

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY
JOHN W. RAWLINGS SCHOOL OF DIVINITY

The Flourishing Life of the Leader Who Makes God the Top Priority

Submitted to Dr. Clifford Todd Hartley

In fulfillment of the requirements for the completion of
the Doctor of Ministry Degree

Department of Christian Leadership and Church Ministries

by

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Liberty University John W. Rawlings School of Divinity

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THE DOCTOR OF MINISTRY THESIS PROJECT ABSTRACT

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The Thesis Project that is undertaken in Richmond, Virginia, is addressing the issues in the leaders of churches' lack of understanding, when it comes to prioritizing their relationship with God. The purpose of the thesis is to train the men and women in leadership, so that they seek and reach forth onto that highest priority of relationship with Christ. The interventions that are designed to help in the development of the spiritually healthy leaders include the practices that the Lord Jesus Christ mentions in His speech, the Sermon on the Mount. Through mentoring and the participants' initiative in fasting, prayer, and giving, the benefits of the spiritually developed leader may become the example, that is reproducible in the discipleship of the four small churches in Richmond. The success of this project may shape the attitudes of leaders at home in Richmond, and abroad, beyond the borders of Virginia, to the extent that the contributions may provide new ways of facing the decline in the exponential increase among the flourishing disciples, or the spiritually mature followers, of Jesus Christ.

Contents

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Introduction	1
Ministry Context	2
Problem Presented	9
Purpose Statement	10
Basic Assumptions	11
Definitions	12
Limitations	16
Delimitations	17
Thesis Statement	17

CHAPTER 2: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Literature Review	19
Intimate Relationship with Christ.....	19
The Flourishing Life/Bearing Much Fruit of the Leader.....	22
God as the Top Priority in the Leader’s Life.....	25
Building of a Christlike Character in the Leader.....	29
Stewardship of the Time, Gifts, and Talents God Has Given the Leader.....	32
Learning and Growing through Suffering and Hardships.....	35
Summary.....	37
Theological Foundations	38
Notable Leaders of the Old Testament.....	41
<i>The Example of Joshua as a Leader of God’s People</i>	41
<i>The Example of David as King of Israel</i>	42
<i>The Example of Solomon as King of Israel</i>	45
<i>The Example of Hezekiah as King of Judah</i>	47
Notable Leaders of the New Testament.....	48
<i>The Apostle Paul’s Example as Servant of Christ</i>	48
<i>The Apostle Peter’s Example as Servant of Christ</i>	50
<i>The Lord Jesus Christ’s Example as Servant of God</i>	52
Theoretical Foundations	54
Conclusion.....	64

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Intervention Design	65
Implementation of Intervention Design	78

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

Results for the Initial Interview.....	84
Summary of the Responses from the Initial Interview.....	85
Discussion on the Results of the Initial Interview.....	88
Results of the Survey Questions on Fasting.....	90

Notes on the Results of the Survey on Fasting.....	91
Discussion on the Results of the Survey on Fasting.....	93
Results of the Survey Questions on God’s Increase.....	96
Notes on the Results of the Survey on God’s Increase.....	97
Discussion on the Results of the Survey on God’s Increase.....	98
Notes from the Leaders’ Personal Journals.....	100

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

Conclusion.....	103
IRB Approval.....	114
Bibliography.....	116
Appendix A.....	120
Appendix B.....	123
Appendix C.....	124
Appendix D.....	125
Appendix E.....	126

Graphs

Results of the Survey Questions on Fasting	91
Results of the Survey Questions on God's Increase	96

Abbreviations

LUIRB *Liberty University Institutional Review Board*

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Introduction

In every institution or organization, leaders are accountable for decision making and direction and the exercise of authority. The burden is much more heightened for Christian leaders, especially in these end times and the twenty-first century. Christian leaders are different, and they should be the example that is attractive to the secular models of leadership, not the other way around. However, impediments to effective leadership in the church exist, including the lack of the distinctive commitment to see God's perspective of successful ministry and the patience to wait for God's provision and providence. Therefore, leaders of today, including pastors and other skillful ministers of the church, have sought other methods and models of leadership to suit their own definition of success and the infatuation with numbers and growth. The problem, purpose, and thesis that are related to the current ministry in a particular section of North America are discussed below. It is the intention of this project to address that particular issue of leadership in the churches, so that the correct idea and understanding of leadership may be grasped both at home and abroad, and near and far.

In Chapter One, the discussion includes the introduction, the ministry context, the problem statement, the purpose statement, and the thesis statement. The ministry context is explained below, where the background, location, and history of the churches that are involved in this research project are presented. The problem that is addressed in Chapter One is in relation to the leadership of the churches that are in consideration, and it is concerning the need for the proper prioritizing of the leaders' relationships, favoring the relationship with Jesus Christ as the utmost relationship. The purpose of the research project is to teach and mentor and train these leaders to embrace the intentionality that comes with prioritizing a flourishing relationship with

Christ. The correct action in the prioritizing of relationships sets up the thesis, in which the leaders who have learned and been trained and mentored will bear much fruit, to the benefit of each leader as well as the corporate body of Christ. When the local problem is addressed, the entire universal church will reap the rewards and benefits of the successful story in a subset of the congregation of God's church in North America.

Ministry Context

The local church that is representative of the problem, purpose, and thesis of the action research project is located in Richmond, Virginia. Since the state of Virginia is in the United States of America, it is also safe to say that this Thesis Project may address one of the issues with ministry in North America. The parent church is Seed International Church, a non-denominational church. Three other churches are also a part of the collective ministries that are in this project. All of these churches are in Richmond, Virginia, and they are located within thirty to forty-five minutes of driving in the state capital. The leaders in these churches are not many, but together they give a sample that is sufficient to address the issue in ministry leadership of this region in the United States.

