spiritual director. Gordon Johnson suggests one-way to build community and accountability is to covenant with a Christian friend or members of a small group to serve as accountability partners.⁹⁹ In John 14, Jesus knew that the disciples would need guidance when they saw Him crucified. He told them they would receive a guide or “Advocate” (John 14:16). Jesus knew that the men’s group that He was leading would need the same divine presence, as also do the men in the church require. Jesus knew that the disciples would grow by the presence of His Holy Spirit, and the men of the church will have the same results.

The Apostle Paul had many gifts from God that he used in his ministry, including being a theologian, pastor, and church planter. The strategy that he used was to plant a church and then move on to another city and do the same thing. Paul would afterward send messengers and mentors back to these churches that he started, to provide them guidance and to receive reports

⁹⁷ John Ortberg, *The Life that You’ve Always Wanted*, 2045.

⁹⁸ Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline the Path to Spiritual Growth*, 160.

⁹⁹Johnson, “Old Testament Community and Spiritual Formation,” 84.

back to him on their progress. Emissaries such as Timothy would be sent by Paul to these new churches with letters of encouragement much of the time.¹⁰⁰ He writes in one letter, “Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel” (Phil 11:27). Paul wanted the new churches to have the mind of Christ, which will form them and guide them into self-fulfillment and self-improvement. The men’s group can be an encouragement to each other, serving side by side for the sake of the gospel. The men will have to practice teaching one another. “The test of all teaching is practice. Nothing should be taught which cannot be grasped in this way and used.”¹⁰¹ The men’s group needs a guide, but members must remember that their ultimate guide is Christ and not a person.

Theological Foundations

The theological foundations covered how God built a bridge in developing a passion for men, starting in the Old Testament, and continuing in the New Testament. The bridge is the conduit between God and the men of Freedom Fellowship Church. God started in the Old Testament by developing self-care principles and renewal to form the foundation of awareness and the importance of spiritual resiliency in the lives of men. Studying biblical examples found in Scripture proved profitable to the men who lead in ministry. Practicing the spiritual disciplines has positive results in preventing a person from suffering and professional disaster.

¹⁰⁰ Benjamin K. Forrest and Mark A. Lamport, "Modeling Spiritual Formation from a Distance: Paul's formation transactions with the Roman Christians," *Christian Education Journal* 10, no. 1 (2013): 110+. Gale Academic Onefile (accessed November 2, 2019), https://link-gale-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/apps/doc/A326851742/AONE?u=vic_liberty&sid=AONE&xid=1006af04.

¹⁰¹ Roland Allen, *Missionary Methods: God's Plan for Missions According to Paul* (Abbotsford, WI: Life Sentence Pub., 2017), Kindle, 154.

The theological foundations also offered valuable lessons from the New Testament that benefited the men practicing the spiritual disciplines. The principles of self-care and renewal pointed towards the importance of practicing the disciplines both individually as well as in a community. Reading God’s Word, prayer, and worship regularly serve as examples of practicing the spiritual disciplines and how they benefit men who regularly practice.

At the beginning of creation, God created both males and females as mates because God did not want them to be alone (Gen 2:18). Human beings need companionship, and God created Adam and Eve to build this relationship and to encourage one another. Christian men need a relationship with each other for support and to grow spiritually, which is what God desires. God calls for discipleship using the spiritual disciplines to grow the men of Freedom Fellowship Church spiritually. The men of the church need to be “disciple-makers to tell others who they are and what God has done in their lives.”¹⁰²

The book of Nehemiah describes a story of a man who prayed to God to look favorably upon the people of Israel and to reinstate their identity as the community of God. Nehemiah opens his book with prayer by acknowledging that there is only one God, stating, “O LORD God of heaven, the great and awesome God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments” (Neh 1:5), and then he goes on to pray in the next verse, “let your ear be attentive and your eyes open, to hear the prayer of your servant that I now pray before you day and night for the people of Israel your servants, confessing the sins of the people of Israel, which we have sinned against you. Even I and my father’s house have sinned” (Neh 1:6). Nehemiah opens with a prayer of confession, remembering the sins that were committed in the past by the Israelites. Men’s groups that build their foundation on prayer and devote

¹⁰² Jim Putman, *Real-Life Discipleship: Building Churches That Make Disciples*, 469.

considerable time to prayer will grow spiritually.¹⁰³ Freedom Fellowship Church men that regularly confess their sins and ask forgiveness before God, will and have worked well together. Turning to the scriptures and studying them helped the men learn to confess their sins, which is a spiritual discipline, and they realized that God wants to forgive them for their sins. The next verse, states, “We have acted very corruptly against you and have not kept the commandments, the statutes, and the rules that you commanded your servant Moses” (Neh 1:7). The word corrupt means that they have been dishonest. Sin has, as one of its symptoms, dishonesty, which then leads to corruption. At the end of the prayer, Nehemiah says, “O Lord, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of your servant, and to the prayer of your servants who delight to fear your name, and give success to your servant today, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man” (Neh 1:11). The word fear here is essential because it means the same in Proverbs 1:7: “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.” The reason the fear of the Lord is the beginning of both knowledge and wisdom is that moral life begins with reverence and humility before the Maker and Redeemer.¹⁰⁴ Nehemiah prayed that fear would begin with God because it would show reverence and humility towards Him.

In the New Testament, Jesus spent time with a group of men and disciplined them for approximately three years. Scripture and prayer were a significant part of His teaching to these men. In one incident in Matthew’s gospel, Jesus led these men, His disciples, to a place called Gethsemane, and He asked them to sit when He went to pray. In John 17, Jesus offered a prayer for Himself, the disciples, and the world. Matthew 26:41 states that the disciples could not follow

¹⁰³ Mark Roberts, “Nehemiah,” *Mastering the Old Testament*, vol.11, ed. Lloyd G. Ogilvie (Dallas: World Publishing, 1993), 167.

¹⁰⁴ *English Standard Version Study Bible*, (Crossway: Wheaton, IL. 2016), 1248.

Jesus' direction and fell asleep. The temptation to succumb to sleep was too much for them, and in the next verse, Jesus was arrested and led away. Later, the disciples succumbed to the temptation to deny Jesus and betray him, which is surrendering to sin. When a group of men comes together to confess their sins, they are able through the studying of scripture and prayer to receive forgiveness.

The Apostle Paul and Silas, for example, were teaching the spiritual disciplines to a young man named Timothy which is found in Acts 16. Timothy's mother was Jewish, but his father was Greek. Paul desired for Timothy to accompany him on his journey, but before this could begin, he had Timothy circumcised because of the Jews who were living there. "Paul always worked through the Jewish synagogues where possible. To have a member of his entourage be of Jewish assent and not circumcised would have hampered his effectiveness among the Jews."¹⁰⁵ Identification with the Jewish faith to reach a non-believer would not save the person. By following the ceremonial laws back then, believers were confirmed in the Christian faith because it set up a spiritual way of serving God, and because of this, the church increased in numbers.¹⁰⁶ Timothy did not want to be disobedient with Paul, his mentor. Timothy was able to identify with Paul's group. The men's group at Freedom Fellowship will want to emulate Timothy's example. Disciples of Christ who follow the scriptures identify with the Christian faith. This becomes the bridge in learning the spiritual disciplines for a brother to be disciplined by another brother, not only to observe but also to practice. Putnam calls this the "parent" to reproduce our faith in another.¹⁰⁷ Luke writes in chapter 10 that Jesus sent seventy-

¹⁰⁵ John B. Polhill, *Acts*, vol. 6 of *The New International Version: The New American Commentary: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1992), 343, Kindle.

¹⁰⁶ Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry Concise Bible Commentary*. Database © 2011 WORD search Corp. [Matthew Henry (2013). *Matthew Henry Concise*. Retrieved from <https://app.wordsearchbible.com/ch>. Ch.16, para. 1.

two followers ahead of his arrival to different towns to prepare the people for his arrival. Jesus gave them specific instructions on what to take with them and how they would minister to the people in these towns. Jesus told them to proclaim, “Peace be to this house!” (Luke 10:5).

Paul sent a letter to the Philippians and explained who Timothy was and how his service to the Lord was an example of a service-centered life.¹⁰⁸ A Christian being disciplined by another Christian should not only observe but also practice the same spiritual disciplines that they practice. Paul wanted the Philippians to know that gift of service, “Timothy’s proven worth, how as a son with a father he has served me in the gospel” (Phil 2:22). Paul wanted them to know that Timothy had a servant’s heart. Paul desired to use Timothy to demonstrate the early churches mission of being personal in nature. The spiritual disciplines, when practiced as a way of life, produce a spiritual change in a person’s life. Earlier in chapter 2, Paul writes about how “kindness” is the rule of living in Christ’s kingdom.¹⁰⁹ Comfort and love mean that the disciple, according to Paul, is “participating in the Spirit” who is causing these feelings to lead him to disciple others. Timothy demonstrated this early on in his ministry revealing how Christ was concerned for the welfare of the Philippians.

Paul is writing to the Philippians about how disciples of Christ are supposed to conduct themselves. Timothy was fortunate to be raised by a very devout Jewish mother and grandmother who had a strong commitment to the Lord and taught the Old Testament scriptures. Practicing the spiritual disciplines is a great help because, like Timothy, it causes believers to think about others instead of just themselves.

¹⁰⁷ Jim Putman, *Real-Life Discipleship*, Kindle, 469.

¹⁰⁸ English Standard Version Study Bible (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2008), 2499.

¹⁰⁹ Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry Concise Bible Commentary*. Database © 2011 WORD. Ch.2, para. 1.

True humility calls on a person to think of others' value and not themselves. Paul wrote to Timothy a second time: "I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God" (2 Tim 1:6a). Paul reminded Timothy of his spiritual gifts that God had bestowed upon him and the "laying on of my hands" (2 Tim 1:6b), which means that Paul ordained him to carry out these spiritual gifts which have been commanded by God. In the next verse, Paul says, "for God gave us a spirit not of fear but power and love and self-control" (2 Tim 1:7). The Holy Spirit is what gives the person boldness and not cowardice in facing their fears.¹¹⁰

The men of Freedom Fellowship Church, when they began to practice the spiritual disciplines, faced the same challenges that Timothy did when he started in ministry. They were timid and unsure of the skills that they possessed and whether they would be successful. At times, ministry will become too tiring, and the person will feel the lure to give up. Fear, pain, and many other emotions will drive these thoughts through the person just starting in ministry. Paul was reminding Timothy power does not come from within himself, but through the power of the Holy Spirit. Paul wanted Timothy to know and by the preservation of his letter to Timothy, the men of Freedom Fellowship believe that success in ministry does not come from skills, courage, and abilities, but instead, it comes through God's power, which is love and self-discipline. Through God's power, the new disciples living out the spiritual disciplines can be fruitful. Paul writes that being a disciple of Jesus Christ is equivalent to serving as a "good soldier" and athletes who compete "according to the rules" (2 Tim 2:3-7). Paul writes about the farmer, who after doing the work in the fields planting crops must wait patiently for the fruits. Paul urges

¹¹⁰ English Standard Version Study Bible (2008), 2562.

Timothy to have patience with sharing and teaching the Word of God to the new believer.¹¹¹

These examples that Paul offered to Timothy will help the men of Freedom Fellowship with their spiritual growth. A disciplined life calls for living by faith daily. Pleasure and denial are obstacles to spiritual growth for the disciple of Christ. God will reward the person who follows His rules for daily living, and Paul wanted Timothy to realize this truth in his ministry.

The Apostle Paul wrote, “Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things” (Phil 4:8). Paul desired the church at Philippi to fill their minds with words that inspire the worship of God and service to others. The men at the church benefited from Paul’s recommendation. Study as a spiritual discipline allows God to transform the individual’s mind through spiritual growth. As Paul wrote earlier in this letter, “for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure” (Phil 2:13). Individuals choose to cooperate with the spirit of God within them, and in turn, He stimulates the desire to follow Him. Author Adele Ahlberg Calhoun writes, “Teachability is a propensity and openness to learning from God no matter who the teacher or what the experience may be.”¹¹² People who offer themselves to teaching demonstrate what the word humility is all about. Being a lifelong learner means that practicing this spiritual discipline in a person’s life causes the Holy Spirit to open a person’s mind continually.

The spiritual discipline of fellowship was necessary for the early church when it started. Acts 2:40-47 speaks about the activities of the early church and what characteristics they displayed that made them Christians. Fellowship and the breaking of bread was an essential part

¹¹¹ The Life Recovery Bible, *New Living Translation*, 2nd ed. (Carol Stream: Tyndale House, 1998), 1560-1561.

¹¹² Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*, 82.

of their time together. When the men of the church participate in fellowship, they are also participating in the spiritual disciplines of worship, prayer, celebration, and service. The attitude of some people may be that they do not need a Christian community to participate in these activities. Acts 2:43-47 says that many “signs and wonders were being done,” which is evidence of God’s power in the life of the Christian community. Acts 2:44-45 speaks about all who believe, which is common in the Christian community. In Acts 2:46, the disciples shared in a typical meal collectively. The men of Freedom Fellowship, just as the early Christian community, can meet in various places such as the church building, online, restaurants and private homes. The atmosphere was of a celebratory nature; the disciples and men were festive. When fellowship happens, the church back then grew, and the same hopefully will happen with the men of Freedom Fellowship. The practice of the spiritual disciplines will always be essential in the vitality and growth of the church.

Theoretical Foundations

This project examined the most effective way to disciple the men of Freedom Fellowship Church of Canyon, Texas. The men were interested in learning about spirituality and teaching on the spiritual disciplines. The training had as an outcome making the men into disciples of Jesus Christ. Richard Foster wrote, “God intends the disciplines of the spiritual life to be for ordinary human beings: people who have jobs, who care for children, who must wash dishes and mow lawns.” He then says, “the disciplines are best exercised amid our daily activities.”¹¹³ The emphasis here is that people desire God’s presence. In an article Dallas Willard writes about the spiritual disciplines for spiritual formation and the restoration of the soul. Spirituality for the men of the church has become important to them in relation to discipleship. Willard argues that if the

¹¹³ Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 1.

spirituality does not find a foundation in the soul of a person, then it will “be at most a fad.”¹¹⁴

The spiritual disciplines taught at Freedom Fellowship Church will become a part of the ministry of the church, and in turn, the men will feel motivated to teach it to others. The spiritual disciplines, when practiced daily, will cause the person to have a continual presence of the Holy Spirit and, in turn, will guide the person’s thinking psychologically and theologically.¹¹⁵ Starting the day with the inward disciplines of Bible reading, meditation and worship will cause people to build a firm foundation of spirituality into their lives.

Tish Harrison Warren writes about when the foundation of spirituality begins which is baptism. She comments on God’s response when Jesus was baptized, God said “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased” (Matt 3:17). Warren writes how God showed His love toward Jesus, and in turn, the believer is to worship Him because He is worthy and full of glory.¹¹⁶ Having been clothed with Christ as it says, is when the new believer is “baptized with Christ,” they are dying to the old selves with the sin that was controlling their lives, and now once they rise out of the water, they are a new creation which is a milestone of conversion (Gal 3:27). The spiritual discipline of worshipping the Lord through baptism means that the new Christian is given a place in God’s family. New Christians entrust their lives through Jesus Christ; the people become His children. The new life for the Christian comes from baptism. Baptism means that the “old” person is a “new” person. When Paul wrote to the church at Rome, he spoke about being “baptized into Christ” (Rom 6:13). Baptism is a corporate discipline

¹¹⁴ Dallas Willard, “Spiritual Disciplines for Spiritual Formation and the Restoration of the Soul,” *Dallas Willard Articles*, (2006): accessed February 1, 2020, <http://www.dwillard.org/articles/individual/spiritual-disciplines-spiritual-formation-and-the-restoration-of-the-soul>. Para.1.

¹¹⁵ Dallas Willard, *Spirit of The Disciplines*, xi.

¹¹⁶ Trish Harrison Warren, *Liturgy of the Ordinary* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2016), 17.

whereby the Christian community celebrates the person's new birth in Christ. The pastor of Freedom Fellowship has, on occasion, invited family members (men) to baptize their family during the service. The men who have participated in baptisms are given the confidence to minister more in their families and community. God does the transforming in a person's life, which will enable them to overcome the strong sinful impulses. According to David A. deSilva, "Transformation of the individual, the community of faith, and the world itself as God's goal for His saving action."¹¹⁷

The men of Freedom Fellowship Church will have to be intentional about wanting a relationship with Jesus and practicing the spiritual disciplines as a way of life. The spiritual disciplines, when practiced by the Christian, build a rhythm that will give space to this relationship with Jesus. Acts 2:42 says that the new believers "devoted" themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to breaking of bread, and to prayer. The rhythm then was practice, relationship, experience, and then back to practice.¹¹⁸ The word *rhythm* here is vital because practicing the spiritual disciplines starts a pattern that, once begun, becomes a habit. The men must want to find a habit that, once started, will lead them into a long-lasting relationship with the Lord. The path that the person is looking for is one that will take them on a journey of spiritual truth. God is calling people into a relationship deep within their hearts. God calls the believer to study the Word of God, to learn and understand "what God has done from beginning to end" (Eccl 3:11). The gospel will transform the believers lives; God then teaches them to love Him.¹¹⁹ The believer who is continuously frustrated over not being able to come up with the

¹¹⁷ deSilva, *Transformation: the Heart of Paul's Gospel*, 5.

¹¹⁸ Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*, 17.

¹¹⁹ Nation, *Habits for Our Holiness*, 11.

definitive answer might give up on wanting to know more about God. The person may be just like the teacher in Ecclesiastes, who vented his frustrations in the book. Willpower does not answer the person's dissatisfaction over not learning all of God's secrets. Instead, Christians must learn to be patient with God and allow Him to teach them the way to act and speak.

The spiritual disciplines mean to bring glory to God and not to people. Many discipleship models concentrate on activities that build the person up, but they miss out on the most crucial part, which is teaching the person to love God. Spiritual growth leads the believers to love God "with all of their heart, soul, mind, and strength, and then the next step is to love our neighbor as ourselves. Love is the central discipline of the Christian life."¹²⁰ The spiritual formation will occur when the men of Freedom Fellowship start making the spiritual disciplines a habit of rhythm in their daily lives. Reading the Bible, prayer and worship are mental and physical activities used by God to bring the person into a closer relationship with Him. Paul warns Timothy in a letter that he should be careful not to argue about insignificant issues that pull the person down, but instead focus on spiritual fitness: "Rather train yourself for godliness" (1 Tim 4:7). Spiritual strength comes by the practice, which builds on agility. The believer should practice the spiritual disciplines like an athlete trains for a sporting event, looking forward to the reward. The person practicing the disciplines may not see results overnight, but over time, practicing them each day, the person will reap the "promises of the life and also for the life to come" (1 Tim 4:8). Training in the spiritual disciplines will strengthen the Christians' soul, and they will reap eternal benefits from these exercises. Paul wrote, "whatever one sows, they will also reap [and have] eternal life" (Gal 6:7-8). Reaping means that when the person continues to practice the spiritual disciplines, glory to God is gained that is beyond comparison.

¹²⁰ Phillip Nation, *Habits for Our Holiness*, 12.

The spiritual discipline that can help the men of Freedom Fellowship Church to “reap what one sows” is the discipline of meditation. Don Whitney says that “deep thinking on the truths and spiritual realities are uncovered when understanding, prayer, and application are applied.”¹²¹ Paul wrote these words: “Let the word of God dwell in you richly” (Col 3:16). Paul urges the church at Colossae that when one is reading God’s Word, it should be fed upon by the person’s mind in a slow process. The Holy Spirit reveals to those who meditate on God’s Word what He desires for them to receive. When the men of the church start meditating on God’s Word, they will also want to do what Paul wrote further in this verse, when he said, “singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God” (Col 3:17). God will form His Spirit in the men of the church, who realize that Christ is all and in all. The discipline of worship is a corporate discipline that, when accomplished together as a community, has a teaching purpose, which was also part of this same passage when Paul writes, “teaching and admonishing.” The men’s character will then shape into the image of God. The goal is to bring God glory.

The Psalms offer one of the best places to practice the discipline of meditation. Psalm 1:1-2 opens with the words “Blessed,” which means when a person reads the Word of God, it evokes happiness. The person does not have the desire to “sit with the wicked, sinners, or scoffers.” Instead, he finds his delight in the “law of the Lord,” on which he “meditates day and night.” The Psalmist wants readers to ponder or even whisper to themselves in search of understanding. The goal here is not just to gloss over these words like speed reading, but instead, they are to ponder these words in their hearts.¹²² Psalm 119 is another resource that will help the

¹²¹ Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for The Christian Life*, 46.

¹²² David C. Mathis, *Habits of Grace*, 57.

men of Freedom Fellowship meditate on God's Word. The Psalmist speaks "on your precepts" (vs. 15 and 78), "on your statutes" (vs. 23 and 48), and "your testimonies are my meditation" (vs. 99).

One of the essential requirements of meditation is to read with the heart. Paul writes that the people would be led by "the Father of glory" of our Lord Jesus Christ and would have "the Spirit of wisdom" revealed in their hearts (Eph 1:17). The Spirit works on Christians while reading and meditating on God's Word to give them insight into the Word of God and the saving knowledge of Him. Richard Foster speaks about just "reading the surface of the biblical text and encountering the God who divinely superintended its delivery into our hands."¹²³ Paul prayed for the new believers in Ephesus, and God wants the same blessing for those men of the church who are practicing the discipline of meditation. There is a future hope, a "glorious inheritance in the saints, and . . . immeasurable greatness of his power" working in believers (Eph 1:18-19). When the men of the church begin to read with their hearts by allowing the Holy Spirit to guide them, they will not just be reading words for a mental exercise, but instead, they will be able to see with God's eyes what He wants to reveal to them.

The other discipline that will help the men of Freedom Fellowship Church to meditate and to know God's Word is to study. In John 14:26, Jesus said to the apostles in the upper room, "He will teach you," which is the "Spirit." Jesus said that He would send a "helper," which the Father will send in my name, to teach...and help you remember all that was said." In the case of reading the Bible, God, through His helper, the Holy Spirit, is the teacher to guide the person through understanding His Word. God calls the individual to grow in the Word and "to work out your salvation with fear and trembling" (Phil 2:12). Spiritual growth will happen when the

¹²³ Foster with Helmets, *Life with God: Reading the Bible for Spiritual Formation*, 57.

believer obeys the Word of God. God will provide the person with the power to live a godly life. The transformation will come about for the men of Freedom Fellowship when they practice the discipline of study. The Holy Spirit will give them the desire to read God's Word and meditate on it "day and night." The Holy Spirit will change the person on the inside.

The spiritual disciplines have strength when they are shared and learned together. The word *together* is essential here because when the men of Freedom Fellowship Church gather, they are together, meaning that they are doing something at the same time. The group is composed collectively of men, and they participate in an activity that has mutual benefits for all in the group. While in the upper room, Jesus used the word "abide," which means to remain and then He says to the apostles, "my Word abides (remain) in you" (John 15:7). Abiding in Jesus through His Word transforms the person's mind and heart towards God. Abiding in Jesus transforms the mind into desiring what Jesus desired and, in turn, enables the person to pray words that are pleasing to Him. In the same chapter in vs. 9, Jesus uses "abide" where he says, "abide in my love." Mutual love between the men in the group will enrich their relationship with one another and cause the togetherness to grow stronger. James W. Goll writes, "The key to effective intercession is the same as the key to all of the Christian life: abiding in Jesus Christ."¹²⁴ Jesus called the apostles to go deep into the Word, and the only way to accomplish this is through His Holy Spirit. There are many study tools available to the Christian such as concordances, commentaries, and study Bibles, but here, the goal is for the believers to immerse themselves into God's Word. The men have been able to do this when they gathered regularly for encouragement and prayer time. Recording words from the men's study when they are with the group helped them to remember what was said and how to meditate on the Word of God.

¹²⁴ James W. Goll, *The Lifestyle of a Watchman* (Bloomington, Minn: Chosen Books, 2017), 33.

Listening is one of the skills necessary for reading the Word of God. One way is to read the Word through without stopping and then to go back and look over the words to see what is helpful. The next part is reflecting on what the Spirit has revealed through the reading of the Word. If a word that the reader comes across is not familiar, later, the person can go back and look it up in a concordance and look at what others have commented on the word in the passage. Psalm 42:7 says, “deep calls to deep.” Reflecting means hearing God’s voice in one’s spirit. Talking about this in the group can help people to understand what God is saying to them. Praying is the next step here. When believers meditate, they may be praying, but it is an inward spiritual discipline. Praying can be an outward and corporate discipline. The person can pray out loud as well as praying for the entire group. The final part of abiding in Christ is obeying. In John 15:12, Jesus commands the disciples to “love one another, as I have loved you.” The command to love goes back to the Old Testament, where God commanded Moses to tell the children of Israel to “love God and to love one another” as He has “loved them.” The command calls for Christians to love their neighbors as themselves, by following the example of Jesus and His love (Luke 10:27).

Chapter 3

Methodology

Intervention Design

The reason the researcher chose to use both qualitative and quantitative models in the paper was to show that a “variety of methodological approaches are needed and credible and can be especially valuable.”¹²⁵ The quantitative method was used in the questionnaire to measure responses over time. The Likert scale was used at the beginning as a Pre-Test and at the end as a Post-Test to gauge their responses. The qualitative method of gathering the data was used in the group sessions to help the participants improve their score on the Likert scale. Sensing states that “qualitative research systematically seeks answers to questions by examining various social settings and the individuals who inhabit these settings.”¹²⁶ He then goes on to say, “Qualitative research is grounded in the social world of experience and seeks to make sense of lived experience.”¹²⁷ The researcher wanted to use this type of mixed method of research because of the social nature of the participants, which is a men’s group setting.

The problem identified in chapter one called for qualitative action research to investigate and prescribe a ministry intervention, which was the group sessions. The reason the group sessions were used is to address the lack of information, education, and skills in the spiritual disciplines, which was the rationale for doing the research. The intervention was the action, which in this case was the group sessions to address the problem and fulfill the purpose of the project.

¹²⁵ Tim Sensing, *Qualitative Research*, 52.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 56.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

“The action research study is being used to help both the researcher and the collaborator’s, which are the participants to perceive, interpret, and respond to the events that are being investigated.”¹²⁸ The quantitative information gained from the survey “provides important information that will be incorporated into the study. The information will be included in the process meaning-making that is essential to action research...”¹²⁹ The strength of action research is that it accepts varied viewpoints from the stakeholders, which is the men of the church. The group sessions will help the men to come up with mutually acceptable solutions to the problem. The researcher, who is a stakeholder, was interested in enabling the men to identify the problem and take measures to resolve it. The researcher enjoys the company of the men’s group and gains knowledge and education in leading these group sessions. Socializing is enjoyable to the researcher, and it allowed for the opportunity to have a pleasant human experience.

The explanation the researcher used for focus groups was qualitative action research to provide a means of acquiring information through the group process. “Participation in research contexts also provides research facilitators with opportunities to engage in interviews and conversations that extend the pool of information available.”¹³⁰ The group sessions allowed the researcher to engage with the participants to educate them on the spiritual disciplines as well as give them time to offer their comments. Once the data was collected, the researcher was able to start identifying themes from the findings. For example, some of the themes identified might be relationships between families in the church. How interested are the participants in coming to church and participating in men’s groups? When the men took the Pre-Test and then started

¹²⁸ Ernest T Stringer *Action Research* (2014) Ch. 2, para. 2.(Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, Inc. [Liberty University Online Bookshelf].

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Ibid., Ch.4, para. 31.

participating in the group sessions, it helped the researcher to understand why some of them answered the way they did. The researcher wanted to help the participants understand why it is essential to study the spiritual disciplines and why they are significant in their lives. The time spent during the eight weeks will benefit the men “the participants” by giving them confidence to conduct ministry opportunities. It also promoted value in the ministry that God has called them into.

Relationships, as mentioned above, were an essential theme for this group. Another theme was the importance of learning the spiritual disciplines to enable them to carry out ministry opportunities. Confidence was another theme that the men worked on to feel that they had the trust, faith, and belief that what God had called them to do, they can carry out. A theme that could emerge along these same lines was additional training on a discipline that some of the men may be interested in pursuing. Some of the data collected demonstrated to the leadership of the church that a workshop would be useful to gain more information on a subject due to an experience that a participant encountered. For example, a participant becomes part of an emergency in the community and then feels a call from God to pursue this type of ministry but realizes that training and education are required. The outreach committee of the church could set up a training event that could benefit not only the participants in the church, but also the local and surrounding community. The researcher is hoping that the data collected will yield this type of information that will empower the men of the church to feel confident that they can participate in ministry opportunities when God calls them into service.

The methodology used in the research to address the problem of the men’s group at Freedom Fellowship Church in receiving training in the spiritual disciplines was qualitative, interpretive, and longitudinal. The qualitative research collected in group sessions and the

interpretive method were used during group sessions; the notes were analyzed following the focus groups. The group session was conducted for the Freedom Fellowship Church by the researcher and a recruitment script endorsed and approved by the Liberty University Internal Review Board (IRB). The research was conducted over eight weeks.

The researcher discussed the research problem and the planned intervention with the key leaders of the Freedom Fellowship Church. The principal backers were the pastor, the associate pastors, and the elders of the church. Permission from these stakeholders was secured, and the researcher started recruiting participants for the group sessions and the education program in the spiritual disciplines.

The researcher had a meeting with the pastor regarding the instruction and training on the spiritual disciplines, and the pastor felt that the intervention would accomplish the goal. The men encountered God's presence through the Holy Spirit. The pastor indicated that the spiritual disciplines have never been taught at the church. The pastor felt that there was a disparity in the men's education and training. The church exists to connect people to God, and this intervention accomplished the goal.

Twelve men were committed to participating in the training, and the researcher gathered the contact information, identified several dates and times for the first group session, and determined the date of the men's availability for the first groups through email communication. The men had two days to respond to the email. If the men did not respond, the researcher called those who did not respond to determine the dates when they were available.

The researcher explained the project to the participants on the first night of the sessions. Participants were encouraged to ask questions to help them understand why the researcher is conducting the project. The researcher explained to the contributors that the research will help

them in their ministry at the church. Their participation increased their spirituality, and in turn, they were able to help others. The group sessions were scheduled for two hours and took place in several of the homes of group members. The homes of group members were used due to the church being closed due to COVID 19. The researcher then finalized the date with the participants and secured meeting places and times in participants homes.

The first group session assessed the men's knowledge of the spiritual disciplines. The researcher inquired about their education into the spiritual disciplines. The men joined in on the discussions about specific experiences they had with the spiritual disciplines. Freedom Fellowship exists to connect people to a relationship with Jesus Christ. Jesus, when He worked with the twelve apostles, referred to them as a group. Jesus knew that working as a group, the men would encourage one another by meeting together. In their book *Wired that Way*, Littauer and Littauer tell those who take their personality inventory that they will learn about their temperament as well as the temperament of others. The interaction the men have with one another will improve their relationships with one another as well as new contacts.¹³¹ Improving relationships helped the men of the church learn to depend on God in their helping ministries. People move through the day, participating in daily routines, and interact with brothers and sisters in Christ as well as those who are not Christians. The aim was for the men of the church to follow scripture and love fellow Christians and use good behavior with others outside the church.

The group sessions began with the researcher presenting himself and reviewing the purpose of the research, the time commitment for the participating men, the planned intervention,

¹³¹ Marita Littauer and Florence Littauer, *Wired That Way*, 1.

and the projected conclusion. The researcher informed the men in the group sessions that the information from their responses in the group sessions will be transcribed and kept private.

Implementation of Intervention Design

Meetings began with an opening prayer. The first night of the group session started with a handout pre-test that asked the following questions:

1. Please provide the following information:
 - a. Name:
 - b. Marital status:
 - c. The number of children and their ages:
 - d. Employment status and the type of work you do:
 - e. How long you have been a member of the church:
 - f. Which ministries you are involved in and how long you have been involved in each:
2. What do you know about the spiritual disciplines?
3. How long do you read your Bible every week? Please circle one of the time limits in the parentheses:
(never, fewer than 15 minutes, 15 minutes, 30 minutes, 45 minutes, 60 minutes),
4. How long do you pray every week?
(never, fewer than 15 minutes, 15 minutes, 30 minutes, 45 minutes, 60 minutes)
5. How often do you attend church services?
(once a month, two times a month, three times a month, four times a month)
6. How long do you meditate every week?
(never, fewer than 15 minutes, 15 minutes, 30 minutes, 45 minutes, 60 minutes)

7. How much time each week do you spend confessing your sins?
(never, less than 15 minutes, 15 minutes, 30 minutes, 45 minutes, 60 minutes)
8. How often do you fellowship with other men in the church? (never, rarely, once a month, two times a month, three times a month, four times a month)
9. Please explain your understanding of submission.
10. Explain your understanding of guidance.
11. How often do you fast? (never, when faced with a major concern, once a month, two times a month, three times a month, four times a month)
12. Explain what you know about the spiritual life?

Once the participants filled out the questionnaire, they returned it to the researcher for data collection and analysis. The format that the group applied was as follows: receiving a handout, participating in a group session (not to last more than approximately 45 minutes), a 15-minute break, and an hour of group training with verses of Scripture to discuss.

The following was the format for the seven group sessions: Each session came with a handout. (See Appendix B). Group session questions were 45 minutes long. The questions queried were as follows, what does the word *spiritual* mean as well as what does the word *discipline* mean as well. Here were the questions: 1) What is your understanding of what it means to be spiritual? 2) What is the purpose of the spiritual disciplines? 3) What is disciplined grace? 4) What does the concept of “cheap grace” mean? 5) What are the difficulties in following a disciplined life? The participants were given a 15-minute break during each session. The second hour was a training session that lasted approximately one hour. The following scripture lessons covered include: Psalm 42 and Psalm 51. The researcher viewed these scripture passages to be important because they emphasize that believers need God in their lives. God does

not overlook His people. Psalm 51 has as its central theme “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me” (vs 10). Romans 6:5-14 and 7:13-25 discuss how a person’s life is dominated by sin, and the only way out is to “present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life...” (6:13). The participants learned from the teachings of Paul when he speaks of sin being the problem and not the law (7:13-25). Philippians 3:1-6 explains that freedom from sin causes rejoicing in the Lord. Finally, using the Lord’s strength and the “whole armor of God” from Ephesians 6:10-20. The last five minutes of all the sessions were devoted to questions, prayer, and dismissal.

The researcher wanted to assist the men’s group to help them “to live and to know what is true.”¹³² Referring to Romans 6:13, presenting yourself to God and not sin means that believers use their gifts, abilities, and bring goodness to the world. The men should desire to dedicate their body parts “as a living sacrifice” (Rom 12:1a), praying in private that they would offer themselves in service to God through their family members, friends, co-workers, and worship community. The Holy Spirit is God, and He is the giver of Life. God was the one at the beginning of creation and given to the church in fullness at Pentecost. When individuals accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, they receive the Holy Spirit into their very beings. The men’s group was and is based on building relationships, and spiritual growth will cause this to happen: “simply covenant together to be a loving and intimate community, then spiritual maturity will inevitably result.”¹³³ Power from the Holy Spirit leads the men into the Christian life. The men can use the gifts of the Spirit to edify the church and to further His Kingdom on earth.

¹³² Francis Chan, *Forgotten God*, 337-338.

¹³³ Rynsburger and Lamport, Part 1.

The second session had a handout (see Appendix B). The session opened with prayer, and then the group session, dealing with the study of the scriptures and five questions, lasting approximately 45 minutes. The following questions included: 1) Why does study more completely bring about the purpose of the spiritual disciplines? 2) How does the study of the disciplines bring about transformation? 3) How does studying the scriptures help a person with the discipline? 4) Other than the Bible, what book has had the most influence in your life? 5) How does the study produce joy? The second session emphasized the study of scripture as the foundation for following the spiritual disciplines. The training session, lasted approximately one hour, will cover the following scriptures: Proverbs 1:1-9, 23, 12, 23. Proverbs 1:7 says, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge.” The writer of the Proverbs emphasizes the words in this passage as a correct understanding of the world and oneself as beings of the loving and beautiful God, with wisdom as the acquired skill of applying the knowledge of God in a right and skillful manner. James 1:5 speaks of the believer who lacks wisdom and says that it is supplied by God, “who gives generously to all without reproach” through prayer.

Hebrews 4:11-13 asks the participants to strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience (4:11). Studying the Bible promotes living by the “Word of God,” which is “living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow . . . “

Participants need not only to learn but believe that God knows their sins, and there is salvation only in Him. God knows a person’s thoughts and intentions, and through the Word of God, it is exposed to the believer. Exposure to God happens endlessly in the lives of Christians. Timothy 3:16-17 begins with the words “All scripture,” which implicates both the Old and New Testaments of the Word of God being “breathed out by God” for the “man of God” to be

“equipped for every good work.” Scripture is sufficient in directing the believer’s life.

Colossians 3:1-17 speaks about setting Christians’ “minds on things that are above,” which are contrasted with the “things that are on the earth” (1, 2).

David R. Bauer and Robert A. Traina wrote a book a few years ago entitled *Inductive Bible Study*, which covers the whole thought and procedure of studying the Bible. In Chapter 2 of the paper the researcher discusses the “importance of an inductive approach to the study of the Bible which is based on the principle of suitability, which stands at the center of the very notion of the method.”¹³⁴ The writer wants to help the men to learn to study the Bible with the Spirit of God guiding them and to realize that they are imperfect and may have to change their minds about an interpretation at a later date. One part of the book states, “Induction best suits the nature of the Bible, which stands outside of ourselves and has its message to speak to us, a message that has its basis in, and emerges out of, its own social, linguistic, and historical context.”¹³⁵ The men learned about the method of reading and studying scripture and then letting the theme emerge from the study. As Bauer and Traina stress, it is “important that the person studying the scripture let the Word of God speak for itself instead of the person injecting their own opinion.”¹³⁶ They also point out “at a later point, one will have an opportunity to make value judgments concerning the message communicated by the text.”¹³⁷ Believers are to pursue a deeper knowledge of Christ Himself through the reading and studying of the scriptures. In Colossians 3:15, Paul records, “And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body.