Census Reporter has provided some information about the demographics of Richmond, Virginia, which follows next.¹ Richmond has a population of 234,000, approximately. The Richmond metropolitan area, however, has a population of 1,332,590. The city is diverse, with various ethnicities and races of people residing within its 62 square miles area. The following represents the distribution of its population: 45% Black or African American, 42% White, 3.31% two or more races, 2.14% Asian, 0.99% other race, 0.42% Native American, and 0.02% Native

¹ Census Reporter, "Census Data: Richmond, VA," accessed November 8, 2020, censusreporter.org/profiles/16000US5167000-richmond-va/.

Hawaiian or Pacific Islander. People of Spanish descent form about 6% of the population, overall. The foreign-born population is 8.2%. The median age is 33.8 years old, with the median age for females at 34.4, and the median age for males is at 33.2. There are more females, 52.53%, than males, 47.47%, in Richmond.

The education level with the highest numbers is the Bachelors' degree, which is at 22.78%. The following shows the remainder of the education level for the population in Richmond: High school is at 22.35%, some form of college education is at 18.47%, Graduate degree is at 15.71%, and Associate degree is at 5.75%. Caucasians represent the most people with high school diploma, while Asians have the highest percentage of people with Bachelors' degree. African Americans have a good portion of graduates from high school as well, but the numbers are relatively low when it comes to graduates with Bachelors' degree and Graduate degrees. With the education comes the leverage in earnings also. Meanwhile, the average earnings for the citizens are at \$34,440, where the average for males is \$36,849 and the average earnings for a female is \$31,936. The median household income is \$51,285. There are approximately 183,783 adults in the city, of which 27,831 are senior citizens. There are 21,729 married couples, with three people in the home, in the city, and the non-family couples are about 49,507, with about 1.47 persons at home. Altogether, 33% of the population, ages 15 and above, is comprised of married people. The home ownership rate is at 42.2%. Again, the above information and statistics were made available, primarily, by the Census Reporter website.²

Richmond has numerous churches, many of which follow the traditions of the Baptist, the Methodist, the Presbyterian, and the Lutheran churches. There are also other churches which could be described as non-denominational, not sticking to any particular denomination. Seed

² Ibid.

International Church happens to be one such church, that is comprised of a few families, whose goal is to serve the Lord faithfully, until He comes for His church any day in the future. Because of the small size of the church, the leaders are the senior pastor, an assistant pastor, and a deacon and his wife, the deaconess. In times past, other assistant pastors aided in the ministering of the Word of God and in serving the church and the local community. Times have changed now, however, and some of these leaders have exited Seed International Church and started other ministries, independent of the operations of Seed International Church.

This present state of things has also created another component of the Thesis Project, in that three other churches are included in the project so that the participation of the leaders of these churches will be wholesome to the churches and the broader community of God, in Richmond. The three other churches are Champion Believers Ministries, Christway Prayer Ministries, and Transformed City Church. Even though all these churches are open to the general public for membership and tend to be inclusive, the members are typically Africans and African Americans. Among the African members of all four churches, there is diversity in country of origin, and so the differences in leadership styles appear to originate from customs and practices of the home country. But the leaders do aim to attain to that special calling in Christ, where serving God and others drives the momentum of ministry. Also, good Bible teachings and devotion to living out the teachings of the Word of God are the motivation for the leaders to engage in faithful ministry to God and His church, in the local community first, and then to the universal church of God.

The children attend the main service in the sanctuary, together with the adults. The oldest members are in their late sixties, while the youngest are babies. The churches are not at the capacity level, where there may be separate ministries for children, or women's groups and so

on. Seed International Church had small groups in the past, but recent issues and the COVID-19 pandemic have contributed to slowed gatherings. The efforts to attract people from other ethnicities to become members of the church have waned, as frustrations have set in. This condition is part of the overall problem that is seen in the decline of numbers in each one of these churches. The resulting action has been for the leadership teams at each of the churches to come up with the appropriate prescription to this ailment. It is readily accepted in all the congregations that the gospel is the way to go, as far as the main attraction to the church of God goes. It is a great starting point, making it possible for the four churches to avoid the trap of “pragmatism and consumerism,” which Jared Wilson has described as being the source of erosion that has led to “more flexible and less faithful” theology.³ The tendency still remains for the leaders to look at the declining numbers and financial difficulties and begin to panic. The temptation to copy what is working in other churches in the area is also strong, but each church has a DNA that is specific to its congregation and context.

All the senior pastors in the respective ministries are also employed in other institutions. All the wives are also working in other occupations, apart from doing ministry for the church and the community. It is not farfetched to indicate that even the children, who are at the age to attend college, are all working to establish a firm grounding in financial security. As Andy Stanley has noted, everyone in the church, including leaders and even those seeking membership, becomes “concerned,” when a church does not meet its “budget” for two or three months.⁴ The lights must be on, the amenities need to be functional, the staff need to be paid, and the leaders must be able

³ Jared C. Wilson, *The Prodigal Church: A Gentle Manifesto against the Status Quo* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 73.

⁴ Andy Stanley, *Deep and Wide: Creating Churches Unchurched People Love to Attend* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016), 281.

to feed their spouses and children. The various needs must be met in every church, and the four churches in Richmond are not exempt from these situations. The families in the four churches attempt to gather all the persons together during the Sunday services, which is something that is difficult to make happen, because of the divided commitments and schedules. As a result, church services and gatherings suffer, due to limited numbers of people in attendance. The prospect of having a church building, which has more empty seats than there are occupants, is indeed a scary one. Therein lies a major problem.