¹³⁴ Bauer and Traina, *Inductive Bible Study*, Kindle, 467.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Bauer and Traina, *Inductive Bible Study*, 503.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

Moreover, be thankful.” Then in verse 16, he writes, “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.” The passages listed here encouraged the participants to engage in the scriptures constantly. The use of the spiritual disciplines helped the participants in the ministry that God has for them.

The men were offered several types of methods of studying the Bible. One was for the men to read the Bible from cover to cover in one year. Many Bibles have reading plans in front of the book to be followed daily. Another method of studying the Bible is to go online and download a reading plan and have it sent electronically as a daily reminder to read the Bible with the passages already chosen. There are many devotionals published that can offer a person an inspirational message as well as a Bible reading plan.

The intake of God’s Word, a steady diet of engaging in the Word regularly, is essential for the men of the church. Just like milk and meat are essential in a person’s natural diet, so is the intake of God’s Word.¹³⁸ The men in the church who regularly engage in the scriptures will learn that they are essential in being able to do ministry outside the walls of the church. When Paul wrote 2 Timothy 3:16-17, he told the new believers, “All Scripture... is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction...,” because he knew that scripture has authority and is useful in training. The men of the church will be able to use this vital tool, which will ultimately lead to “righteousness” (1:16).

The third session (handout, see Appendix B) opened with a prayer and the group session, which lasted approximately 45 minutes, with the discipline of meditation and the discipline of prayer. The questions that were covered: 1) What is meditation? 2) What are some responses to

¹³⁸ Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for The Christian Life*, 22.

the idea of meditation? 3) What is the difference between meditation and Christian meditation? The discipline of prayer, which will cover the following questions, including: 1) What do I say when I pray? 2) How can I view prayer as a learning process? 3) What should I do when I do not feel like praying? These two disciplines are combined in this session because they may be done together or separately. The training session will follow with scriptures for meditation and then prayer. Exodus 20:18-19; 24:15-18; 33:11 and 2 Corinthians 12:1-4 are some of the scriptures that speak about meditation. Exodus says, “do not fear for God has come to test you”; the presence of the Lord and God speaking to Moses. Meditating on these scriptures helped the participants know that God is not to be feared when they come into His presence and He speaks to them.

The scriptures for prayer include Matthew 6:5-15, which is the Lord’s prayer, and the Psalms, including chapters 51, 103, and 150. These scriptures about both meditating and prayer can be used together. Believers may want to pray these scriptures while meditating. The difference between prayer and meditation is that prayer can be done just about any time, whereas meditating is a quiet time with self-reflection, which usually means being alone. Prayer can be done alone or in a group of people. Prayer is a discipline that can be inward, outward, or corporately, whereas meditation is an inward spiritual discipline. The session concluded with final questions and a closing prayer.

The men of the church learned that prayer changes things. Ortberg speaks about the reason prayer does not come automatically to people. He feels that of “all of the spiritual disciplines,” prayer should come out of the believer without effort.¹³⁹ In Psalm 51, which is a Psalm of repentance, the person praying is asking God to have mercy on him. The Psalmist

¹³⁹ John Ortberg, *The Life that You’ve Always Wanted*, 1385.

writes, “create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me” (vs 10). The men learned to pray for one another’s sins, asking that God would have mercy upon them.

The fourth session (handout, see Appendix B) explained the discipline of fasting. The 45-minute group session discussed the following questions: How does fasting differ from going on a diet? 2) What is a “normal fast,” a “partial fast,” “absolute fast?” 3) What is most difficult for you in fasting? 4) Find something to fast from this week such as watching television, reading the newspaper, or your favorite hobby and see what you learn about yourself. The training session spent one hour on the scriptures for fasting, which included Isaiah 58:1-7. The prophet encourages the followers to make their fasting to not be false, but in truth. In verse 6, he writes, “Is this not the fast that I choose: to lose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the straps of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free...!” God calls the believers from living a dishonest life to one that calls for loosening the bonds of oppression. Daniel 10:1-14 explains how he fasted from meat, delicacies, and wine so that he could hear the vision that God was sending him. Fasting produced the vision of understanding (vs 14). In Luke 4:1-13, the writer shares the story of Jesus going on a 40-day fast. Jesus faced many temptations during this ordeal but was triumphant because he knew the Word of God. Finally, in Acts 14:19-23, the elders in Lystra prayed and fasted before appointing elders to the new church. The session will end with final questions and the closing prayer.

Fasting for Freedom Fellowship Church is not new. The pastor and church leaders call for an annual fast each Fall. Fasting does require effort upon the believers who are practicing this discipline. Of all the disciplines, fasting requires the most willpower and challenges. The word *discipline* here is necessary because it is for people to discipline their wills and rebel against the

person's willpower to stop.¹⁴⁰ This is why the disciplines of prayer and meditation are so important when engaging in this discipline. While fasting, meditating, and praying, they can focus totally upon God, as pointed out in Matthew 5:6.

The fifth session (handout, see Appendix B) covered was the discipline of submission. The following group session lasted approximately 45 minutes: 1) How can the discipline of submission be abused? 2) What is freedom of submission? 3) What images come to your mind when you hear the word *submission*? 4) Why was Jesus' teaching on submission so world-shattering? 5) What does it mean to you to be in submission to God? The training session spent one hour on the scriptures for submission, which includes Mark 8:34, and discusses "denying himself." In John 12:24-26, Jesus speaks in complete terms to emphasize the point that whoever loves his life more than God cannot be Jesus' disciple; and the consequence of loving one's life is losing it (John 12:25). In contrast, Jesus says that, "whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life" (vs 25). Following Christ necessitates self-sacrifice, which ultimately comes at the cross. In Philippians 2:1-11, Paul writes about the ultimate example of true humility. Verses 5-11 are almost like a hymn, calling for the Christian to focus the mind on Christ. Paul writes about how Christ emptied Himself and made himself a servant. Galatians 2:19-21, speaks about being "crucified with Christ, and it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me." Submission calls for the believers to allow Christ to live in their lives voluntarily, which in turn will allow the believer to be sufficient for Him. Ephesians 5:21-6:9 discusses "submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ" (vs 21). God calls for those serving in the church to submit to one another, as reflected in God's example. The session culminated with final questions and a closing prayer.

¹⁴⁰ Phillip Nation, *Habits for our Holiness*, 85.

In Luke 9:23, Jesus said, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.” The spiritual disciplines instilled in the men how to be disciples. Jesus wanted His followers to realize that the first step is to submit to His authority and follow Him. Jesus is calling the believer to self-denial, but this does not mean believers are giving up their individuality. According to authors Richard Foster and Julia L. Roller, “Self-denial means that we do not have to have things our way and that our happiness does not mean we have to get things our way all of the time.”¹⁴¹ Jesus commands the disciples and the men of the church to come after Him, as He said in Luke 9:23. This is what it means to be a disciple. The believer who denies himself means he is giving up personal control of his life. In the next three verses Jesus says, “For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it” (Luke 9:24). Self-denial means that Jesus is calling believers to give up their self-centered lives against God for the sake of Christ, and in turn, they will have eternal intimacy with His Son.

James 4:7 says, “Submit yourselves therefore to God.” When the men of the church submit their lives to God, they will be humbling themselves before the Lord. Foster and Roller write, “The Lord places us in the position to be freed from double-mindedness, a worldly and competitive spirit, and a judgmental attitude towards others.”¹⁴² The second half of verse 7 says, “Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.” Then verse 8 continues, “Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you.” When the men drew near to God, they felt in their hearts the invitation from God to receive forgiveness, acceptance, renewal, and restoration, which happened inside

¹⁴¹ Foster and Roller, *A Year with God*, 293.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 301.

the believer. Love and peace will then “take the place of” these feelings in the believers. The devil will be defeated and have no choice but to leave the Christians.

The sixth session (handout, see Appendix B) covered the discipline of service. Group session questions lasted approximately 45 minutes. The questions are as follows: 1) What does the word *humility* mean to you? Also, what do you think it looks like? 2) What does the service behind the scenes look like to you? 3) What are human limitations when it comes to service? 4) What does it mean to give of yourself? 5) How do you know when to say “no?” The training session will last one hour in length and will follow the scriptures for service in Matthew 20:20-28 and 25:29-31. The writer here talks about “servants.” In John 13:1-17, the writer speaks of true humility when serving. Jesus demonstrates washing of the disciple’s feet. Jesus gave the disciples a message that would be passed down to those serving in the church. In Colossians 3:23-25, Paul emphasizes to the followers that ultimately, they “are serving the Lord Christ” (vs 24). In Romans 12:9-13, to serve means to show hospitality (vs 13). Fellow believers are to serve one another out of kindness and generosity. The session closed with final questions and a closing prayer.

The training that the men received had as one of its chief goals, to not only learn about service but also to engage in it. The story in Luke 10:25-37 is a great learning tool on what it means to serve. The story tells that a man was going down to Jericho and was robbed, beaten, and left for dead on the side of the road. Jesus was teaching a lesson to a lawyer who had asked him a question to test him. Jesus gave him the answer to “love the Lord your God” and to “love your neighbor as yourself.” The question that the lawyer asked Jesus was, “who is my neighbor” (vs 29)? Two passersby, a priest and a Levite ignored the man lying in the road, but Jesus says it was a “Samaritan” who felt remorse for the man, treated his wounds, and then took him on his

own animal to an inn. The Samaritan paid the innkeeper for two more nights lodging and asked him to take care of the victim, and if he had to stay longer, the Samaritan would be good for the rest when “he came back.” The discipline of service, coupled with the ministry of mercy, is an excellent reason for serving. The caution which the Priest and Levite used for their reason for not helping should be a warning for all those who serve in mercy ministries. Compassion identifies the Samaritan. Service to a person who is contaminated, hurting, and dying, can be a challenging way of serving the Lord. The Samaritan put into action the answer to the lawyer’s question “And who is my neighbor?” and Jesus’ answer is to “love your neighbor as yourself.” Jesus did test the lawyer about who “proved to be a neighbor,” and the lawyer said, “the one who showed mercy.” In other words, the one who showed compassion.

The great service for the men of the church is to be like the Samaritan and engage in the spiritual discipline of service, not only in the church but also in the community. The question that they need to ask is, “how can I be a neighbor?” The emotion of compassion, which has love as one of its main ingredients, always leads the Christian into service. Caution is essential, but it does not have to be a barrier. The servant can be alerted to the threat, but compassion here, as the Samaritan demonstrated, is powerful.

The pastor of Freedom Fellowship Church desires for the men of the church to participate more in ministry leadership opportunities, which can include mercy ministry, youth ministry, praise, and worship team, as well as an outreach ministry. When new members choose to participate, they sign a commitment form and then on a Sunday morning are formally recognized and welcomed by the pastor along with the church as new members. In the *Connections* handbook for new members, they are encouraged to invest their time and talents in serving.¹⁴³

¹⁴³ Freedom Fellowship Church, *Connections*, 13.

Members are called by God to invest the treasures that God has given them and devote their time and gifts to His kingdom. The church desires for members to serve the body of Christ and to be a part of a group of individuals that want to make a difference in God's kingdom on earth. The men of the church, when they choose to "serve" will grow spiritually, build new and lasting relationships with one another, and learn to care for the needs of others. Practicing the spiritual disciplines resulted in giving the men the motivation and courage to use their gifts and talents serving the members of the church as well as the community and world. The Great Commission from Jesus in verse 19 of Matthew 28 says, "Go and make disciples," which is the command from the Lord.

The seventh session (handout, see Appendix B) covered the discipline of worship. Group sessions lasted approximately 45 minutes with the following questions: 1) How is worship an experience? 2) How does worship usher you into the divine presence of God? 3) What hinders you from worshipping God? 4) What forms of worship have been particularly meaningful for you "in your life?" 5) What are the advantages and disadvantages of Formal Worship and Informal Worship? The training session will last for one hour and will be on the scriptures for worship in John 4:19-24, 6:52-58, and 6:63. These passages on worship deal with a physical place as well as how to worship. Physical objects that are a point of reference for the worshipper are not what Jesus taught. Also, he did not mean for a person to literally eat flesh and drink his blood (vs 53). The worshipper is to feed on the Word of God, which will lead to eternal life (vs 58). Ephesians 5:18-20 speaks about not getting drunk on wine but instead worshipping in "psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs" (vs 19). Isaiah 6:1-8 conveys that worship has a lasting impact because of the image of God in His holiness. Psalm 148 is for the worshipper a hymn of

praise emphasizing the believer's constant posture towards the Lord. The session ended with final questions and a closing prayer.

The heart is the most critical part of worship. Worship comes from an attitude that communicates to God and worshippers that the person loves God unconditionally. Study helps the worshippers to know God, who they are in love with and to remember all that He has done for them. Worship communicates to God that He is worthy. Psalm 139:13-14 beautifully expresses the intentionality God used when He created each person. The Psalmist writes, "For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made." God cared for the worshipper starting in the womb. God has laid out a course for people from the moment they are conceived.

True joy will be found in the group when the men's lives are centered in Him and they are doing what He designed them to do. According to Richard Foster, "To worship is to experience reality, to touch life. It is to know, to feel, to experience the resurrected Christ amid the gathered community."¹⁴⁴ The men that serve God together will encounter God through the ministry opportunity that He has given them. Richard Averbeck says "A big part of spiritual formation is about transforming our human spirit from corruption to godliness--back to the image of God, having put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator."¹⁴⁵ The men will be able to "put off the old self...and put on the new self" (Col 3:9-10). Worshipping the Lord brings about a new change in the believer. When the men realized the redemptive gift from God through His son Jesus Christ, they desired to worship Him forever. Paul uses the words "being renewed," (3:10), which in the present tense indicates that the

¹⁴⁴ Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline the Path to Spiritual Growth*, 138.

¹⁴⁵ Richard Averbeck, "Worship and Spiritual Formation" in *Foundations of Spiritual Formation, A Community Approach to Becoming Like Christ*, ed. Paul Pettit, (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2008), 56.

transformation of Christians is an ongoing process. Giving back the gift that God has given the men will demonstrate true fulfillment has been found in Him.

Eighth and Final Session (handout, see Appendix B)

Post-test survey: (15-minutes) handout (This was given back to the researcher).

The Post-Test Survey will be given on the last night compare and contrast to the pre-test results.

1. What do you know about the spiritual disciplines now that you have spent eight weeks learning about some of them?
2. How often do you read your Bible every week? Please circle one of the time limits in the parentheses:
(never, fewer than 15 minutes, 15 minutes, 30 minutes, 45 minutes, 60 minutes)
3. How often do you pray every week?
(never, fewer than 15 minutes, 15 minutes, 30 minutes, 45 minutes, 60 minutes)
4. How often do you attend church services?
(never, once a month, two times a month, three times a month, 4 times a month)
5. How long do you meditate every week?
(never, fewer than 15 minutes, 15 minutes, 30 minutes, 45 minutes, 60 minutes)
6. How much time do you spend confessing your sins each week?
(never, less than 15 minutes, 15 minutes, 30 minutes, 45 minutes, 60 minutes)
7. How often do you fellowship with other men in the church? (never, rarely, once a month, two times a month, three times a month, four times a month)
8. Please explain your understanding of submission.
9. Explain your understanding of guidance?

10. How often do you fast? (never, when faced with a major concern, once a month, two times a month, three times a month, four times a month)
11. Explain your understanding of the spiritual life?
12. How will you teach the spiritual disciplines to other men in the church?

The final session will open with prayer and a group session and questions which will last approximately 45 to 60 minutes.

The following questions covered: 1) What is the pitfall of turning the disciplines into law? 2) What happens when a person centers on the disciplines and not Christ? 3) What is the greater good of the disciplines? 4) What happens when one discipline is elevated over another? 5) What are the fruits of the disciplines? 6) What happens when a person studies the disciplines but does not experience them? 7) What perception of your life have the disciplines helped you with? The training session will last approximately 1 to 1.5 hours. The following scriptures for the final session will be discussed, including Psalm 23. The believer is to live a disciplined life by making the Lord as his shepherd. In Deuteronomy 16:15, calls for the Christian to rejoice and be joyful altogether. According to 1 Kings 17-19, believers are to realize that God is supreme over everything, and they are to follow His Word. Acts 1-5 and 9, speaks about the “promise of the Holy Spirit” and how He will guide the believers. The believers were to share what they had with one another, and finally, Daniel 1-12 says that even in adversity, the Christian is to rely on God. The session finished with final questions and a closing prayer.

Marshall Welch writes, “Spirituality is relational. Regardless of the reasons, men experience difficulties in many relational contexts, including their relationship with God.”¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁶ Marshall Welch, *Man-Ifestation of the Spirit*, 84.

Freedom Fellowship Church desires a connection with its members to God and one another. The problem as Welch points out is that “this may be due, in part, to the fact that many traditional formats of worship and adult education have not adequately met men’s needs in this area.”¹⁴⁷ God values connection. He is a relational God who chooses to fellowship with human beings. The church is the place where believers can connect with God. People are changed when they encounter God “in their lives.” God’s presence occurs when the new believer experiences this divine meeting with Him.

Data collected will be entered on an Excel sheet using graphs and pie charts for illustrations. Data from the pre-test given the first night, as well as from the post-test given on the last night; the information was compared and contrasted to evaluate any change that took place during the eight-week training. See Chapter 4 for data collection. The type of research was qualitative and action oriented. Action research is “social research carried out by a team that encompasses professional action researchers and members of an organization, community, stakeholders, who are seeking to improve the participant’s situation.”¹⁴⁸ The men of the church (who are the stakeholders) have put a great deal of time and effort into the church, and they want to carry out the Great Commission. The men desire to improve the situation in the church by participating in ministry opportunities. The group session questionnaires will assist the group members in learning how the spiritual disciplines can give them the encouragement and confidence to do ministry for God, the church, and themselves. The qualitative action research hopefully will solve the problem that the church is facing at this time, which is the pastor’s desire

¹⁴⁷ Welch, *Man-Ifestation of the Spirit*, 84.

¹⁴⁸ Tim Sensing, *Qualitative Research*, 54.

to decentralize the ministry of the church and by having the men participate in the research, they will realize the problem for themselves and then develop a strategy to solve it.

The information was gathered in group sessions. The men had opportunities to describe their experiences and present their opinions on the present problem. Questions during the group session provided a direction on how to guide the participants in identifying the problem and come up with a viable solution. The researcher gave participants plenty of opportunities to maximize and express themselves in their own words. “The researcher set out rules and guidelines on how the participants could share their ideas. The researcher will encourage everyone to be respectful and nonjudgmental in other opinions.”¹⁴⁹

The researcher explained the procedures clearly to the group members in the first session. Handouts were given with questions to be answered by the participants. There was a clear time frame set for God values connection. All participants could express their opinions about any of the questions. The participants were encouraged to stick closely to the subject at hand. The researcher helped summarize the group members’ answers to each question as well as the entire group discussion. The researcher also asked questions of participants for clarification as well as to extend the understanding of the group’s perspective.

The researcher assessed group members’ reactions to each other’s comments. When the participants became adamant about an opinion they believed in, the researcher respectfully questioned how they had come to this answer and then encouraged others to do the same. The researcher provided a graph of what the group members were describing and analyzed their answers. Once the data was collected and analyzed, it was shared with the pastor as well as other leaders in the church.

¹⁴⁹ Ernest T Stringer, *Action Research*, Ch. 4, para. 21.

The qualitative data was evaluated and interpreted for common themes and compared to the literature review that appeared earlier in the dissertation. The study expected to find a need for education in the spiritual disciplines, which provided a benefit for the men of the church to discover opportunities to help others.

In the eight meetings, the researcher offered education in inward, outward, and corporate disciplines. During the group sessions the participants were encouraged to keep a personal journal to record findings from the two-hour weekly training. Journaling is a spiritual discipline that will allow the men to have a written account of what they are learning. According to Adele Ahlbert Calhoun, “On the pages of a journal, in the privacy of a moment, we can take tentative steps into truth and scour our feelings, hurts, ideas, and struggles before God.”¹⁵⁰ Calhoun then states, “During times of transition, travel, loss, joy, illness and decision making, journaling can provide a way of processing the hopes, fears, longings, anger, and prayers of our heart.”¹⁵¹ In Romans 8:28, Paul writes, “And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.” When the men journaled, they were able to witness how God weaved everything together “for good,” which in turn developed a closer relationship with God and also caused the connection between members of the church to be stronger for His glorification. Journaling also helped the members with prayerful ways on how to “examine their consciousness.” The examination of consciousness allows the person to “notice where God shows up in the day. By writing down questions that a person has for God in their lives, or others, can help the person stay focused on God’s internal and external movement in their lives.”¹⁵² In Psalm 16:7, David writes, “I bless the Lord who gives me counsel; in the

¹⁵⁰ Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*, 57.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

night also my heart instructs me.” Even when people are sleeping, their unconscious minds are focused on God and His presence. Journaling, which can be done with a piece of paper on a nightstand ready to record God’s presence, can reassure the person that God has not left their side, even when they are sound asleep. God will give counsel to the person in his sleep. Believers can record these encounters with God during the night and see the journey that He is taking them on.

The following draft outline for the education program follows:

- 1) Provided a handout with relevant information on the spiritual discipline topic covered with definitions and discussion questions.
- 2) Reviewed examples of how the spiritual disciplines will help the men feel confident in doing ministry.
- 3) A half-hour to forty-five-minute lecture using resources from the literature review and then discussion to followed. The next hour of the session concluded the two-hour session.

There were some participants in the group sessions who were quieter and did not share as openly as the others, but instead recorded their answers in writing. The same for those who were more vocal, but less in writing out answers. Using different methods of data collecting, offered the group the flexibility in how they participated in group sessions. The participants that seem reserved and had minimal participation required one-on-one to give them a chance to share. The answers that they came up with were so personal to them that they felt they could not share openly with group members. The group members were told that the answers were anonymous and would not be shared outside of the group session. The researcher also

¹⁵² Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*, 53.

emphasized that the meetings were based on Christian discipleship and were not intended for Christian counseling. The participants who felt a need to share about a personal issue were encouraged to set an appointment with the pastor to discuss these matters in a confidential setting. The researcher maintained a reflective journal during the entire project to look for and record any personal biases among group members. If biases were present among participants, the researcher asked the group to be respectful of other opinions and beliefs. The journaling for the researcher was just as important as what the participants were recording for themselves. Journaling is a journey that can be tracked to show the direction that God is taking the group. The researcher maintained a journal and then looked to scripture to see how God was working through the lives of the entire group, including the researcher. Some participants were not able to participate due to other obligations. There were also those who come once and decided after one meeting that they were not interested in attending anymore. Some had to drop out after starting due to emergencies, family obligations, and employment. The researcher did contact those who dropped out to encourage them to come back and finish the project and asked those who dropped out if speaking one to one would work. There were some who dropped out and the researcher contacted them and encouraged them to fill out the questionnaire and email it back. The researcher contacted the participant by phone and responded by email to the participant's responses. The researcher exhausted all possible means of encouraging the participants to stay for the duration of the project.

The pastor sent out an email to men in the church, asking them to participate. The researcher also sent an email letter encouraging men in the church to participate in the group sessions. The researcher also called men in the church that the pastor indicated would be

possibly interested in participating. Some of the ones that were contacted by the researcher indicated that they could not attend all of the group sessions but were willing to do the Bible training sessions on their own and send back answers to the questions and the scripture references. The researcher also explained the benefits of completing the sessions for themselves as well as the church. The letter that went out from the researcher stated,

The time spent investing in these next eight weeks will help a man to develop disciplines in their Christian Life that will increase their relationship with Jesus Christ. Spiritual self-care is vital for all church members and who seek a lifelong commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ. The time spent during these eight weeks will empower the men with the skills and experiences to do the ministry that God has called them too. The time spent during these eight weeks will benefit the men “the participants” in having confidence in themselves for conducting ministry opportunities. It will also promote value in the ministry that God has called them into.¹⁵³

The first group session started with participants meeting in a participant’s home and not the church. Due to a worldwide pandemic called the COVID-19, some extraordinary steps had to be implemented due to the severity of the virus. Group sessions, with no more than ten participants, had to observe social distancing of six feet or more along with participants wearing surgical masks. Some of the participants also could only participate by electronic means in what was called Zoom meetings. The pastor sent a message to men in the church who would be interested in participating in the group sessions. The researcher sent participants a personal invitation to participate in the group session either in person or by electronic means each week. There were also some that could not participate due to computer software issues. The researcher then contacted these participants by phone for responses to the questions. The records of this study were kept private. Research records were stored securely, and only the researcher had access to the records. Data collected from participants may be

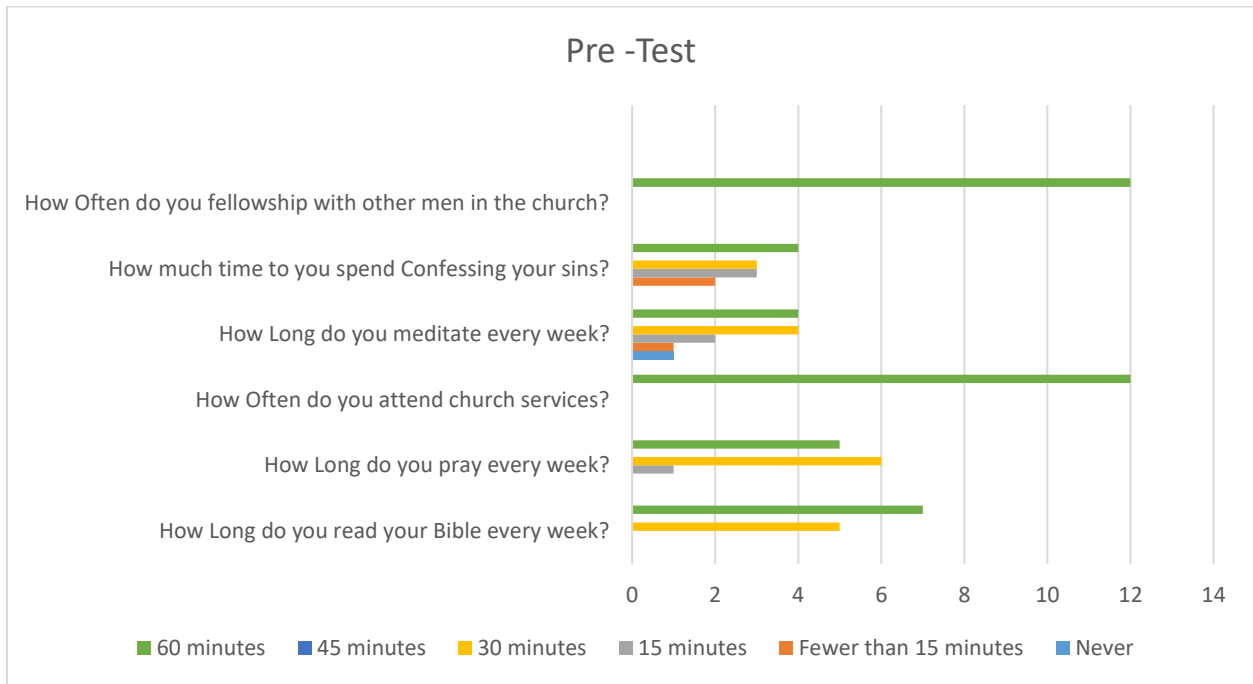
¹⁵³ Scott L. Willis, *Consent Letter to author from participants*, April 21, 2020.

shared for use in future research studies or with other researchers. If data collected from them is shared, any information that could identify them, if applicable, will be removed before the data is shared. The direct benefits participants should expect to receive from taking part in this study will be for participants to experience more of God by encouraging them to rely on Him as a close friend. Benefits to society include making the men better leaders in their church and community. Participants were compensated for participating in this study with refreshments such as water, coffee, cookies, brownies, popcorn, and tea during each session.

Chapter 4

Results

The researcher learned through the eight weeks of training in the spiritual disciplines that most of the men were lacking in education and instruction.



The raw data from the pre-test results (table 5.1 above), shows that twelve men took part in the training. Eleven men were married, and one was divorced. All the men had children ranging from adolescence to adults. The men also had employment ranging from presidents of companies, to pastor's, chaplains, security guards, painters, chicken farmers, retired, and health care workers. The men have been members of the church from three to thirty-three years. Some of the men were involved in ministries within the church, such as pastoral care, youth ministry, outreach to a local food bank, elders, leading marriage groups and men's groups, evangelism outreach, and leading Bible study groups.

As indicated above, the raw data from the pre-test demonstrated that the men of the church are involved in men's groups and attending church, which was the most prominent

disciplines indicated on the graph. The men indicated that they are in church every day of the week, as well as intentionally getting involved in men's group activities. The researcher was able to evaluate that the men in the group genuinely enjoy fellowship with other men. The post-test did not change the outcome. The group sessions that the men participated in caused several other ways that the men can fellowship with each other even when they are not face to face.

One method that was created by the president of the men's group (on his own) was a group chat room. The men's group was able to share openly and confidentially about such areas as prayer, Bible readings, family situations, and employment. Some of the men who could not make all the group sessions took up this means of participating in the group discussions. The researcher assessed that the comments shared in the chat room were helpful for their spiritual growth as well as accountability. However, the researcher realizes that nothing replaces face to face interaction, but it was a helpful alternative to not participating at all. Some of the men came together on their own in smaller groups of two to four, for more fellowship and discipleship.

The other two disciplines that the men scored high in the pre-test was Bible reading and prayer. Five of the men scored that they read their Bibles thirty minutes or more each week while seven of the men indicated that they read their Bibles 60 minutes a week. Only one participant indicated that he reads his Bible less than fifteen minutes a week. Another participant indicated that he reads his Bible more than two hours a week. Four of them indicated that they read their Bibles thirty minutes or more each week. The researcher believes that the men in this group believe that reading the Word of God is vital in their lives.

The spiritual discipline of prayer had a wide variety of answers, including five who indicated they pray sixty minutes or more each week. Six scored that they spend thirty minutes in prayer a week. Only one participant indicated that he prays fifteen minutes each week.

The disciplines of meditation and confession of sins scored the lowest of the raw data. The discipline of meditation scored from never to sixty minutes. One of the participants that scored never is involved in professional ministry. He just indicated that he had never taken the time to participate in this spiritual activity for himself. One participant indicated that he meditated less than fifteen minutes, and two indicated that they meditate fifteen minutes a week. Four indicated that they meditate thirty minutes a day each week, and four indicated that they meditate sixty minutes a week. When it came to the question, “How much time do you spend confessing your sins?” two scored less than fifteen minutes each week. Three each indicated that they spend fifteen and thirty minutes each week confessing their sins, and four indicated that they spend sixty minutes confessing their sins each week. One participant stated that he confesses his sin “as soon as it happens every day if needed.”

Several of the questions called for a subjective answer in the pre-test. The first one was asked of the participants, “What do you know about the Spiritual Disciplines?” The researcher received a wide variety of answers from the participants, such as “I do not know” to reading the Bible, prayer, meditation, and that they will help a person mature in knowledge. Answers that were of more detail stated, “Spiritual disciplines are vital for the growth of anyone who wants to grow as a follower of Jesus.” Another answered with, “I believe the spiritual disciplines are ‘exercises’ for our Spirit just as we have exercises for our bodies. The spiritual disciplines are habits, practices, and experiences that develop, grow, and strengthen in certain qualities of our Spirit — to build the ‘muscles’ of one’s character and expand the breadth of one’s inner life. They structure the ‘workouts’ which train the soul. Some spiritual disciplines are personal; inward exercises practiced alone; others require interpersonal relationships and practiced in the community.” Another participant answered, “These are the actions and attitudes of our faith that

are given by God to assist us in living a righteous and holy life. Such disciplines include worship (private and corporate); praise; thanksgiving; prayer, scripture reading, study, tithing, service, and fasting.” The last participant wrote this answer, “My definition of the spiritual disciplines: they are practices or actions that Christ-followers undertake to deepen their relationship with God, and to promote spiritual growth.” The keywords that the researcher assessed in this answer are practices and actions. The practices of the spiritual discipline observed, and the actions, are the movements or activities in which the person participates, and the participants will gain. The spiritual disciplines require practicing and actions if achieved in a person’s spiritual growth.

The next question was, “Please explain your understanding of submission.” The participants answered accordingly: “God is the ultimate authority over all things, and thus being a follower requires full submission to His Lordship and the full council to His Word. Jesus calls followers to submit to one another out of love.” Another man answered by stating, “Submission to God is the foundation of Christian faith, life, and discipline.” Another participant stated that, “For me I am willing to defer to God in all areas of my life – seeking God’s understanding of life and how it should be lived as revealed in His Word and working to align my life with God’s Word.” One more answered by stating, “Submission is simply allowing for the authority of God to speak into your life, and this starts with surrendering yourself to God’s authority and continues in allowing other believers to hold you accountable, and to speak wisdom to you. Submission requires obedience, and a letting go of selfishness.”

The next question on the spiritual disciplines was, “Explain your understanding about guidance.” One answer stated, “Spiritual guidance is the process and experience of receiving wisdom and direction from God. Jesus promised that He would send the Holy Spirit, who would lead us into all truth. Through regular Bible reading, prayer and meditation, our circumstances,

and godly advice from friends and family, God is constantly guiding us through the Holy Spirit.” The next participant answered by stating, “For me, spiritual guidance means being open and faithful to the leading of God’s Word and His Holy Spirit and being open to the guidance of the church and pastoral authority, as well as those fellow-believers God has placed in my life for support and accountability.” One participant had no answer to this question.

The next question was, “Explain what you know about the spiritual life.” One participant stated, “God created humanity to be first and foremost spiritual beings. That means everything in our lives has direct or indirect spiritual implications. We are to see all aspects through the lens of God.” He then went on to say, “We have a spirit, body, and soul.” We clearly understand the body, but not the spirit or soul. However, a healthy spirit helps the body. The healthy spirit comes from spiritual disciplines. The next participant stated, “Being led by the Holy Spirit is to acknowledge God’s Lordship over my life.” Another participant said, “I also want to pray in the Spirit on all occasions.” Then another participant stated, “I try to renew myself in the Holy Spirit according to Romans 12:2 and to return to the way I was when I first came to know the Lord as Savior and received the gift of the Holy Spirit.” A spiritual life seeks to be aware of the Holy Spirit and the leading of God, while incorporating the teachings of God’s Word into body, mind, spirit, and relationships.

The “Implementation of the Intervention Design” discussed back in Chapter 3, began smoothly. After taking the pre-test exam, the group was led through the first session, which was learning about what it meant to be “spiritual.” During the first session, the men received instruction from the researcher on what it means to be spiritual. The researcher had to first explain to the group members what the word discipline meant when joined with the word spiritual. Many of them thought the word discipline meant to correct, punish, or exercise. They

did not realize that discipline, in this case, referred to a field of study. Once the men realized this, the “aha” moment came out in many of them, and they were not as intimidated with the word. The scripture that came to the mind of the researcher was 1 Corinthians 10:4, “for they drank from the same spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ.” The Apostle Paul was referring to the Israelites that wandered in the desert for 40 years. Moreover, the water that came from the rock was Christ. The rock followed the Israelites throughout their wanderings. Christ in pure form was with them throughout their journey in the desert. One of the participants shared during the session that “bringing the individual into the abundance of the Kingdom of God is good, and He intends to fill us with His goodness which becomes the good life.”

One of the questions discussed was, “What is the meaning of ‘cheap grace?’” One of the participants gave an answer by stating, “Once I am saved, I do not have to do anything to be a Christian for the remainder of my life.” The participant then stated, “Cheap grace is where a person only calls themselves a believer as a title but does not live it out in their daily lives.” Richard Foster writes about Jesus desiring his disciples to not “shy away from more demanding calls to obedience.”¹⁵⁴ Continued growth as a Christian should be lived in full surrender and submission to God and walking daily in His presence. “Leadership is a discipline because it demands effort and focus. But it also is a discipline because it requires effort in our relationships.”¹⁵⁵ The participants realized that to grow in Christian leadership, they must submit themselves to growing as a disciple of Jesus Christ. Discipleship calls for sacrifice of a person’s self to Jesus Christ, which is expensive and valuable. The leadership (elders) realizes they must be devoted to serving Christ and His church.

¹⁵⁴ Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 47.

¹⁵⁵ Phillip Nation, *Habits for Our Holiness*, 184.

Another question discussed was, “What are the difficulties of following a disciplined life?” The answer was not making the disciplines into a rigid bunch of rules or laws. When a person abuses the disciplines, they can be used to manipulate and control people almost in a way that makes them feel like a prisoner. The spiritual walk should be a blessing and not a curse, and not an attempt to manage other people’s lives.

After a short break, the men were led in a review of scripture lessons that support the need for learning the spiritual disciplines. The scripture that seemed to get the most discussion from the group was Romans 6:5-14 and 7:13-25. The discussion in Romans 6 involves Paul writing about being “dead to sin and alive to God.” One of the participants commented by stating, “The old sinner man inside of me is strong, yet Christ inside me is strong in the Holy Spirit, making the spiritual man in myself stronger.” The meaning goes back to Adam McClendon’s statement as it relates to Galatians 2:20: “It becomes more apparent that those who express faith in Christ are given the empowering presence of Christ in their life, utilizing His Spirit to live out a life of faith.”¹⁵⁶ In Romans 6:8, Paul writes, “Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with Him.” The power of sin is broken in the new believer for their old self was crucified. McClendon then goes on to state further, “They are, then, fully equipped for Christian living at the moment of salvation but need to grow in awareness of and submission to the presence of the Spirit of Christ within them.”¹⁵⁷ Paul, in Romans 7:13-25, argues that the blame lies with sin, not law. Through the law of sin in all its repulsiveness, the law is upheld as good. The meaning goes back to the answer from the participant, where he stated, “Christ inside me is strong in the Holy Spirit.” Christ, who lives in

¹⁵⁶ McClendon, *Paul’s Spirituality in Galatians*, 1568.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

the person, now directs and empowers all that he does, which comes from what Paul wrote that “the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God” (Gal 2:20c).