The education level for the leaders at these ministries differs, ranging from Doctor of Ministry in Chaplaincy to Master of Divinity in Theology, to Bachelor of Arts, to some level of college education. The children in the families are taught to take education seriously, and they normally pursue a college education after they graduate from high school. For the churches in this project, a few of the high school graduates have moved on to college away from home. The rest of the families which stay in Richmond do endeavor to attend church services, especially when these people are not working. The potential for any one of these people, whether adult or child, to become leaders is increased as they see effective leadership being demonstrated in the church and the community. However, the constraints on serving others in the community, due to the requirements and demands from the secular sector, create an impediment to the full dedication and development of people into ever-increasing spiritual growth.

Seed International Church has extended its ministry beyond the borders of the United States. There is a primary school that is currently functioning at a high level in Ghana, under the financing and supervision of Seed International. As the apostles and disciples of the early church were able to reach out to their immediate community first, and then carry the gospel message to the uttermost parts of the earth afterward, the four churches in Richmond are careful to do the

same (Acts 1:8). In the meantime, however, only Seed International Church has been able to have a viable outreach ministry. The other three churches are cognizant of the importance of building their local church and its impact on the community, before there may be any attempt to have a representative church in another city, or even in another country.

As the name might imply, Seed International Church was founded with the idea that its leaders would eventually move into other churches and continue the discipleship processes that work at home elsewhere. At the beginning of its establishment, the church was able to produce many competent leaders who are in ministry far and near. The pastor of Champion Believers Church, for example, came from the ranks at Seed International Church. This background makes it difficult to retain the leaders who are competent and are performing ministry at the highest level, since these same ministers are the people who are responsible for building up other faithful men and women in the new church plants. Also, the nature of the church causes families to move, rather than just one individual at a time, making every departure of one leader a bigger exodus than anticipated. In other instances, differences in vision and priorities have brought about separations and exits out of the church.

Champions Believers Church is also family oriented, comprising of a few families that are focused on serving the Lord with a pure heart and an unwavering mind. There is the constant push in this ministry to effectuate the kind of evangelism that will incorporate the other ethnicities of the locality. The affiliations seem to be set already though, as people are doing church in certain settings and are not interested in changing the norms that they are accustomed to. A good number of the people in Richmond are politically motivated, seeking to be involved only to suit their political leanings and desires. Therefore, the expectation is for the pastors and leaders of the churches to lower their preaching of the Word to the level of not turning anyone

off politically. As a result, the number of attendants has remained at the same place, and it seems that the church is stagnant and may head in a decline sooner or later. The church does not merely exist to be sustained, but it is “a send-gather-disciple-reproduce mode,” as Frost and Hirsch put it.⁵ These circumstances are common in the Richmond area, and they appear to be present now in many other contexts, as well as they have been in the past.

Christway Prayer Ministries is making headway, considering that it is a small church. The church has only been in existence for about five years, but it has retained its membership and added a few members in the past year. The commitment to two-hours of prayer, every other Friday, and fasting for two to three weeks, at the beginning of every year, are noteworthy in the church’s history. From time to time, the congregants from the Methodist church, in which Christway Prayer Ministry services occur, come to worship the Lord together with them. There is a small representation by the African American population in Richmond as well. The leaders are dedicated here, mobilizing the congregation to engage in the church gatherings, as the apostle Paul has made it abundantly clear in Hebrews 10:25: “Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.”⁶ People are encouraged every time, recognizing the need to live out the commandments of the Lord in the church and in the local community, first.

Transformation City Church has primarily an African American congregation. The population is of mixed ages, but the leaders are mostly young adults and middle-aged persons. This context makes it conducive for reaching the younger generation of people with the gospel

⁵ Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come: Innovation and Mission for the 21st-Century Church* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2003), 67.

⁶ Unless otherwise noted, all Bible quotations are from the *King James Version* (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2013).

message, as the leaders are younger and are capable of using the cultural tools and communication competencies that are available to them to their advantage. Even in these hard times of the COVID 19 pandemic, the leaders at Transformation City Church have employed the resources at Facebook, Zoom, YouTube, and Google to bring about virtual gatherings and church, that may be missing in some of the other churches. Christway Prayer Ministries have Facebook and Zoom presence as well. All four churches have incorporated some version of these new technologies into their settings, as the 21st Century has made these systems necessary in almost all contexts now.

The goal for all four churches is to reach a place in ministry, where the church membership is as diverse as the population of Richmond. As things stand right now, work needs to be done to bring on board the other ethnicities in the services at the four churches. When it comes to politics, it appears that the people are willing to join in the efforts for social change and uprising. It is a different story, as far as integrating the efforts to reach the world for Christ together. The leaders of the churches are cognizant of the fact that inclusion of various groups of people is good for the overall health of the churches, especially when the different skills and talents are developed and evaluated for the benefit of the church of God. The cultural difference could also serve as an avenue for devising practical ways to evangelize and to make the gospel applicable to people who have other backgrounds, that are different from the Western perspective.

Problem Presented

The problem is that the leaders of four small churches in Richmond, including Seed International Church, lack understanding in prioritizing their relationship with God. Life happens and life goes on every day in these ministries. The leaders are also aware of their calling to serve

God and their local community and the broader Christian community of the world. There are responsibilities at home, with the immediate family, and then with the congregation and the local assembly. With these circumstances before the leaders of the four small churches, the sensible and reasonable thing to do will be for the proper prioritizing of the service that is rendered each day. Some form of balance must be established as well. However, God and the things of God, in terms of personal spiritual growth, is the top priority for every leader in the church. It does not mean that these leaders should not be concerned with the financial stability of their families and the members of the congregation. These realities are important. But if there is not much quality time that is dedicated to seeking the face of God and building a flourishing relationship with Him on an individual level first, then public ministry will suffer. In other words, the leaders will not be able to bear the fruit that will become the example for the aspiring leaders and people of the local churches to emulate.

The trend has been that these leaders exert so much energy in the secular occupations that none of it is left for the development of an intimate relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. In such instances, the leaders come to church services exhausted, to the extent that the enemy gains the advantage and causes sleepiness and dormancy to infiltrate faithful ministry with God. The result of this kind of situation is that the stagnant spiritual life of the leaders spills over into the church at large, and that people begin to leave the church to seek opportunities in the secular world. The leaders and the local body of the church have declined in spiritual growth, leading to a loss in numbers of faithful ministers and gifted servants of Jesus Christ.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this action research thesis is to teach the leaders of four small churches in Richmond to prioritize a flourishing relationship with God. By mentoring and being intentional

in teaching the highest form of spiritual formation in each leader's day-to-day walk with God, every leader will come to bear much fruit. The intimate relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ, in which there is abiding in His love and words and ways, is something that pleases God, as it is in John 15:7-8. It would be wise to bring each leader to understand that making God the top priority is biblical, and that it is also the best way to develop that ever-rich relationship with Jesus Christ. The temptation is there for the leaders to make the quality time with God a secondary priority. The demands on life, due to financial need, and secular demands from secular occupations may rob leaders of the deliberation in prayer, in reading the Word of God, in fasting, in giving, and in going the extra mile for God. The Lord's words in John 15:8, especially, explain that the disciple who bears much fruit is the one who pleases God: "Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples." The proper order of one's dedication to the things of God can be taught. It means, therefore, that intentionality and the mentoring and teaching of the leaders to seek to please God the Father will result in the churches' gain in spiritual health. When God is pleased, He brings about the increase in the church, as far as spiritual growth, individually and corporately, goes.

Basic Assumptions

The main assumption that comes up in this thesis project is that all the participants have the Christian worldview. It means that the participants are aware of the basic practices of the believer in Christ, which include fasting, prayer, reading of the Word of God, and giving. With these presuppositions, it is also assumed that the participants in the Thesis Project will deal in truth, even as in John 4:24. That is, it is assumed that all answers to interview questions and surveys that are given are true, and that every participant is honest, just as is expected of a true follower of Christ. It is assumed also that the teachings in the project that are designed to address

the problem will be adhered to wholeheartedly, without coercion or intimidation. The integrity of the research project is made secure, by the provision of anonymity if the participants do prefer this approach. Finally, there is the assumption that the sample, that is used in this action research project, is an accurate representation of the situation and conditions, not only in this region of the United States, but of similar regions with about the same demographics and composition.

Definitions

Flourish: It is necessary to give a clear definition for the Christian leader, who is “flourishing” in his or her relationship with Jesus Christ. To flourish is understood as an act of producing abundantly, and it is a term that is related to multiplication of fruit-bearing plants. To flourish could mean that one is successful in a particular activity, especially in a relationship. The writings of the wisest man who ever lived, King Solomon, employ the word, “flourish,” as in Proverbs 11:28 and 14:11, in Ecclesiastes 12:5, and in Song of Solomon 7:12. The Psalmists also portray the life of the righteous person as one that will “flourish” (Psalm 72:7; 92:7, 12-13). In Psalm 1, David sings of two opposite ways of being, one of prosperity and one of failure to thrive. The life of prosperity is in line with the kind of being, which is blessed, and there is continual growth. It is the flourishing life that experiences the situation where the leaves do not “wither” and “whatsoever” the person does will prosper (Psalm 1:3).

John Ortberg attributes the happiness that is found in “happier people” to the existence of “rich, joy producing, life-changing, meaningful relationships.”⁷ In other words, it is something that may be identified as a flourishing relationship. Further, Ortberg explains that the meaningful relationship is best exemplified in connectedness, in that when one is connected to God, he or

⁷ John Ortberg, *The Me I Want to Be: Becoming God's Best Version of You* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 183.

she will “flourish,” but a person declines when he or she is disconnected from God.⁸ For that strong relationship with Christ to develop fully, a leader should be constantly led by the Holy Spirit in the daily walk with God. Along these lines, Klaus Issler describes the presence of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer as being imperative to the development and sustaining of “a flourishing life” in the kingdom of God.⁹ Therefore, whether on earth or with the Lord in heaven, a fruit-bearing life cannot be realized independent of God.

Disciple refers to the follower of a master. The Greek philosophers, such as Socrates and Aristotle, had their own disciples or followers. John the Baptist had disciples; the Pharisees also had disciples (Luke 5:33). The Lord Jesus had twelve disciples, whom He also called apostles (Matthew 10:1; Luke 6:13). In Christianity, the disciple is then the follower of the Master, Jesus Christ. Bill Hull explains that unless the person, who is following Jesus, desires to be like Him and undergoes “regeneration or new birth,” there is no authentic discipleship.¹⁰ Therefore, the process of becoming familiar with the ways and words of Jesus Christ is Christian discipleship. Putman and Harrington give several definitions for a disciple, but the main idea of a disciple is the follower of Christ, who is “becoming spiritually mature.”¹¹ Discipleship becomes the deliberate attempt to follow Jesus Christ, and the reaching forth toward the goal to become more and more like Him, every blessed day.

⁸ Ibid., 185.

⁹ Klaus Issler, *Living into the Life of Jesus: The Formation of Christian Character* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 133.

¹⁰ Bill Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship: On Being and Making Followers of Christ* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2006), 17.

¹¹ Jim Putman and Bobby Harrington, *DiscipleShift: Five Steps That Help Your Church to Make Disciples Who Make Disciples* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013), 43.