The next scripture lesson discussed was Philippians 3:1-6, which examines “righteousness through faith in Christ.” The words that the participants identified were beware, be on alert, be cautious, watch for evil workers, ungodly teaching, untruths, and actions/attitudes. The participants stated, “I should not trust my accomplishments and/or achievements. I should not trust in my flesh. I need to yield to being filled continuously with God’s Holy Spirit.” Paul’s opening sentence in the letter to Philippi in chapter 3, verse 1, states, “Finally my brothers, rejoice in the Lord.” We are to celebrate our relationship with Jesus in our lives. In verse 3c, he writes, “glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh...” We are to have nothing outside of Christ in our lives, and the practice of the disciplines will reinforce this behavior.

The final scripture lesson discussed, which goes back to addressing the problem stated in this paper is, “The men of Freedom Fellowship Church in Canyon, Texas, do not have adequate training in the spiritual disciplines. Training in the spiritual disciplines would offer to the men in the church the proper leadership instruction that would give them the tools necessary to accomplish this goal.” If the men of the church receive training in the spiritual disciplines, they will be able to utilize them in their daily lives, which is the thesis of the paper. When the researcher offered this scripture, the men understood the intended goal behind the lessons. In 2 Timothy 2:2, Paul writes that “what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also.” The reason Freedom Fellowship Church exists is that people need God. The church desires to connect people to God through His presence and His word.¹⁵⁸ The purpose is to help the men of the church learn to depend on God

¹⁵⁸ Freedom Fellowship Church, *Connections*, 2.

in the helping ministry. The church offers several ministries opportunities for the men to engage including Freedom House and visitation ministry. Freedom House, which gives out clothing and other household needs to citizens in the community would be a great place for the men to engage in the helping ministry. The Associate Pastor who resigned earlier in the year was tasked with visitation ministry. Several of these men can now step up and participate in this ministry of the church. One might be the participant who is homebound and cannot attend church due to being blind. Several of the men hopefully feel called to reach out to this participant to help with any needs he may have. Since this person is a Christian, the men that visit him could also have some individual or small group time with him to study and pray together. He is knowledgeable about the scriptures and the church and would enjoy sharing as well as learning. Several of the men have the potential to become elders in the church. The study of the spiritual disciplines will help them discover and equip them to be effective leaders in the church. The transformation of the men of the Freedom Fellowship Church is the goal of practicing spiritual disciplines. The spiritual disciplines have a goal of forming them into the image of God. The goal will be for the men of Freedom Fellowship to be like Paul when he directed young Timothy, which was to pass on the gospel to faithful men in the church who will, in turn, instruct others so that the gospel is protected for coming generations.

The second group session was on the spiritual discipline of study. The researcher shared different methods of studying the Bible involving reading it through in one year and following the directions offered in most Bibles. The researcher also encouraged the group to look at daily devotions that offered a Bible reading plan. One question discussed during the session was, “Why does study more completely bring about the purpose of the Spiritual Disciplines? Several of the participants shared that study causes a person to go deeper into the scriptures. Another

participant said that studying the scriptures has caused him to grow in a deeper relationship with God. The next question asked was, “How does the discipline of study bring about transformation? The participants answered, “Study will allow God to transform our lives.” The next question was, “How does studying scriptures help the person with the disciplines? One of the participants indicated that “the more I study, it seems the less I know.” The researcher asked the group why that could be, and some said, “Because there are more answers than the Christian realizes, which means they did not know as much as they thought.” Another question asked was, “Other than the Bible, what book has had the most influence in your life?” One individual indicated he had read an autobiography of Theodore Roosevelt, and he enjoyed it. Another one shared that he had read the autobiographies of several athletic coaches, including Tony Dungy.

Other scriptures that were studied included Proverbs 1:1-9. The topics discussed involved learning “wisdom and instruction,” improved understanding about God, and not being taken in by the world. James 1:5 discussed that lacking wisdom means learning from God and His wisdom and not our own. The next scripture that took on many discussions was 2 Timothy 3:16-17: “All scripture is breathed out by God” and can be used to train and equip us with His Holy scriptures. Paul stresses to his followers the authoritativeness of scripture, which means when the person reads it, they can rely on it for “teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.”

The writer assisted the men in learning to study the Bible with the Spirit of God guiding them and helped them realize that they are imperfect and may have to change their minds about an interpretation at a later date. Some of the men were unsure about this at first, but the researcher was able to help them realize that they should be open to the guidance of the Holy Spirit each time they read scripture; God may reveal a truth not realized when they last read this

portion of scripture. The researcher emphasized that the group should allow the scriptures to speak for themselves before making a judgment call. Bauer and Traina spoke about this when they stated, “Induction best suits the nature of the Bible, which stands outside of ourselves and has its message to speak to us, a message that has its basis in, and emerges out of, its own social, linguistic, and historical context.”¹⁵⁹ The men were able to learn about the method of reading and to study the scriptures and then emerge from the study with a new perspective. The researcher wrote that once the participants start studying the scriptures, they will grow a more in-depth knowledge of Christ Himself through the reading and studying of the scriptures. The men acknowledged this during the group session, as mentioned above in the question, “Why does study more completely bring about the purpose of the Spiritual Discipline?”

The third group session had as a discussion two spiritual disciplines, including “meditation and prayer.” The session started with meditation, and the participants shared that the definition of meditation is “close the mind off to anything that would interfere with thinking of God.” Another answer to meditation was that it involves “deep thought.” The next question was, “What are some responses to the idea of meditation?” The answer that the participants came up with: “It is the contemplation of the spiritual and waiting to hear what God was saying to them.” Thought, reflection, and observation are essential in meditation because it will help with hearing what God is communicating to the person. The last question was, “What is the difference between eastern meditation and Christian meditation?” None of the participants had an answer to this question. The researcher offered the answer from Richard Foster: “Eastern meditation attempts to empty the mind, where Christian meditation attempts to empty the mind in order to

¹⁵⁹ Bauer and Traina, *Inductive Bible Study*, 467.

fill it.”¹⁶⁰ The men learned that there is no God with eastern meditation. The researcher received a response of “surprise” from the men’s faces. Christian meditation, as Foster points out, “leads the person to the inner wholeness necessary to give ourselves to God freely, and to the spiritual perception necessary to attack social evils.”¹⁶¹ The critical part of the discipline of meditation is that it is an inward discipline meant for the person to reflect upon God and His Word.

The second spiritual discipline was prayer. Prayer is a discipline practiced inward, outward, and corporately. The first question asked was, “What to say when I pray?” Many of them indicated they did not feel comfortable praying in a corporate setting because they felt that they did not pray as good as the pastor. The researcher encouraged them to just pray from the heart. Praying in private was most comfortable for all of them. The next question was, “How can I view prayer as a learning process?” Several of them said that they journal to be able to listen to God better. The researcher pointed out that journaling is a spiritual discipline and that it is an effective method of hearing God and being able to see their prayers. The last question was, “What should I do when I do not feel like praying?” The answer that one of the members gave and then turned into a lengthy discussion was, “where the discipline of waiting on hearing from God comes in.” Several of the men talked about continuing to journal, which would be a way of continuing to hear from the Lord. One participant who was unable to attend, spoke to the researcher on the phone and said, “Listening to the Lord prompts me into learning to wait on God.” The participant shared that he is legally blind and unable to drive or leave the house. He also shared that he was a charter member of the church and was the oldest member still at the church who was saved. The participant offered much knowledge on the scriptures as well as

¹⁶⁰ Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 15.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

sharing about being lonely and not being able to come to church. He does use his computer to watch the service. When the researcher asked the participant about getting a ride to church, he indicated he could not come due to dizzy spells and becoming nauseated quickly. The researcher, who is a chaplain, had the “aha moment” of providing pastoral care and listening empathetically. The scripture that came to mind was Matthew 25:40, “...as you did it to one of the least of these, my brothers, you did it to me.” Even though the call was discipleship oriented, the call was private, and the chaplain was able to use compassion and listening skills that he had developed over the years from pastoral care. The believer is called to care for the sheep as Jesus commanded them to take care of those in need. The researcher believes that chaplains with their skills, education, and experience, can be of valuable help to church members such as this participant who seems to be forgotten and lost from the fellowship. Prayer was offered at the end of the call that was beneficial to the participant.

In looking over the scriptures for meditation, one of the scriptures discussed was out of Exodus 24:15-18, where Moses goes up on the mountain to speak with God. The emphasis was to get away to a place with no distractions to be able to hear what God is saying. In the New Testament reading from 2 Corinthians 12:1-4, the Apostle Paul shares about a man who was “caught up to the third heaven,” which shows how a person can be in the Spirit and experience heavenly moments in their lives.

The scriptures addressed about prayer were from Matthew 6:5-15, where the disciples come to Jesus and ask him to teach them how to pray. Jesus gives them an outline for prayer and encourages them to follow this format. The participants said that they try and use this format when praying, but some never thought about the “Lord’s Prayer” as being a format. The part brought out in the session was what Jesus warned the disciples about when He said, “And when

you pray, do not heap up empty phrases...that they will be heard” (Matt 6:7). Prayers should not be mindless mechanical repetition, but instead, they should be words that flow from the heart. Paul says, “Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know how to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words” (Rom 8:26). When a believer does not know what to pray, calling on God to intervene or meditate for the Christian is the correct course of action. Psalm 51:10 was discussed at length, “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.” The renewed Spirit is God’s way of rebuilding or renewing the person’s spirit with God’s Spirit. Psalm 51 was David’s prayer for the people, which would make it a corporate prayer. God will go to the deepest level of a person’s heart to change them. The group closed in prayer. As mentioned back in chapter 3, the men can help one another learn how to pray for their sins, with assurance that God will have mercy upon them.

The fourth session covered the spiritual discipline of fasting. The first question asked was, “How does fasting differ from going on a diet? The group all said that dieting is just an activity to lose weight. Exercising and cutting back on eating is how the group defined dieting. Fasting is different because it causes a person to get closer to God. Fasting is going without food, and in the process, a person may lose weight, but that was not the goal. The real goal behind fasting is spiritual closeness with the Lord. Fasting allows a person to get direction from the Lord in their lives. The next question was, “What is a “normal fast, a partial fast, and an absolute fast?” The group struggled with this question. They understood what absolute fast was by answering going without food or water for a certain amount of days. The typical fast and partial fast had a variety of answers ranging from “not sure” to only eating certain foods. The researcher used Richard Foster’s definitions, which stated, “*normal* means abstaining from all food,

including solid, or liquid, but not from water.”¹⁶² The *partial* fast, according to Foster, is “a restriction of diet but not total abstention.”¹⁶³ The scripture lesson in Daniel 10:3 reads, “I ate no delicacies, no meat or wine entered my mouth...” The discipline here discussed by the participants was one of denying self. One participant said, “Fasting for Him is doing without food and drinks to allow God’s spiritual man to be in control and not my physical appetites controlling me.” Daniel demonstrated humility and strength in his personal life. The next question was, “What is the most difficult for you in fasting?” The answer by the participants was “being intentional.” The group also said that to fast, a Christian must be deliberate and purposeful in their actions. The key to fasting is planning it and then going through with the plan. The final question/activity proposed was to “find something to fast from this week, such as watching television, reading the newspaper, or your favorite hobby and see what you learn about yourself.” The researcher indicated he would be following up on this answer at the next group session.

The scripture lessons the participants discussed was not only Daniel 10 but also Luke 4:1-13. The fast that Jesus went through was an *absolute* fast for 40 days. The participants spoke about how it was the “Spirit” who led Jesus out into the wilderness. Jesus was able to use the time away from other people to strengthen and prepare Himself for ministry opportunities that would be coming in His life. When going through an absolute fast as Jesus experienced, it gave Him the chance to be led by God. Prayer is an essential spiritual discipline coupled with fasting as seen in Acts 14:23: “And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed.” Paul was an

¹⁶² Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 43.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 43.

advocate of “equipping the saints” (Eph 4:12-13), to strengthen the souls of the disciples. The researcher pointed out that all of the spiritual disciplines will not be successful if a believer does it with the wrong motivation and attitude. The men in the church who feel God is calling them to become an elder, should adhere to the discipline of fasting before entering this type of leadership role in the church. Preparation will be the key to success in the discipline of fasting, and when prayer is involved, then the right outcome will be experienced by the believer who engages in these disciplines. Isaiah 58:11 declares the reward for the believer who participates in the spiritual discipline of fasting for the right reasons: “And the LORD will guide you continually and satisfy your desire in scorched places and make your bones strong; and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters do not fail.” Fasting with prayer will guide the Christian through tough times.

The fifth session discussed the spiritual discipline of submission. The first question was, “How can the discipline of submission be abused?” The participants offered one response, which was “attempting to force someone other than myself to submit or better yet surrender.” A few other responses from the participants regarding submission was “being used as a doormat, false humility, and that it can also be self-abusive.” The researcher asked the participants to give an example of this, and they stated, “It would be like a person being rude or offensive about themselves.” They described it as a person who has no confidence in themselves. The next question was, “What is the freedom of submission?” The response from the participants was “not always having things the way they want them.” The researcher directed the participants to Mark 8:34, where Jesus is speaking to a crowd and the disciples, and He said, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.” Jesus was saying the person would have to reject themselves and submit to His authority to follow Him.

Another participant then stated, “I must be under God’s authority, which will then offer me protection.” The next question was, “What images come to your mind when you hear the word submission?” The participants used various words to describe submission as “yielding, peasant, degrading, and humility,” The next question that the group discussed was “Why was Jesus’ teaching on submission so world-shattering?” The scripture that the researcher led them to was John 13:1-20, where Jesus washes the feet of the disciples. That is where the words degrading, yielding, and peasant came in. The researcher asked the participant why he thought of the word “peasant,” and he said it was like a bumpkin or laborer. The act was considered degrading by the disciples, but Jesus said it was for the love of them that He was washing their feet.

Submission does call for humility, and Jesus demonstrated that for the disciples and His followers. Another participant then responded with “putting God’s will ahead of my own.” The next question also helped lead the participants in this same discussion, which was, “Why was Jesus’ teaching on submission so world-shattering?” The group answered by stating, “it is putting the least first and the first last.” Submission, as some said, reduces “pride and selfishness.” The last question was, “What does it mean to you to be in submission to God?” The answer was, “putting God’s will ahead of my own.” One of the participants used the word surrender, which means renouncing or rejecting one’s self for the sake of God’s directions in the person’s life. The scripture passage that received the most attention was Philippians 2:1-11, where Paul writes about how Jesus took “the form of a servant...becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.” The group spoke about how Jesus was in heaven with God and came down and humbled Himself on the cross in obedience to the Father. Paul then says “that at the name of Jesus, every knee should bow...every tongue will confess...that Jesus Christ is

Lord.” The submission that God wants is what Jesus did for His heavenly Father and what He wants from His followers.

The sixth session discussed the spiritual discipline of service. The first question asked of the participants was, “What does the word “humility” mean to you? Also, what do you think it looks like?” One of the participants quoted Proverbs 6:16-17a, which states, “There are six things that the LORD hates, seven which are an abomination to him: haughty eyes...” The participant here talked about the person who has a questionable character. Humility for another person means serving with confidence while to another it meant to be “teachable.” What humility looked like for another participant was to “love your neighbor as yourself.”

The next question was, “What does the service of behind the scenes look like to you?” The answer many of the participants gave was to serve where the Lord is the only witness. The next question was, “What are human limitations when it comes to service?” Answers to this question ranged from money, transportation, illness, time, and physical limitations. One of the participants commented further on this question by answering, “We all as Christians have spiritual gifts that God has given us to use in His service.” The next question was, “What does it mean to give of yourself?” The answer that seemed to get the most discussion from the participants was the word “sacrifice.” To serve God, the person sacrifices or surrenders themselves to His service. The scripture that was shared by one of the participants was Luke 10:25-37 about the Good Samaritan. The Samaritan, unlike the Levite and Priest, surrendered himself to the service of his neighbor out of a motivation of compassion instead of caution, which the other two favored. The last question in this session was, “How do you know when to say, ‘no?’” Many of the participants admitted that they struggled with this question. The

researcher assured the participants that it is permissible to say no to requests and that if done honestly, then God will accept this answer.

The scripture discussed the most was John 13:1-17, regarding Jesus washing the disciple's feet. One of the participants pointed out that the disciples only wore sandals, which meant they stepped in everything and would have made the activity of washing someone's feet very offensive, both in appearance as well as odor. In Matthew 25:40, Jesus said to the disciples in teaching, "...as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me." Jesus saw service in this situation to be a sacrifice of helping the neediest among the believers. The participants then spoke about several members in the church that could use extra help.

The seventh session was on the spiritual discipline of worship. The first question asked was, "How is worship an experience?" The researcher offered the answer from Richard Foster's *Study Guide for Celebration of Discipline* who shared the experience of worship "is something that happens."¹⁶⁴ One of the participants then pointed out for himself, worship happens when believers come together. Then another participant shared that worship must come from the "heart." In the scripture shared during the session from Colossians 3:9-10, Paul writes, "seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator." "To worship God means to ascribe the proper worth to God, to magnify His worthiness of praise, or better, to approach and address God as He is worthy."¹⁶⁵ Worshipping the Lord has the power to renew or repair the heart when it happens. The next question was, "How does worship usher you into the divine presence of God?" One of the participants commented that worship removes daily worries and concerns and

¹⁶⁴ Foster, *Study Guide for Celebration of Discipline*, 63.

¹⁶⁵ Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for The Christian Life*, 103-104.

causes “me” to focus on Christ alone. Being in the presence of God allows the person to express their feelings and emotions freely and unhindered. The next question was, “What hinders you from the worship of God? The participants all agreed that distractions of the world keep them from worshipping God. The following question was, “What forms of worship have been particularly meaningful for you in your life? Everyone agreed that music is the main form of worship for them. Since the group session on meditation and study, many of the participants realized these are methods of worshipping the Lord as well. The last question discussed was, “What are the advantages and disadvantages of formal and informal worship?” Formal worship is pre-arranged and has an order, which is the advantage. The disadvantage is that formal worship has little spontaneity. Another disadvantage is that formal worship can become too legalistic. The participants shared that the disadvantage of informal worship could be offensive to some; for example, believers laughing or crying with what seems to be no prompting. Participants were getting up out of their seats and running around the sanctuary, with no one stopping them.

The scriptures that the participants discussed the most was Psalm 148 and Isaiah 6:1-8. Psalm 148 has as its central theme, “Praise the LORD!” The participants shared about old hymns and praise songs that are meaningful to them in worship. One participant shared that singing old hymns of the church were particularly meaningful to him, especially when doing it with a group. The scripture from Isaiah 6:3, which states, “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!” Hearing these words and then coming to verse eight, which states, “And I heard the voice of the LORD saying, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then I said, Here I am! Send me.” Worshipping in this manner, motivates the person to want to serve the Lord, who took the participants back to the sixth session, which was on serving. One of the

participants pointed out that “we all as Christians have spiritual gifts to serve God.” Worship does not have to be restricted to just music. Foster goes on to state that hymns, Scripture readings, preaching, Holy Communion, and liturgy, lead a person into a worship experience. The expressions are essential because they are the means of God’s grace...”¹⁶⁶ Worship as the prophet Isaiah said, should be in a manner that is “high and lifted up” (Isaiah 6:1). Worship happens or occurs when the believer comes into God’s great holiness.