Luke 14:26-35 gives verses of the Lord Jesus's own descriptions of what a disciple is not. A selfish person or one, who loves himself, or herself, more than the love for Christ, cannot be the disciple of Christ. Likewise, a person who is looking to engage in comfortable Christianity is in for trouble, as the Lord describes the person who does not "bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:27). Moreover, any person who does not sit down and deliberate on the cost of discipleship is not worthy to be called a disciple of Jesus Christ. That is, it will cost any man or woman to follow Jesus. It will also cost any man or woman not to follow Jesus. Therefore, the Lord Jesus teaches that the person, who does not forsake all things and follow Him, cannot be His disciple (Luke 14:33). Following the Lord Jesus and becoming His disciple comes with losing all things, including one's life, and without sacrificing the comfort and the possessions in this life, one cannot be a disciple of Jesus, especially. Similarly, without the attitude of the soldier that the apostle Paul describes in 2 Timothy 2:4, the man "that entangleth" not "himself with the affairs of this life," the divided commitments will make a follower not a true disciple.

Spiritual formation is the adherence to certain practices that bring about spiritual growth in the believer of Christ. Spiritual formation goes hand in hand with discipleship. Hull describes spiritual formation as being the process by which the disciple, or follower, of Christ puts on "the character of Jesus Christ by a combination of effort and grace."¹² It takes time for a believer to allow the Holy Spirit to develop him or her to increasing levels of spiritual maturity, or into the image of Jesus Christ. The biblical verse that is in relation to this aspect of growth is 2 Corinthians 3:18: "But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord." The process

¹² Hull, *Complete Book of Discipleship*, 19.

of transformation into the image of Christ comes with certain practices that set apart Christian spiritual formation. Hull gives examples from the “spiritual formation movement,” such as “silence, solitude, frugality, and meditation on Scripture.”¹³ The Holy Spirit is the One who develops the believer into the image of Christ, even though the believer is the person who takes on the practices.

It should be made clear that a believer in Christ has signed up for change in his or her life, and that this change is for the better since the Lord is the ultimate example for discipleship. Paul Pettit defines this transformation process in the following terms: “First, spiritual formation is the holistic work of God in a believer’s life whereby systematic change renders the individual continually closer to the image and actions of Jesus Christ.”¹⁴ The sooner the believer grasps the concept of spiritual formation, the more beneficial it will be for him or her. The Lord Jesus Christ has taught His disciples that they should be perfect, even as God the Father is perfect (Matthew 5:48). Therefore, spiritual formation is necessary in the life of the disciple of Christ, especially if this follower of Christ is a leader in the church.

A *leader* in the kingdom of God is a different type of person from a leader in a secular occupation. This distinction is succinct in Stacy’s description of leadership in the New Testament, in that “‘leadership’ is a matter of guiding rather than governing.”¹⁵ Therein lies the difference, as the secular view of the leader is a person who wields authority over others, as opposed to the Christian leader who is humble and is a servant, first and foremost. The twelve

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Paul Pettit, ed., *Foundations of Spiritual Formation: A Community Approach to Becoming Like Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2008), 19.

¹⁵ Robert Wayne Stacy, “A Concept Study: Leadership in New Testament Greek,” in *Biblical Leadership: Theology for the Everyday Leader*, ed. Benjamin K. Forrest and Chet Roden (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic, 2017), 303.

apostles of Jesus were trained by Him to take on the responsibility of leadership. But this leader, who is called by Jesus Christ, is actually a person who serves God and others. Again, Stacy explains that a leader, in the New Testament context, “can *guide* others precisely because he’s been there and knows the way.”¹⁶ In other words, the person in the church, who understands the teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ on shepherding and servanthood, is positioned to be a leader, because he or she is trained to teach others to adopt the same attitude and skills.

As it has become evident that the Christian leader is a servant of God, he or she is called to exhibit a particular form of leadership. Joseph M. Stowell distinguishes the character-driven leader, the Christian leader, from the outcome-driven leader, the secular leader, and he states that “their leadership is not about them, but about Christ and his kingdom.”¹⁷ The apostle Paul writes that leadership is a gift from God, as in Romans 12:8: “He that ruleth, with diligence.” A Christian leader, then, has influence on many people and should be cautious to promote the agenda of God. Stowell adds that it is important to steward that gift of leadership well, knowing that the highest level of accountability is required of the men and women who will lead God’s people.¹⁸ On this very point, the apostle James warns leaders, or “masters,” that they “shall receive the greater condemnation” (James 3:1). The faithful disciple of Jesus Christ may be well on his or her way to accept the responsibility to guide others into a growing relationship with the Lord, as he or she also grows daily into the image of Jesus Christ.

Limitations

¹⁶ Ibid., 305.

¹⁷ Joseph M. Stowell, *Redefining Leadership: Character-Driven Habits of Effective Leaders* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), 35.

¹⁸ Ibid., 24.

This action research project is supposed to address a problem in ministry leadership. Therefore, the research is exclusive to adult leaders of the church, meaning that children are not included. In order for this project to be one of collaboration and not one of manipulation, the participants can decide at any point to remove themselves from, or take back their inclusion in, the project. The set number of participants, in the range of ten to twelve, is intentional, so that the project can effectively be carried out and the studies may be undertaken smoothly. The surveys and interviews which form a part of the action research also place further limitations on the overall Thesis Project. It means that the specific methodology, through surveys and interviews and teachings, is in itself a limitation, considering that other competing methodologies are available.

Delimitations

The particular choice to undertake this action research project in Richmond, Virginia, is within the researcher's control. Any other set of ministries could have been chosen, but the four small churches in the Richmond area were selected. It is part of the delimitation of this project that both men and women leaders in the churches are selected, and that at least ten participants are considered. The decision to tackle the present issue in leadership, where leaders lack the understanding in prioritizing a meaningful relationship with Christ, is a delimitation as well. Out of the numerous problems that may be addressed in Christian ministry, the choice to deal with this aspect of leadership is something that is within the researcher's own control.

Thesis Statement

If the leaders of four small churches in Richmond prioritize a flourishing relationship with God, then they will bear much fruit that glorifies God. The type of relationship with Jesus Christ, in which the leader is led and directed in everything, requires the time, dedication, and

intentionality of relying on the Holy Spirit of God. In such a relationship with Christ, God's own reputation is on the line. Trials and tribulations and hardships may come, but the leader will not be moved because he or she will be learning how to endure in the good and bad seasons of the walk with God. It is the kind of growth that must be imitated, a spiritual growth that keeps on developing to the point that its influence spreads on to every person the leader encounters. The bearing of fruit in the personal ministry will translate into public ministry. The steps of the leader will be ordered, whether he or she happens to be prominent in the church or in the occupation in the secular world. No longer will the leader be enticed to exit the church and go after greener pastures in the secular world.

As the leader spends more time in reading the Word of God, and in praying, and communing with God, the Holy Spirit will bring about the right balance in other areas of his or her life. The flourishing leader will see that relationships at home with the spouse and children are growing. The leader who has prioritized that intimate relationship with Christ will come to appreciate the Lord's work in adding to the church. He or she will settle with the fact that God is glorified when fruit bearing is a constant goal, and that a personal commitment to please God as the top priority in one's life is what leads to true discipleship. The leaders' practices that lead to this spiritually healthy disciple will continue to be the example in discipleship in each of these churches in Richmond.

CHAPTER 2: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Chapter two presents a literature review, in which the problem, purpose, and thesis statements receive further support and clarification. The literature review is followed by the theological foundation on the topic of making God the first and foremost in all things the leader engages in, while leaving the increase to God. The theoretical foundation is carefully given, and a summary and conclusion are made available in this chapter.

Literature Review

The literature review on the topic of leaders and the prioritizing of their relationship with God has provided a conversation that is given in this discussion below. Six themes are considered in this literature review: Intimate relationship with Christ, the flourishing life or bearing much fruit, God as the top priority in the leader's life, building of a Christlike character in the leader, stewardship of the time, gifts, and talents God has given the leader, and learning and growing through suffering and hardships. Each theme receives its distinct conversation and discussion, and a summary is provided at the end of this literature review.

Intimate Relationship with Christ

The first theme that is discussed is the intimate relationship that a leader is supposed to have with Jesus Christ. With John 15:1-8 in consideration, Peter Scazzero explains that abiding in Christ and bearing much fruit go hand in hand, and that it has never been a debate about separating the two.¹⁹ The argument is that values of the kingdom of God outweigh the values of the world, in that everything that a disciple or leader is doing is never to be independent of the direction and wisdom of God. The leader does not achieve this level of intimacy without being

¹⁹ Peter Scazzero, *The Emotionally Healthy Leader: How Transforming Your Inner Life Will Deeply Transform Your Church, Team, and the World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2015), 37.

intentional about the daily entailments and quality of the personal relationship with Christ. The private life of the leader, then, must be one of discipline in the conversations with God. Henry Blackaby and Richard Blackaby add to this important part of the relationship with Jesus, that a prayerful life is significant to developing the growth in a leader's life that has eternal value, for without Jesus Christ nothing of substance will be achieved before God.²⁰ An attitude that is contrary to being deliberate in an intimate relationship with Jesus is tantamount to a person doing his or her own thing, without building on the foundation of Christ.

Doing the things that please and glorify God should be the goal of every Christian leader. In that sense, the leader will be successful. Matt Perman refers to the leader's intimate relationship with Christ that involves prayer as being productive, stating that it is the implied interpretation of John 15:5.²¹ To neglect to set apart the time and energy to be intimate with Christ ends up in disappointment, to the detriment of the Christian leader. Tripp argues in a similar fashion that if anyone, especially pastors and leaders of the church, is not making the Savior present in his or her daily walk, then the people and things in one's life will become "the messiah."²² The relationships with fellow human beings are necessary, but it is far more important that each person looks upward for the meaningful relationship that is to be found with knowing the Lord Jesus Christ. Tripp stresses the need for growing "vertically" in one's primary relationship, which is with Jesus Christ.²³

²⁰ Henry Blackaby and Richard Blackaby, *Spiritual Leadership: Moving People on to God's Agenda* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing, 2011), 183.

²¹ Matt Perman, *What's Best Next: How the Gospel Transforms the Way You Get Things Done* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016), 56.

²² Paul David Tripp, *Dangerous Calling: Confronting the Unique Challenge of Pastoral Ministry* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 36.

²³ Ibid.

Any relationship will be rocky and shaky, but the relationship between the leader and Jesus Christ should not be. For this reason, Prime and Begg point to the devotional life, that results in harmony with God and the Savior, as the “preeminent purpose” of ministry, leading to keeping “ourselves in step with God.”²⁴ Words and actions do matter in relationships. Now, if the leader is not asking God to lead him or her every day, how is this most precious of relationships going to be successful? During prayer, the Lord hears each leader or disciple. Prayers can be short or long. However, a life of short prayers, once a day, or no prayers at all will not do. Epperly argues that, without the presence of the Divine, the God of Christianity, in a person’s life, the daily life will lead to burnout and instances where “our ministries lose their zest.”²⁵ That is, pastors and leaders in Christian organizations would be wise to stay plugged in to Christ, the source of their understanding and the meaning within their labor.