The eighth and final session had two objectives, which was to examine both the advantages and disadvantages of following the spiritual disciplines and take the post-survey test. The question in the group session was, “What is the pitfall of turning the disciplines into law? Many of the participants answered by stating that when they are required, it makes them feel like they are law or rules, but not grace. The participants indicated that following the spiritual disciplines like this would make them feel like their faith was in danger each time they violated one of these disciplines. The next question was, “What happens when a person centers on the disciplines and not Christ? This, along with the first one, made them feel like following Jesus would be difficult or almost impossible because of all the legalism that the believer can imagine when being self-manipulated into following them. The next question asked, “What is the greater good of the disciplines?” The participants indicated that following the disciplines as a means of grace will have a superior outcome when voluntarily followed.

Klaus Isler writes, “While objectively true, moral rules are not our ultimate reference point. Jesus himself is the ultimate reference point for us. We look to Jesus’ authoritative example and illustrations that present a range of ways to love God.”¹⁶⁷ Isler then goes on to

¹⁶⁶ Foster, *Study Guide for Celebration of Discipline*, 63.

¹⁶⁷ Issler, *Living into the Life of Jesus*, 158.

write, “What can we learn from Jesus’ life and words about Christian living and character formation? Jesus’ invitation is still available, “Come to me, all of you who are laboring and bearing burdens, and I will give you rest” (Matt 11:28) so that we might have life “to the full” (John 10:10).”¹⁶⁸ The participants realize that Jesus is the “One” who provides the eternal rest for their souls, and the disciplines, when followed, offers the believer “rest” and a “full life.” The next question was, “What happens when one discipline is elevated over the other?” The participants shared that they are in competition with one another. The disciplines working together in the believer’s life will grow the person spiritually. The next question was, “What are the fruits of the disciplines?” The group quickly turned to Galatians 5:22-23, which speaks about the fruits of the Spirit and following the disciplines will yield such fruits as “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control...” The disciplines, when practiced as a way of life, have the benefits of the Holy Spirit battling against sin and producing positive qualities of Godly character. One of the participants answered by stating, “It will boost my relationship with God and other believers.” The next question asked was, “What happens when a person studies the disciplines but does not experience them?” Many of the participants used words such as “hypocrisy, insincerity, double standard, and a waste of time.” Other participants stated, “If I only study the disciplines themselves, they will only produce a “dryness” to my spirit. The last question was, “What perception of your life has the disciplines helped you with?” Many of the participants stated that the disciplines, “keep Christ on the throne of my life and removing self daily, helps me yield my life to Christ, who is the center and focus of my life.”

The scriptures discussed were Deuteronomy 16:15 where God directs Moses to tell the Israelites to observe the feast of weeks which was a discipline, but as a result of following it

¹⁶⁸ Issler, *Living into the Life of Jesus*, 874-876.

“will bless you in all your produce and in all the work of your hands, so that you will be altogether joyful.” The last two words are the fruit of following the feast, which was totally and utterly jubilant. The other scripture examined was Psalm 23. The discipline here is allowing God to lead His people as a shepherd leads their sheep, providing for the demands, directing, and defending them.

In the post-test, the raw data (see below) yielded the following results, showing again that attending church and fellowshiping with other men scored a twelve. The participants were consistent with this answer and did not deviate. The next two disciplines that the men scored high and improved on was Bible reading and prayer. The men in this group believe that reading the Word of God is essential in their lives. The discipline of prayer continued to have a wide variety of answers as it did in the pre-test.

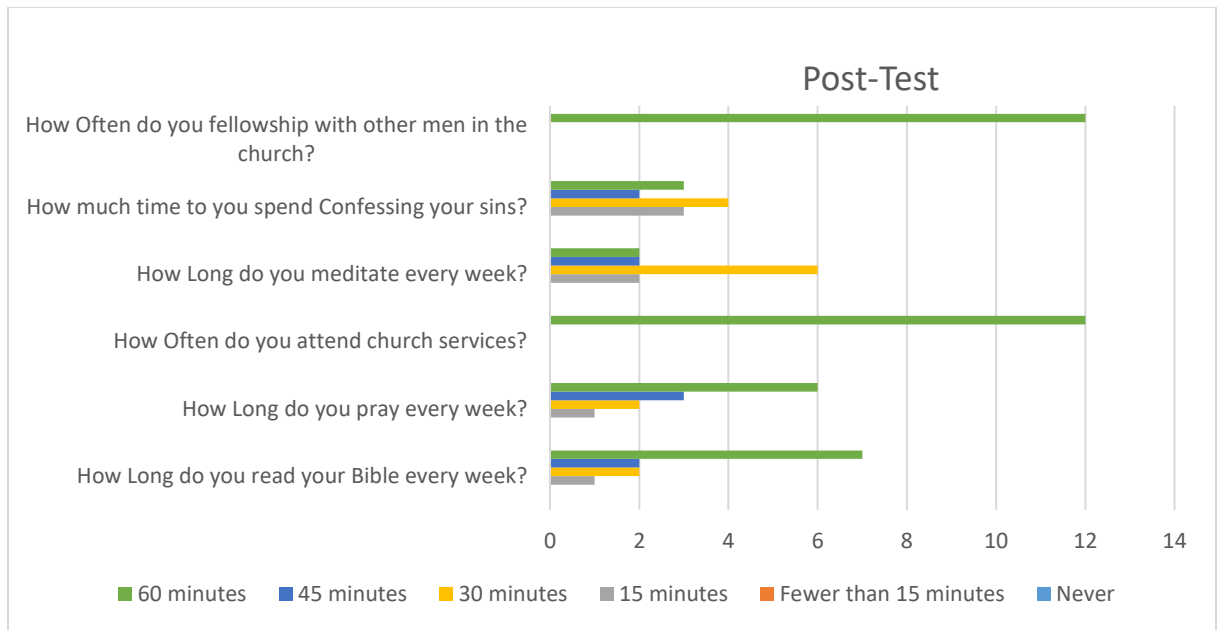
The question on fasting asked, how much do you fast each week? This answer again had a variety of answers. The researcher learned that there was not much improvement in this discipline. Many of the participants had a variety of answers ranging from four times a month, to “when faced with a major concern,” two times a month, as well as several continued to answer “never.” It should be noted that in the fourth session, which was fasting, all of them knew it was not a mode of dieting, but when it came to practice it, the majority did not do it regularly. Only a few were strong in this area. Since learning on this discipline, the group has realized the seriousness and will work on making this discipline one to participate in as a regular activity.

One question that called for a subjective answer was, “What do you know about the spiritual disciplines now that you have spent eight weeks learning about some of them?” One of the participants said they now have more of an understanding and realize the importance of practicing them as a way of life. Another person said that they are significant and brought richer

meaning in his life. On the discipline of submission, a participant answered, “yielding to God’s leadership and authority in my life.” This answer follows a similar response from the pre-test, which stated, “God is the ultimate authority over all things and thus being a follower requires full submission to His Lordship and the full council of his Word.”

On the discipline of guidance, one of the participants stated, “allowing the Holy Spirit, scriptures, and God’s peace leading my life.” One of the participants in the pre-test stated, “Jesus promised that He would send the Holy Spirit who would lead us into all truth.” Guidance for this group means Jesus is the one leading them in their lives. On the next question, which was, “Explain your understanding of the spiritual life?” One participant stated it was an “emptying of self like exhaling and being filled moment by moment with the Holy Spirit, which would be inhaling.”

The last question was, “How will you teach the spiritual disciplines to other men in the church? This question goes back to the problem statement, purpose, and thesis. The pastor desires to decentralize the ministry of the church and have others to take part in these activities. One individual said, “By example, lifestyle, communication, and listening for opportunities to share.” Another participant stated, “For me, I want to live them out for myself before I teach them to someone else, and then I can stress the importance of the Spiritual Disciplines and teach them to someone else.”



The data collected (displayed in table 5.2 above) revealed an increase in some of the disciplines. The men had many questions as well as comments about having adequate time to participate in such activities as reading their Bibles, meditation, prayer, and other disciplines. The men in the group encouraged one another by emailing and calling each other, while practicing the spiritual disciplines. Several of the men indicated they had more confidence in themselves in doing ministry.

The data showed that the men continued to answer the questions “How often do you fellowship with other men in the church as well as how often do you attend church services; all 12 of them answered four times a month. On the question of “How long do you read your Bible every week?” during the pre-test, seven said sixty minutes a week; during the post-test two of them answered forty-five minutes; two of them answered thirty minutes a week; one of them answered fifteen minutes a week. On the pre-test none of the participants answered fifteen minutes. One of the participants admitted these past months had been less due to “many obstacles in my life.” The question of “How long do you pray every week?” The post-test

showed six of the participants said sixty minutes a week, which was an increase of one from the pre-test. Three participants said forty-five minutes a week, and the pre-test showed only three for thirty minutes a week. Two said thirty minutes a week. One said 15 minutes a week on praying, which was the same for the pre-test.

On the question of “How often do you meditate every week?” there was an increase from the pre-test of six instead of just four. Two scored forty-five, thirty, and fifteen minutes a week. These scores decreased where four scored sixty, and four scored thirty. One said never and the other said fewer than fifteen minutes; both scored this time at least fifteen minutes a week. The group session that covered meditation had many responses to these questions. The answer that many of them talked about was how meditation caused them to think upon and mindfully ponder God’s Word. Meditation is strictly an inner spiritual discipline that calls for the person to listen to God only and to be alone.

The question of “How much time do you spend confessing your sins?” Four of them said thirty minutes a week, which was an increase of one from the pre-test. Three of them said they confess their sins sixty minutes a week. The pre-test showed four a week, which would mean a loss of one. Two of them scored forty-five minutes a week, whereas on the pre-test no one scored. Three of them scored fifteen minutes a week; on the pre-test two of them said fewer than fifteen minutes a week. The participants were able to increase their participation in this spiritual discipline, which will help them to grow closer to the Lord.

The researcher will show on table graphs a comparison and contrast of both the pre-test and post-test results. The tables will include Bible reading or study, praying, meditate, confession, and fasting. There is not a table for how often men fellowship and how much the men come to church since in both the pre-test and post-test all 12 scored the same.

Data Comparison and Contrast

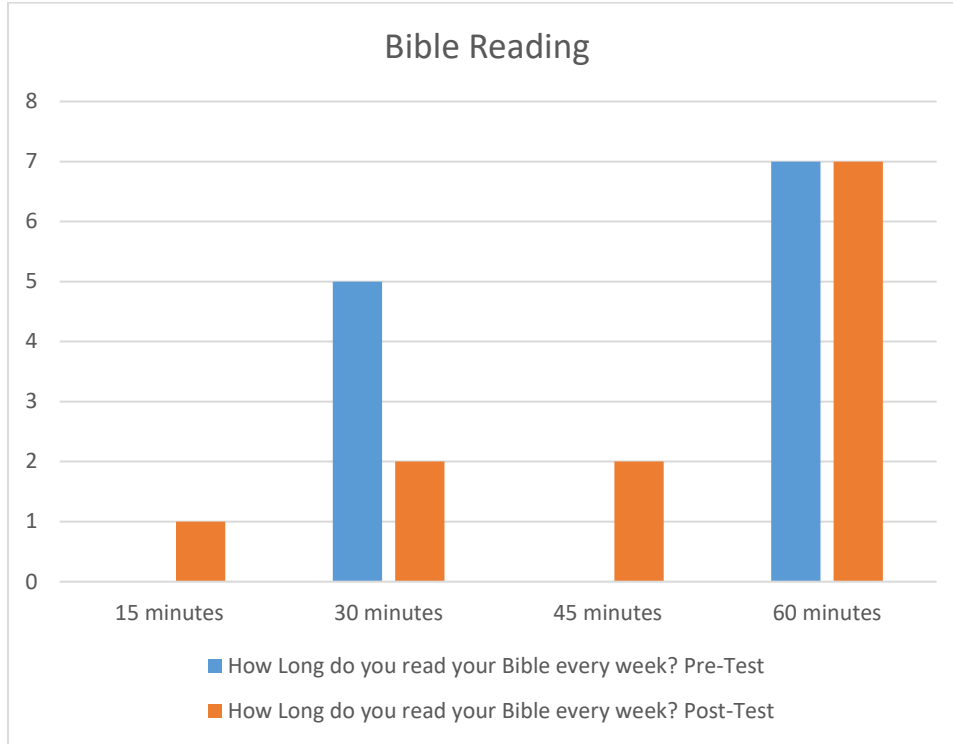


Table 5.3 above demonstrates that the pre-test (in blue) started with 30 minutes of Bible reading for 5 of the participants a week, where at the post-test (in orange), 2 of the participants read their Bibles 30 minutes a week. One participant in the post-test only read their Bible 15 minutes a week, where in the pre-test no one scored in this time frame. Two participants did increase to 45 minutes of Bible reading a week. Seven participants scored from both the pre-test and post-test 60 minutes of Bible reading a week. Two participants from the pre-test felt the need to increase their Bible reading, but unfortunately one scored 15 minutes a week in the post-test. Studying the Bible is an important spiritual discipline for the men to serve in leadership positions in the church. Some improvement was gained in the session on study, especially when two of them increased to 45 minutes, where in the pre-test none scored in this category. The participant who scored 15 minutes in the post-test scored 30 minutes in the pre-test. During the summer he indicated that he had neglected reading scripture for a few weeks due to family issues and work

demands. “Jesus' promise of "another helper" is just what we need. God the Spirit makes available to us all the resources to help us become the kind of persons who love God and serve him (2 Pet 1:3-4). Christian living is a cooperative or synergistic venture.”¹⁶⁹ The researcher believes that more Bible studies will be scheduled for the men of the church to help them increase their participation in this spiritual discipline.

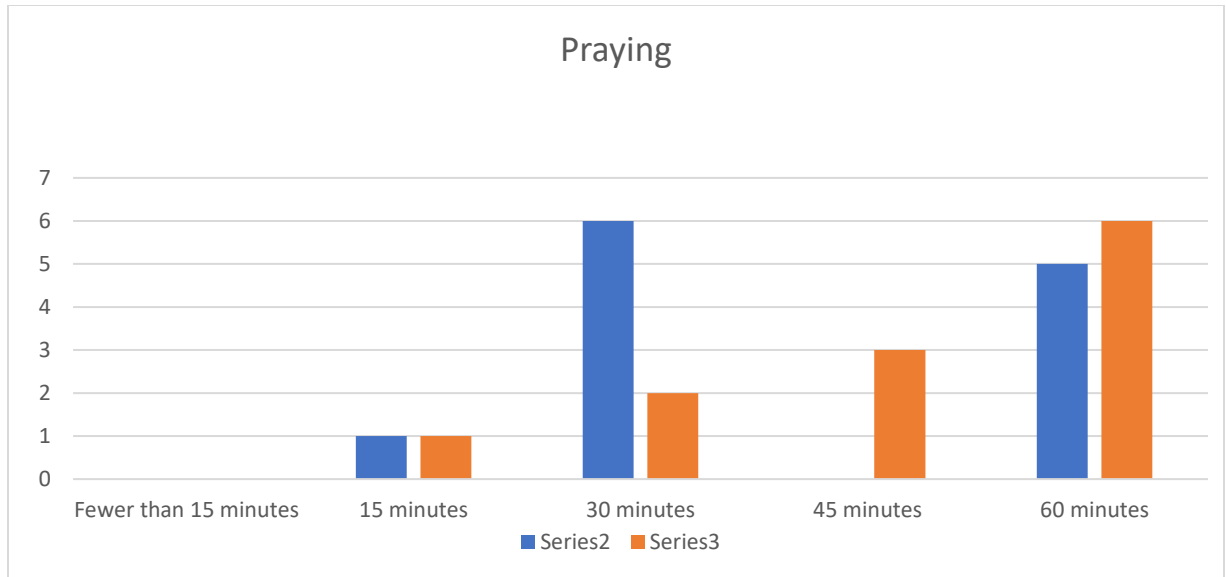


Table 5.4 above gives the pre-test (blue) results for praying 15 minutes a week, which did not change from the post-test (orange) with one participant. The question on never fewer than 15 minutes had no answer in either the pre-test or post-test. Thirty minutes a week scored 6 participants in the pre-test and 2 in the post-test. However, there was a score of 45 minutes in the post-test, which had no score in the pre-test. The score of 60 minutes of prayer a week increased by one from the pre-test from five to six participants. The group session on prayer was helpful because it encouraged the men to make prayer an important spiritual discipline like studying the scriptures. One of the questions during the group session on prayer stated, “How can I view prayer as a learning process?” Several of them said that they journal to be able to listen to God

¹⁶⁹ Issler, *Living into the Life of Jesus*, 1364-1365.

better. The researcher pointed out that journaling is a spiritual discipline and that it is an effective method of hearing God and being able to see their prayers. “The Bible’s teaching on prayer leads overwhelmingly to one conclusion: Prayer changes things.”¹⁷⁰ The participants realized the importance of the spiritual discipline of journaling to help them remember their prayer request. The participants could then see how God changed their lives in the activity of prayer. None of the participants scored never or fewer than 15 minutes a week on either the pre-test or post-test.

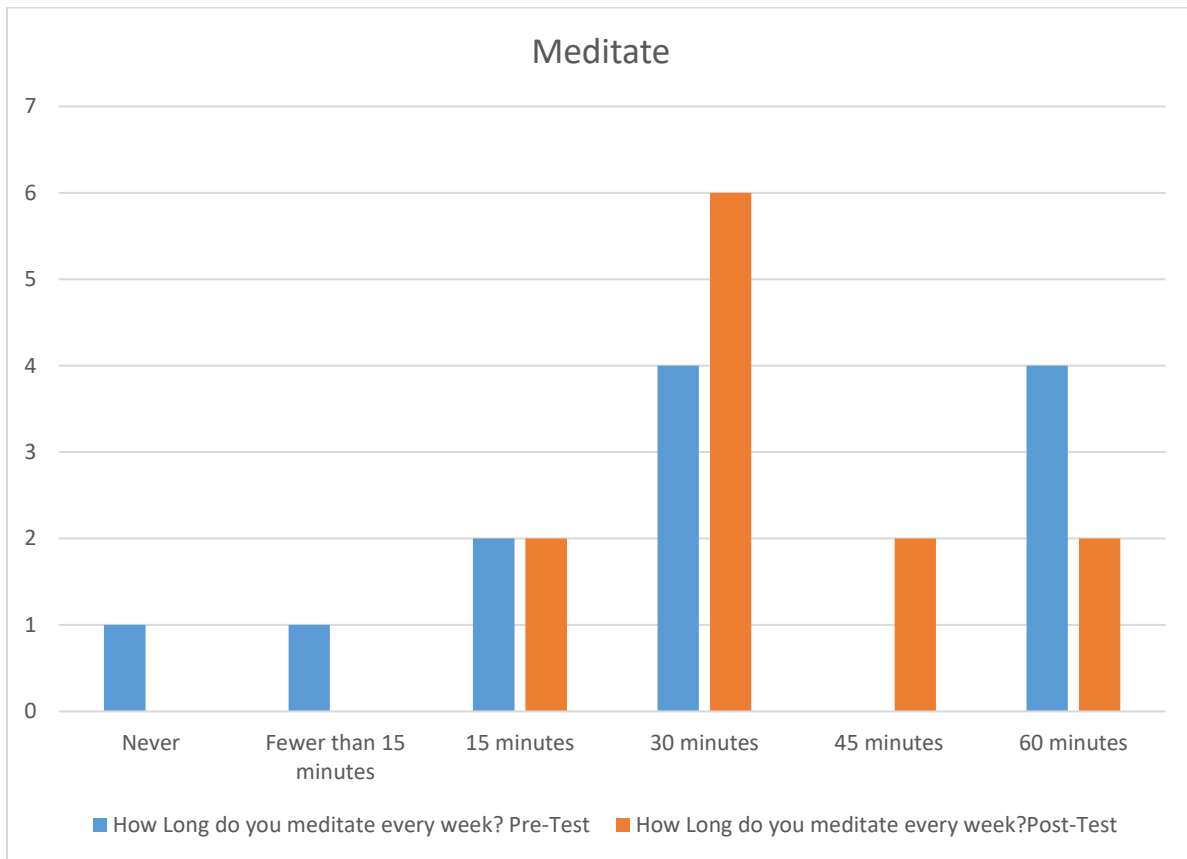


Table 5.5 above on the mediation session, the pre-test (blue) scored never and fewer than 15 minutes with one participant each scoring. The score for 15 minutes also did not change with 2 participants answering in this column. The increase in 30 minutes a week increased by two. Forty-five minutes scored for two of the participants. Unfortunately, a decrease in the post-test

¹⁷⁰ John Ortberg, *The Life that You’ve Always Wanted*, 1362.