It is only appropriate if the Lord is leading in each relationship. Whenever there is a struggle in identifying to whom one must look for direction and instruction, the proper adjustment should be in order. Ortberg adds that this adjustment is effective, when the leader understands that he or she is not God, and that Jesus Christ works in the life of His disciples, in order that they will be changed on the inside “the way God wants.”²⁶ It is a process, and processes take time to come to fruition. Therefore, a relationship with Christ requires the deliberation of a meaningful relationship, leading to that intimate relationship that keeps on growing. From this perspective, Stowell also argues that the preeminence of Christ in the

²⁴ Derek J. Prime and Alistair Begg, *On Being a Pastor: Understanding Our Calling and Work* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2004), 83.

²⁵ Bruce Epperly, *A Center in the Cyclone: Twenty-First Century Clergy Self-Care* (Lanham, MD: Bowman and Littlefield, 2014), 97.

²⁶ Ortberg, *The Me I Want*, 62.

leader's relationship with Him will amount to leadership that is full of "worship" of God.²⁷ The hurried type of relationship of today falls into the category that is contrary to what Stowell is saying above.

Many relationships exist, and not all relationships are created equal. George Hillman describes the relationships that leaders of the church have at work in ministry, or in secular occupations, or in their daily lives, as the places where they "live out" their "calling," and that the love for the Lord and for others means that God has made the relationships "sacred."²⁸ The leader's love for God can be shown in his or her dedication to please Him. This love relationship makes more sense, if the commitment is present as an ongoing, daily practice of being obedient to the Lord for His glory. Jared Wilson shares a similar sentiment, in his argument that an intentional approach to deny oneself and replace one's "self-centeredness" with the teachings and commandments of Christ is the winsome discipleship way to live in a healthy community of God's people.²⁹ An intimate relationship with Jesus Christ is the only way, by which the self can be slowly removed and placed in its rightful, subordinate position.

The Flourishing Life/Bearing Much Fruit of the Leader

After attitudes and approaches are all focused on the intimate relationship with Christ, leaders stand firmly in an advantageous position to bear much fruit, or flourish, in their walk with the Lord. Henry Blackaby and Richard Blackaby explain that when God sets the "priorities" of a leader's life, he or she will then eliminate the chaff, so that "those activities on God's agenda

²⁷ Stowell, *Redefining Leadership*, 83.

²⁸ George Hillman, "Calling and Spiritual Formation," in *Foundations of Spiritual Formation: A Community Approach to Becoming Like Christ*, ed. Paul Pettit (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic, 2008), 202.

²⁹ Wilson, *The Prodigal Church*, 172.

can flourish.”³⁰ It means that the things that attract the leader’s attention will be in line with the will of God, resulting in continual growth and the bearing of much fruit. Klaus Issler is direct in his assessment of a leader who is flourishing: “The Holy Spirit who indwells us forever (John 14:16) does not want to run our life for us, but to mentor/guide and partner/empower us so we can engage in a flourishing life in Jesus’ kingdom.”³¹ Indeed, the flourishing life is the kind that pleases God, the kind that must be influential to the point of being imitated in the community.

In one’s work, the aim is to be productive; the aim is to bear much fruit, then. Mabey, Conroy, Blakeley, and de Marco carry the discussion further, indicating that the Lord Jesus Christ exemplified the effectiveness in bearing fruit internally in His own life, which readily impacted His disciples and those around Him, and that the same is expected of today’s leaders and disciples, except that some people’s work tend to be “degrading, inhuman, and meaningless.”³² In this situation, the leader’s lifestyle and walk with the Lord should be the difference that is attractive to the person whose work is not aligned with fruit-bearing for God. Perman has a remedy for this decay in a person’s life, as he encourages leaders to reach for “virtue and character,” so that they may “live a productive and fruitful life before God,” and then “seek to grow in them.”³³ Growing spiritually is an internal mechanism that translates into external productivity and influences.

The proper way for anyone to bear much fruit must be as described in the last sentence above. The bearing of fruit should be a two-pronged idea, having both individual and corporate

³⁰ Blackaby and Blackaby, *Spiritual Leadership*, 249.

³¹ Issler, *Living into the Life*, 133.

³² Christopher Mabey et al., "Having Burned the Straw Man of Christian Spiritual Leadership, What Can We Learn from Jesus about Leading Ethically?" *Journal of Business Ethics* 145, no. 4 (2017): 765.

³³ Perman, *What’s Best Next*, 125.

benefits. Wilson indicates that the main idea is to safeguard souls, not statistics, and that growth in numbers will always be secondary to the necessity for spiritual growth, which is the disciple's major personal responsibility.³⁴ The care of souls is paramount. Since it is the Lord who adds to the church every time, the effectiveness in the leader's care for the congregation will come in the continued pursuit of the works which yield abundant fruit. Albert Mohler sees that endurance leads to maintenance of the heart and mind to be fruitful, as "it offers the blessing of a long memory and a longer period of evaluation" and allows "the fruit of leadership to show itself in abundance."³⁵ Without committing the time and effort in developing a healthy spiritual life, then, the leader will give up when the going gets tough, especially in the face of adversity.

Ortberg goes to the extent of pointing out that humans were created "to flourish in connectedness."³⁶ It means that each leader should identify those things in his or her relationships that produce something meaningful and eternal, and then nurture them into the relationships. If leaders have had certain experiences, they may be able to relate to someone who is going through a similar situation. The flourishing life of the leaders may serve as the example in those moments, making it evident that it took time and patience for them to grow to that level of spiritual maturity. Aubrey Malphurs cautions, however, that at some point leaders will reach their maximum competence level and will need to move out of the way, so that they do not "hinder God's work."³⁷ Not many leaders can boldly proclaim that they have arrived at that high

³⁴ Wilson, *The Prodigal Church*, 152.

³⁵ Albert Mohler, *The Conviction to Lead: 25 Principles for Leadership That Matters* (Grand Rapids, MI: Bethany House Publishers, 2012), 195.