(orange) from 4 to 2 netted these results. The researcher learned that one of the participants who scored never, at least moved up to 15 minutes a week of meditating, as well as the one who scored fewer than 15 minutes. The researcher believes that the group session on meditation helped the group to understand the importance of this spiritual discipline and how it can help a believer grow in their spirituality. Again, journaling was emphasized to accompany this discipline like prayer. The researcher underscored the importance of studying the scriptures, prayer, and meditation along with the journaling, can and will increase their spiritual growth.

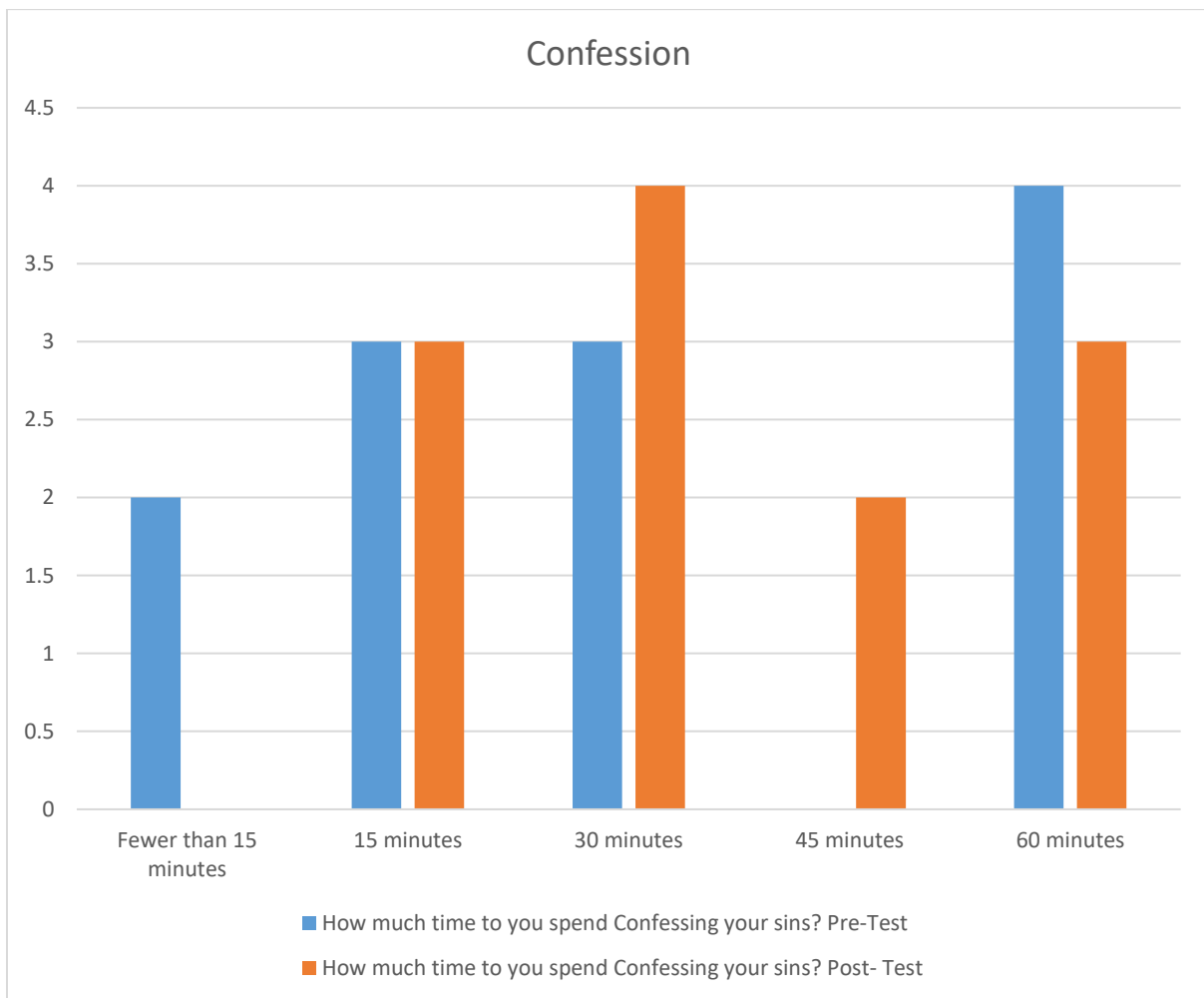


Table 5.6 on confessing your sins from the pre-test (blue) revealed fewer than 15 minutes for 2 participants and 15 minutes for 3 participants. The post-test (orange) demonstrated the

same score of 15 minutes. The increase came with 4 scoring in the post-test 30 minutes, where in the pre-test the score was only three. Two participants scored 45 minutes a week in the post-test where in the pre-test none of the participants scored. The pre-test scored 4 participants and the post-test scored 3 for 60 minutes confessing your sins. “During our prayers, confession is the admission of our sin and the desire for restoration of our relationship with God.”¹⁷¹ In the session on prayer many of them indicated that confession for them came when they were in their prayer time. Several spoke about how they have gone to the pastor to talk about their sins.

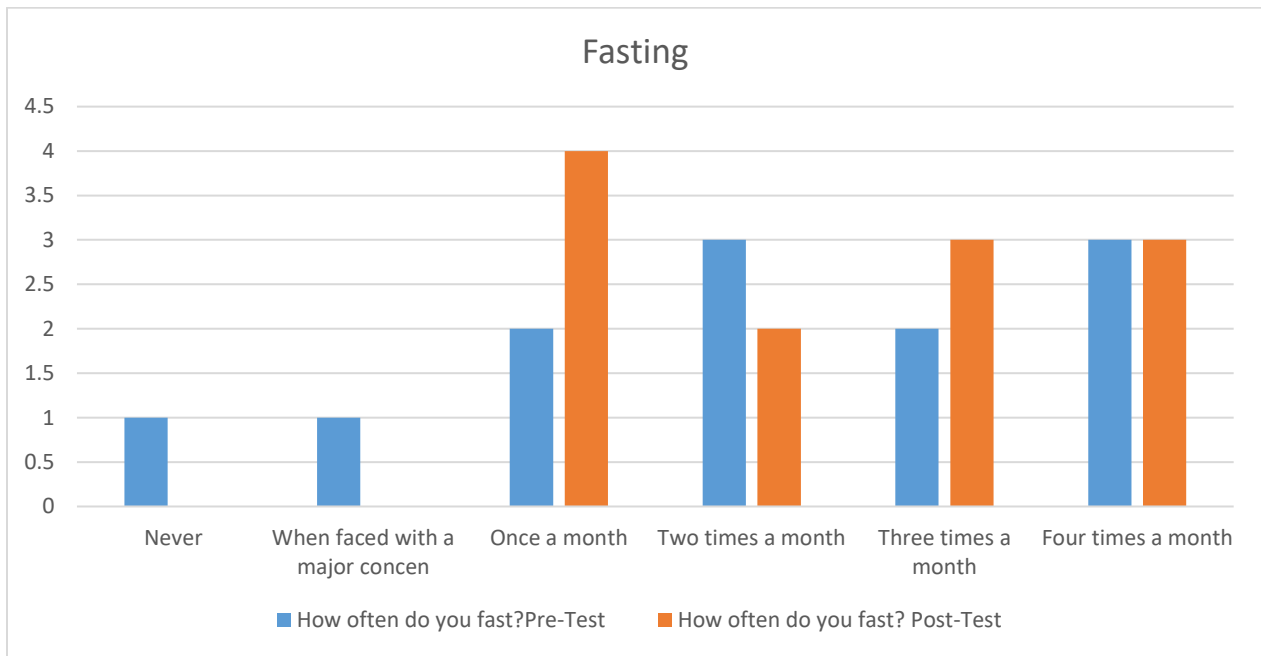


Table 5.7 above on fasting scored 1 for never and when faced with a major concern. Once a month on the pre-test (blue) show 2, but there was an increase of 2, which made it 4 for once a month. Fasting two times a month scored 3 in the pre-test and in the post-test a score of 2. Fasting three times a month showed in the pre-test 2 participants and in the post-test (orange) 3.

¹⁷¹ Phillip Nation, *Habits for Our Holiness*, 70-71.

On the score of four times a month there was no change with the score of 3 participants. The question during the group session asked, “What is a “normal fast, a partial fast, and an absolute fast?” The group struggled with this question. They understood what absolute fast was by answering going without food or water for a certain amount of days. “Suggestions for fasting prayer for the church, throughout history the people of God have been called together to fast and pray.”¹⁷² The researcher wanted to help the participants understand that there are a variety of methods of fasting, wanting them to realize that they could participate without always totally giving up on eating altogether. The researcher also encouraged the men to use the spiritual disciplines of study, prayer, meditation, and journaling to help them through fasting. Making a plan for fasting will help the believer be successful in this discipline.

The researcher believes that the men desire to want to serve in leadership positions in the church and wish to be led by the spirit in growing their discipleship. The two scores of the men wanting to fellowship with one another and attending church did not change, which netted a score of 12 from both the pre-test to the post-test. The researcher believes the men desiring to fellowship and attend church is an important factor in desiring to serve in leadership positions. The plan of increasing the spiritual direction of the men of the church and build confidence in them gave the men a start on what it takes to serve in ministry opportunities. The men fluctuated in their answers to the data, but it caused many of them to realize the seriousness of ministry and how to stay focused without getting discouraged. Circumstances like summer vacation and the Pandemic of COVID-19 were two factors that may have caused the scores to waver. The men have a great tool in the spiritual disciplines to continue to build confidence in themselves and become great leaders for the church and the Kingdom of God.

¹⁷² Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*, 256.

The researcher believes that the problem is not solved but has been addressed. The pastor aspires to decentralize the ministry of the church and some of the men in the group are gaining confidence in themselves in being able to take on the task of ministry. Several of the men will be able to work with other men in the church who did not attend the training and start working with them on the spiritual disciplines to help them in leadership positions.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

The research gathered for the beginning of this paper found that the men of the identified church were yearning to do effective ministry. After the first meeting with the pastor, the writer learned that there was a longing from the men to participate more actively in pastoral ministry activities which was one of the goals. Chapter one communicates that the men of the church felt that they did not have adequate training in such disciplines as reading their Bibles, prayer, fasting, study, solitude, submission, worship, guidance, and confession, which was the research problem. The pastor expressed a desire to begin training the men of the church in these ministry leadership opportunities, which was the other goal. The writer is a chaplain serving in a local hospital with advanced training in the spiritual disciplines, with several graduate degrees and a wealth of experiences in ministry settings; he wished to pass on the knowledge and experiences to the men of the church to help them be successful in participating in ministry activities in the church.

In recalling the new membership "Connections" manual, it stated, the reason Freedom Fellowship Church exists is that people need God. The church desires to connect people to God through His presence and His word.¹⁷³ The church believes that the Bible is the Word of God written by God through men. The authority of the Bible is the ultimate, final, and eternal Word of God. The Bible is the all-inclusive guidebook on how to practically live a godly life.

The keyword in the church was "connecting." Freedom Fellowship believes in community life the way God intended it through the teaching in Acts 2:42-47. The problem presented exists because the men of Freedom Fellowship Church of Canyon, Texas, did not think

¹⁷³ Freedom Fellowship Church, *Connections*, 2.

they were qualified to carry out ministry on their own. The researcher still believes that some of the men believe that the pastor is the one who should, for example, do the praying because he is the most qualified in the church to do so. The problem researched and recently taught in group sessions helped the men in the church learn the spiritual disciplines. The men who have been trained in the spiritual disciplines will now be able to teach other men in the church and community as well.

The purpose of the Doctor of Ministry thesis project was to educate the men of Freedom Fellowship Church of Canyon, Texas so that they would have a clear understanding of the spiritual disciplines. Learning the disciplines has empowered the men with more confidence in themselves in executing ministry. The training has educated the men and given them a clear understanding of how the spiritual disciplines will equip them to do ministry. The project provided for an eight-week training opportunity for the men to study the spiritual disciplines, put them into practice and enhance their spiritual resiliency. Practicing the spiritual disciplines will keep the men strong in discipleship and keep them from giving up. Living by Philippians 4:13 which states, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” and living the spiritual disciplines daily will keep a person’s spirit strong and vibrant. Obedience to God by serving Him and others will be the exercise for a person to stay resilient in ministry. The researcher chose twenty men to participate in the instruction taught during the summer. The researcher was only able to recruit twelve men in the church due to COVID-19. The other reason for the low numbers was that it took place during the summer, and many of the men were on vacation and could not attend. Training in the church typically is held during the fall and spring, but with the training taking place in the summer, the men that did participate were able to take advantage of further

discipleship training. The researcher realizes that twenty men would have been more beneficial to the church, who could have trained other men who could not attend.

The thesis statement was, "If the men of the church receive training in the spiritual disciplines, they will be able to utilize them in their daily lives." Richard Foster writes that the "spiritual disciplines are an inward and spiritual reality, and the inner attitude of the heart is far more crucial than the mechanics for coming into the reality of the spiritual life."¹⁷⁴ The research was able to show that when the men turned to the Holy Spirit, they experienced a change in their inner attitude, which in turn changed their hearts towards God. Foster pointed out in the study guide to the book, "These disciplines open(ed) us to the good life...not to make life miserable, but joyful, not to put us in bondage, but to set us free, not to confine but liberate."¹⁷⁵ The spiritual disciplines have a goal of forming them (the men of the church) into the image of God.

The question then is, where should the research regarding the problem go from here? The research for a problem such as the one discussed here in this paper should be ongoing. The researcher believes the men could take any one of the group sessions and the questions that were covered and pursue more in-depth studies. For example, some of the men are strong in studying, and they could gather up two to four men in the church and start a Bible study. One of the participants who scored high in prayer could start a prayer ministry with two or four men. A group app was started after COVID-19, launched by the president of the men's group. Several of the men in the group started using this electronic platform to alert other men in the church of prayer concerns as well as ministry opportunities. The participants in the group can take advantage of this opportunity to lead others in prayer. The participants can also modify the group

¹⁷⁴ Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 3.

¹⁷⁵ Richard J. Foster, *Study Guide for Celebration of Discipline*, 1.

sessions to accommodate other types of groups, such as younger men and youth. The men could then take another test like the pre-test and post-test and see where progress has been made and what areas need more attention.

How do the results of the research project compare to the information gleaned from the literature review? The spiritual disciplines offered the follower of Jesus Christ and the men of the church the good life, not based upon will power, treasures, status, and independence from all dominion. The Bible teaches that God desires a full life with wealth, which comes from conditions, place, and uniqueness. The spiritual disciplines are a means of receiving God's amazing grace. A thorough literature review presented in chapter three described ten of the spiritual disciplines, in length. In particular, the spiritual disciplines in the research were inward, outward disciplines, and corporate disciplines. Much like the Christians in the early church, today's disciple is offered the opportunity to spend time through the development of the spiritual disciplines. Reading the scriptures has the power to "renew the mind" (Rom.12:2), so that individuals can discern and understand what God desires in their lives.

Absorbing the Word of God into Christ followers and then applying it to their daily lives will then transform their spirit into God's Spirit the way He chooses. The session on study allowed the men to examine their way of studying and consider new ways on how to study the Bible. One of the participants shared that "reading the Bible was vitally important in his walk with God." Francis Chan emphasized studying the scriptures as far back as the book of Genesis to help the person learn the fundamental truths of how the Holy Spirit was active and present in the lives of the first believers.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁶ Francis Chan, *Forgotten God*, 596-599.

Character transformation, which is a fruit of living out the spiritual disciplines, became real to the participants when they learned of a participant who was not attending church regularly due to some physical challenges. The service session motivated some of the men to apply the scripture of "love your neighbor as yourself" (Matt 22:39) and go out and help the fellow member of the church. The discipline of discipleship has a fruit of "kindness." According to 2 Corinthians 5:17, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come." Christ has redeemed the people who now live for Him and are living for others, effected by the power of the Holy Spirit. Living out the spiritual life is a big part of character transformation, which works when a person is living moment by moment through God's perspective.¹⁷⁷ In his letter to the Galatians, Paul says, "until Christ is formed in you" (4:19). When the spiritual disciplines become incorporated into a person's life, then they become a mission. The spiritual disciplines become a means of grace. The "great commission" from Jesus in verse 19 of Matthew 28 says, "Go and make disciples," which is the command from the Lord.

In the meditation session, the participants learned how this inner spiritual discipline works on the deepest part of a person's spiritual life. Meditation is a spiritual discipline that, practiced over time, allows for individual reflection on God's Word. One of the participants indicated that when he meditates on God's Word, he feels in his spirit a feeling of worship, which is another spiritual discipline. The prayer session helped the participants learn that this spiritual discipline can be practiced as an inner, outer, and corporate discipline. The men learned that prayer is a spiritual discipline that could be effective in educating other men of the church, and in turn, would fulfill the purpose of addressing the problem. The men of Freedom Fellowship

¹⁷⁷ John Ortberg, *The Life that You've Always Wanted*, 144.

Church need to continue to practice the spiritual discipline of prayer to help them with not only their inner spiritual growth but also in passing this on to others.

The session on fasting did not change significantly from the pre-test to the post-test and revealed to the participants the struggle many have with this discipline. The researcher believes that the men needed to learn about the discipline of fasting to help them to realize how important it is in practicing this discipline as a way of life. Fasting is one of the inward spiritual disciplines that have the same similarity of abstaining from food while growing spiritually. Mathis says fasting's goal is for the “person to withdraw from eating a meal and focusing on God through reading the Bible, spending time in prayer, and practicing other disciplines such as meditation.”¹⁷⁸ Even though journaling was not covered as a spiritual discipline as an individual session, the researcher did emphasize its importance in helping the person remember prayer requests and how and when God answers them. Journaling is helpful when fasting because the mind is weak due to the lack of food, and there may be difficulty in recalling what God did during the session.

The spiritual discipline of fellowship was discussed the question was asked, "How often do you fellowship with other men in the church?" All twelve participants reported more than sixty minutes a week. The same answer to the question, "How often do you attend church services?" was reported by the participants. The men in the group enjoy each other's company and realize the importance of attending church services regularly. With COVID 19 present in the lives of the participants and summer vacation, this potential problem may surface later when restrictions are lifted on how many people can fellowship together at a time. Fellowship will be the means of the men's group to build brotherhood as well as the community. Fellowship allows

¹⁷⁸ David C. Mathis, *Habits of Grace*, 117.

the group to cooperate by coming together to be in partnership while learning the spiritual disciplines.

The spiritual discipline of submission means the men have surrendered to themselves and given control over to the Lord in their lives. The men's group will feel complete transformation when they, as Nation puts it, "surrender to His love, grace, mercy, and salvation. That is the nature of submission."¹⁷⁹ The men realized that submission could be abused by individuals who misuse authority by degrading a person into serving. Submission means putting God first in the participant's lives, such as Jesus showed in the ministry of washing the disciple's feet, as found in John 13. Submission means walking by the Spirit of God. Submitting means giving up pride and ego and placing the person's self under the power of God.

Worship, which was the seventh session, meant growing one's "affections," as Phillip Nation expressed it, to something.¹⁸⁰ Worship does not need to be a way of controlling one's actions but instead as an effective way of demonstrating love and respect for what God is doing and has done. On the question of "How does worship usher you (the person) into the divine presence of God?" The answer the men offered was "forgiveness of sins." The scripture the men discussed was from John 4:19-24, which was concerning the woman at the well. Jesus answered her in verse 24 when he stated, "God is spirit, and those who worship must worship in spirit and truth." God does not have a physical body, but instead has an existence that means He can be worshipped anywhere.

The spiritual discipline of confession did not have much change from the pre-test to the post-test. The researcher did not cover confession as a separate session, but it was covered during

¹⁷⁹ Phillip Nation, *Habits for our Holiness*, 169.

¹⁸⁰ Nation, *Habits for our Holiness*, 29.

many of the group sessions. In the sessions on prayer and meditation, the participants learned about the importance of confession and how it can help the person in learning forgiveness. Psalm 139:23-24 states, "Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! Moreover, see if there be any grievous way in me and lead me in the way everlasting!" The desire of confession is to "surrender a person's weaknesses and faults to the forgiving love of Christ and intentionally desire to embrace practices that lead to transformation."¹⁸¹

The next spiritual discipline was on guidance. According to Ortberg, it is one thing when a person speaks to God, but it is another thing to listen to Him and receive guidance from the Holy Spirit.¹⁸² Guidance is a corporate spiritual discipline because when used, it can steer a person to the real "director or guide."¹⁸³ The question in the pre-test and post-test had answers such as receiving guidance from reading the Bible, prayer, meditating, and others. The group felt that the discipline of submission was like guidance. In one of the sessions, an individual felt like some of the disciplines were like using a vernacular word, "splitting hairs." Submission means compliance, where guidance means leadership. Submitting may mean surrendering to guidance, but it also means to receive advice and management on the direction a person may go in their lives and in this case, their spiritual life. Guidance in the spiritual life means that a person wants and desires to submit themselves to God's Holy Spirit for guidance in their lives no matter where they are.

The question, what did the researcher learn from implementing the project? The researcher learned by choosing to use both qualitative and quantitative research models it was

¹⁸¹ Calhoun. *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*, 91.

¹⁸² John Ortberg, 2045.

¹⁸³ Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline the Path to Spiritual Growth*, 160.

demonstrated that a "variety of methodological approaches are (were) needed, which are credible and can (or were) especially valuable."¹⁸⁴ The quantitative method was used in the questionnaire to measure responses over some time. The Likert scale used at the beginning as a pre-test and the post-test assisted in gauging the participant's responses. The qualitative method of gathering the data was used in the group sessions to help the participants improve their score on the Likert scale.

The problem identified in chapter one called for qualitative action research to investigate the problem and prescribe a ministry intervention, in which the group sessions attempted to resolve the problem. The reason the group sessions were used was to address the lack of information, education, and skills in the spiritual disciplines, which was the rationale for doing the research. The group sessions allowed the researcher to engage and educate the participants on the spiritual disciplines as well as give them time to offer their own opinions and comments, which was the meaning of qualitative action research. Once the data was collected, the researcher was able to identify some themes from the findings.

The themes identified in the research were confidence, relationships, care, hospitality, socializing, community, and leading. The researcher assessed the participants to gain confidence in themselves once they were able to learn about these spiritual disciplines. The relationships with the men in the group increased because they had a similar interest in wanting to learn and apply these spiritual disciplines. The themes that emerged from the research, which became the defining moment was care and hospitality. In the spiritual discipline of service, the individual who was identified by the group who needed more help, offered an excellent opportunity to engage in the themes of care and hospitality. The group demonstrated their attention and

¹⁸⁴ Tim Sensing, *Qualitative Research*, 52.

compassion towards this individual, allowing them to engage in this discipline and then talk about it among themselves during a group session. One of the participants who raises chickens took several dozen eggs out to the man's house, and in turn, he offered a blessing as well as receiving one. The researcher witnessed God prompting the men to help another person in times of need. Freedom Fellowship exists to connect people to a relationship with Jesus Christ. Jesus, when He worked with the twelve apostles, referred to them as a group. The twelve that went through the training in the church, just like the apostles Jesus taught, are referred to as a group.

The group sessions assessed the men's knowledge of the spiritual disciplines. The researcher was able to inquire about their knowledge of spiritual disciplines. The men joined in on the discussions about the specific experiences they have had with the spiritual disciplines. The interaction the men had with each other improved their relationships and established new contacts.¹⁸⁵ Improving relationships helped the men of the church learn to depend on God in helping ministries. The relationships the men participated in also reinforces the churches mission to connect people to Jesus Christ and one another. The men move through the day, participating in daily routines, and interact with brothers and sisters in Christ as well as those who are not Christians. The aim for the men of the church was to follow scripture, love fellow Christians, and model good behavior with others outside the church.

The next question is, How might the results apply in other settings? The researcher learned through the eight weeks of training in the spiritual disciplines that most of the men were lacking in education and instruction. The data collected showed an increase in some of the disciplines. The men had many questions as well as comments about having adequate time to participate in such activities as reading their own personal Bible studies, meditation, prayer, and

¹⁸⁵ Marita Littauer and Florence Littauer, *Wired That Way*:1.

other disciplines. One method that was created by the president of the men's group was a group chat room. The men's group was able to share openly and confidentially about such areas as personal prayer requests, Bible readings, family situations, and employment. Some of the men who could not attend the group sessions took up this means of participating in the group discussions on their own. The problem of the men of Freedom Fellowship Church was their feeling of not being qualified to do ministry on their own. Some of the men have started working one on one with other men in the church, teaching them the spiritual disciplines. Several of the men are discipling members of their own family. The researcher believes this was the goal of the research study, to empower men to do the ministry that God has called them to do. The men indicated that they are in church every day of the week as well as intentionally getting involved in men's group activities.

The last question asked in the post-test was, "How will you teach the spiritual disciplines to other men in the church? Since the beginning of the research, the importance of learning and practicing the spiritual disciplines has become vital. Two vital ministry positions in the church have become vacant. Both individuals who filled these positions have had extended ministries in these positions. They are seasoned pastors with excellent skills and experience. The new individuals who are filling these positions are young but determined to serve the Lord as well as the church. It will be vital for them to practice these disciplines for themselves to lead in their respective positions. The participants in the group sessions were equipped to teach other men in the church the spiritual disciplines. Some of the men in the group have the confidence to be able to carry out this task.

The word confidence fits in with one of the themes that emerged in the research, which was leadership. The men have been able to solve the problem of not feeling they are qualified to

do ministry, because learning the spiritual disciplines has given the men more confidence and faith in themselves in being able to participate in ministry opportunities. Their relationship with Jesus Christ has improved because of learning the spiritual disciplines. Many of the participants have been leaders and are able to step into these positions. The researcher believes that many of the participants were showing signs of confidence in being able to fill these positions. It is important to note that many of the participants have the gift of hospitality as well as mercy ministry. Since one of the participants who is legally blind and cannot attend church regularly, several of the men have reached out to him to be of assistance. Socializing and community are strong themes in the data, and the researcher believes this is vital for the men to want to participate in ministry opportunities. One area which was discussed as one of the sessions was "service." The men have not only helped this other participant but have done outreach service in the community at a local food bank. The chat room was helpful to the leader of the men's group to call upon those in the church who wanted to go down and help. Some of the participants from the group sessions helped in this community mission outreach activity.

The final question, Did anything emerge during the study that merits future research? The "Implementation of the Intervention Design" discussed back in Chapter three began smoothly. After taking the exam, the group was led through the first session, which was learning what it meant to be "spiritual." On the post-test, the final question asked of the group participants was, "How will you teach the spiritual disciplines to other men in the church?" The answer to the question the writer found through this research, was to help the limited number of men in the church and train them in the spiritual disciplines. Since the original goal was to train at least twenty men and only twelve participated, eight did not participate. These twelve men will be tasked with training these other eight men in the church as well as others who missed out on the

spiritual disciplines. The researcher, along with other men in the church, will have to spend a lot more time teaching the spiritual disciplines to other men in the church. As Richard Foster stated, "These disciplines open us to the good life...not to make life miserable, but joyful, not to put us in bondage, but to set us free, not to confine but liberate."¹⁸⁶ The spiritual disciplines have the aim of creating and developing the men of Freedom Fellowship Church into the image of God.

Chaplains, pastors, those who have stepped down from long-held ministry positions, and ministry leaders should consider using the education, training, and experience they have gained and pass this on to young believers. Part of being a disciple of Christ means not only learning but also teaching. Rest is helpful after a long ministry, but it does not exclude a person from the high commission. Upcoming potential leaders in the church will learn that Jesus gave all of His followers a commandment in Matthew 28:19: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." The men through the spiritual disciplines have been trained and authorized to do just this. Mentoring a young ministry leader can be rewarding to the mentee as well as the counselor. Those with long years of training and experience can offer to help in churches that have members in long term care facilities or confined to a home that needs a visit. They will have the authority through the great commission to train new learners with God's wisdom and His presence.

Amen.

¹⁸⁶ Foster, *Study Guide for Celebration of Discipline*, 1.

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APPENDIX A: IRB Approval

May 22, 2020

Scott Willis
Thomas Cook

Re: IRB Exemption – IRB-FY19-20-247 Spiritual Disciplines for Men in Medium Sized Churches

Dear Scott Willis, Thomas Cook:

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under the following exemption category, which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46: 101(b):

Category 2. (iii). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met:

The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by §46.111(a)(7).

Your stamped consent form can be found under the Attachments tab within the Submission Details section of your study on Cayuse IRB. This form should be copied and used to gain the consent of your research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information electronically, the contents of the attached consent document should be made available without alteration.

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by completing a modification submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

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

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP

Administrative Chair of Institutional Research

Research Ethics Office

APPENDIX B

Procedure

Survey/Questionnaire

First Session (handout)

Open with Prayer

I. Pre-Test Survey: (15 minutes) this will be given back to the researcher

1. Please provide the following information:

a. Your name:

b. Your marital status:

c. Number of children and their ages:

d. Your employment status and the type of work you do:

e. How long you have been a member of the church:

f. Which ministries you are involved in and how long you have been involved in each:

2. What do you know about the spiritual disciplines?

3. How long do you read your Bible every week? Please circle one of the time limits in the parentheses:

(never, fewer than 15 minutes, 15 minutes, 30 minutes, 45 minutes, 60 minutes),

4. How long do you pray every week?

(never, fewer than 15 minutes, 15 minutes, 30 minutes, 45 minutes, 60 minutes)

5. How often do you attend church services?

(once a month, two times a month, three times a month, 4 times a month)

6. How long do you meditate every week?

(never, fewer than 15 minutes, 15 minutes, 30 minutes, 45 minutes, 60 minutes)

7. How much time each week do you spend confessing your sins?

(never, less than 15 minutes, 15 minutes, 30 minutes, 45 minutes, 60 minutes)

8. How often do you fellowship with other men in the church? (never, rarely, once a month, two times a month, three times a month, four times a month)

9. Please explain your understanding about submission.

10. Explain your understanding about guidance.

11. How often do you fast? (never, when faced with a major concern, once a month, two times a month, three times a month, 4 times a month)

12. Explain what you know about the Spiritual Life?

First Session (handout)

Group Session Questions: (45-minute session)

- 1) What is your understanding of what it means to be Spiritual?
- 2) What is the purpose of the spiritual disciplines?
- 3) What is a disciplined grace?
- 4) What is the concept of “Cheap Grace” mean?
- 5) What are the difficulties in following a disciplined life?

15-minute break

Training Session (1 hour)

Scripture Readings: Psalm 42, 51

Romans 6: 5-14; 7:13-25

Philippians 3:1-6

Ephesians 6:10-20

Final Questions (5-minutes)

Prayer and Dismissal

Second Session (handout)

Open with Prayer

Group Session Questions: (45-minute session)

- 1) Why does study more completely bring about the purpose of the Spiritual Disciplines?
- 2) How does the study of the disciplines bring about transformation?
- 3) How does studying the scriptures help the person with the disciplines?
- 4) Other than the Bible, what book has had the most influence in your life?
- 5) How does study produce joy?

Break 15 minutes

Training session (1 hour)

Proverbs 1:1-9, 23, 12, 23

James 1:5

Hebrews 4:11-13

2 Timothy 3:16-17

Colossians 3:1-17

Final Questions (5-minutes)

Closing Prayer

Third Session (handout)

Open with Prayer

Group Session Questions: (45-minute session)

Discipline of Meditation

- 1) What is meditation?
- 2) What are some responses to the idea of meditation?
- 3) What is the difference between eastern meditation and Christian meditation?

Discipline of Prayer

- 1) What to say when I pray?
- 2) How can I view prayer as a learning process?
- 3) What should I do when I do not feel like praying?

Break (15-minutes)

Training session (1 hour)

Scriptures for meditation:

Exodus 24:15-18; 20:18-19; 33:11

2 Corinthians 12:1-4

Scriptures for prayer:

Matthew 6:5-15

Psalms 51, 103, 150

Final Questions (5 minutes)

Closing Prayer

Fourth Session (handout)

Discipline of Fasting

Open with Prayer

Group Session Questions: (45-minute session)

- 1) How does fasting differ from going on a diet?
- 2) What is a “normal fast”, a “partial fast”, “absolute fast?”
- 3) What is the most difficult for you in fasting?
- 4) Find something to fast from this week such as watching TV, reading the newspaper, or your favorite hobby and see what you learn about yourself?

Break (15-minutes)

Training session (1 hour)

Scriptures for Fasting

Luke 4:1-13

Isaiah 58:1-7

Daniel 10:1-14

Acts 14:19-23

Final Questions (5-minutes)

Closing Prayer

Fifth Session (handout)

Discipline of Submission

Open with Prayer

Group Session Questions: (45-minute session)

- 1) How can the discipline of submission be abused?
- 2) What is the freedom of submission?
- 3) What images come to your mind when you hear the word submission?
- 4) What was Jesus teaching on submission so world-shattering?
- 5) What does it mean to you to be in submission to God?

Break (15-minutes)

Training session (1 hour)

Scriptures for Submission

Mark 8:34

John 12:24-26

Philippians 2:1-11

Galatians 2:19-21

Ephesians 5:21-6:9

Final Questions (5-minutes)

Closing Prayer

Sixth Session (handout)

Discipline of Service

Open with Prayer

Group Session Questions: (45-minute session)

- 1) What is the word “humility” mean to you? Also, what do you think it looks like?
- 2) What is the service of behind the scenes look like to you?
- 3) What are human limitations when it comes to service?
- 4) What does it mean to give of yourself?
- 5) How do you know when to say “no?”

Break (15-minutes)

Training session (1 hour)

Scriptures for Service

Matthew 20:20-28; 25:40

John 13:1-17

Colossians 3:23-25

Romans 12:9-13

Final Questions (5-minutes)

Closing Prayer

Seventh Session (handout)

Discipline of Worship

Open with Prayer

Group Session Questions: (45-minute session)

- 1) How is worship and experience?
- 2) How does worship usher you into the divine presence of God?
- 3) What hinders you from the worship of God?
- 4) What forms of worship have been particularly meaningful for you in your life?
- 5) What are the advantages and disadvantages to?

Formal Worship

Informal Worship

Break (15-minutes)

Training session (1 hour)

Scriptures for Worship

John 4:19-24

John 6:52-58, 6:63

Ephesians 5:18-20

Isaiah 6:1-8

Psalms 148

Final Questions (5-minutes)

Closing Prayer

Eighth and Final Session

Post-Test Survey: (15-minutes) handout (This will be given back to researcher)

Open with Prayer

Group Session Questions: (45-60-minute session)

- 1) What is the pitfall of turning the Disciplines into law?
- 2) What happens when a person centers on the Disciplines and not Christ?
- 3) What is the greater good of the Disciplines?
- 4) What happens when one Discipline is elevated over another?
- 5) What are the fruits of the Disciplines?
- 6) What happens when a person studies the Disciplines, but does not experience them?
- 7) What perception of your life has the Disciplines helped you with?

Break (15-minutes)

Training session (1 to 1.5 hours possibly)

Scriptures for the Final Session

Psalm 23

Deuteronomy 16:15

1 Kings 17-19

Acts 1-5; 9

Daniel 1-12

Final Questions

Closing Prayer

Survey/Questionnaire
Final Session (handout)

Open with Prayer

II Post-Test Survey: (15 minutes) this will be given back to the researcher

1. What do you know about the spiritual disciplines now that you have spent eight weeks learning about some of them?
2. How often do you read your Bible every week? Please circle one of the time limits in the parentheses:
(never, fewer than 15 minutes, 15 minutes, 30 minutes, 45 minutes, 60 minutes)
3. How often do you pray every week?
(never, fewer than 15 minutes, 15 minutes, 30 minutes, 45 minutes, 60 minutes)
4. How often do you attend church services?
(never, once a month, two times a month, three times a month, 4 times a month)
5. How long do you meditate every week?
(never, fewer than 15 minutes, 15 minutes, 30 minutes, 45 minutes, 60 minutes)
6. How much time do you spend confessing your sins each week?
(never, less than 15 minutes, 15 minutes, 30 minutes, 45 minutes, 60 minutes)
7. How often do you fellowship with other men in the church? (never, rarely, once a month, two times a month, three times a month, four times a month)
8. Please explain your understanding of submission.
9. Explain your understanding of guidance?
10. How often do you fast? (never, when faced with a major concern, once a month, two times a month, three times a month, 4 times a month)
11. Explain your understanding of the Spiritual Life?
12. How will you teach the spiritual disciplines to other men in the church?