³⁶ Ortberg, *The Me I Want*, 186.

³⁷ Aubrey Malphurs, *Being Leaders: The Nature of Authentic Christian Leadership* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2003), 59.

level of ministry. It follows then that leaders should engage in those practices that will materialize into spiritual health in their personal lives and in the corporate body of the church.

Endeavoring to reach a higher level of spiritual growth as one grows chronologically is a wise concept. It is the same attitude that Epperly has assumed in his personal walk with the Lord, focusing on the “understanding of God’s abundant life, which includes the body as well as the spirit.”³⁸ Every facet of the leader’s life is fashioned into the image of Jesus Christ, when there is the holistic intentionality to attaining spiritual health. The words, deeds, and teachings of Jesus Christ will then be put into practice, and the leader grows and bears much fruit with each passing day. In the midst of all of this process, Scazzero suggests that leaders must “slow down” and allow the Lord Jesus Christ to have full “access to every aspect of” their “lives and leadership,” which will ultimately bring about the bearing of much fruit.³⁹ This reality is in line with the Lord’s instruction that His disciples should abide in Him. It takes time for the Holy Spirit to build the leader up to excel in that intimate relationship with Christ, so slowing down makes it possible to be fully present in the process.

God as the Top Priority in the Leader’s Life

Many of the distractions in a leader’s life can be removed, if things are prioritized, while accepting God as the top priority. Perman argues that the priorities for leaders in various ministries are already set by God, for He is “the one ultimate priority,” as in Matthew 6:33.⁴⁰ All the struggle to achieve financial stability and excellence in ministry, or vocation, and security in one’s family and relationships will be meaningless, without giving God His proper place in the

³⁸ Epperly, *Center in the Cyclone*, 45.

³⁹ Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Leader*, 118.

⁴⁰ Perman, *What’s Best Next*, 135.

leader's life. Since God is first in all things in the leader's life, the kingdom of God should also be a prominent feature in the being and doing of his or her life. Along these lines, Tripp adds that the leader's "vertical" relationship is the top priority, from which a "variety of horizontal expressions" spring up, and that the understanding of this truth signifies the leader's maturity.⁴¹ The recognition, that God is first and foremost, sets the stage for the proper ordering of the secondary and tertiary priorities, and so on.

There is a primary calling for every person that is in a relationship with the God of Christianity. Much more so is it for the Christian leader, whose primary calling, according to Hillman, is not to his or her marriage, or ministry, or work, or vocation, but it is "first and foremost to God."⁴² The purpose of and meaning in life come from God, so the leader is wise if he or she seeks God first and early. All other roles and capacities are therefore secondary and should be recognized as such. Kanagaraj describes the primacy of the relationship between God the Father and God the Son, and the implication for understanding that God is love, as the model and the "prerequisite" to bearing fruit, for every Christian leader, or believer.⁴³ The discussion is resounding, then, that if the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the One that every Christian leader is imitating, saw the Father as the utmost priority, His followers should have the same perspective in their relationships with God.

The focus of Christian leaders should be on God, who alone deserves the top spot on the priority list. Tim Suttle points out that God is at the center, and the gospel is God's "redemption

⁴¹ Tripp, *Dangerous Calling*, 64.

⁴² Hillman, "Calling and Spiritual Formation," 198.

⁴³ Jey J. Kanagaraj, "John 15: Jesus' Pastoral Speech II," in *John: A New Covenant Commentary* (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Lutterworth Press, 2013), 154, accessed October 4, 2020. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1cg4kpk.21>.

of the cosmos,” not the leaders’ infatuation with church growth and numbers.⁴⁴ It must be this way. Otherwise, church leaders would be constantly looking for and relying on their abilities and gifts to do something they can never achieve on their own. Suttle argues further that, without guidance, leaders may continue to follow the failing strategies and models of disciple-making, which are only producing believers with shallow spirituality.⁴⁵ Why not take the first step for the journey from the proper origin? Bill Hull has the answer that the source of God’s kingdom is heaven, and so there is no need for leaders to strive to attain the eternal things of that kingdom from down below heaven, in the earth but, specifically, leaders should catch on “to how God wants to use” their “abilities.”⁴⁶ A misplaced use of one’s gifts and a misunderstanding of who one’s Master is will end up in a complete waste of time and energy. It is high time that people aimed higher, through the leading and direction of Almighty God.

Caution should be exercised, so that valuable time and resources are not squandered on leaders’ pursuit of their own mission and accomplishments. Mabey, Conroy, Blakeley, and de Marco agree that those men and women, who are “called,” have the responsibility to be obedient to God first, and that the vocation and the work itself are to be considered, after the leaders understand that God is the priority in their lives.⁴⁷ Under such conditions, it is possible to perceive something beautiful for leaders of churches, or Christian organizations. It is what Wilson calls the “worship in the splendor of God’s holiness,” where the One true God is

⁴⁴ Tim Suttle, *Shrink: Faithful Ministry in a Church-Growth Culture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), 121.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Bill Hull, *The Christian Leader: Rehabilitating Our Addiction to Secular Leadership* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016), 97.

⁴⁷ Mabey et al., “Having Burned Straw Man?” 764.

celebrated and glorified.⁴⁸ The created being finds his or her calling and remembers that God, who has blessed him or her with the gifts and talents for effective ministry, deserves all the praise and adoration.

The foundation must be Jesus Christ for the Christian leader. It means that the things leaders are instructed to do by Christ are a mandate. Scazzero explains that the inner work in a leader should be focused on God first, and then the good works will show up outwardly, to the benefit of all who see the leader “bear good fruit.”⁴⁹ The things of God will be unstoppable if leaders are careful to make God the top priority. This fact has prompted Henry Blackaby and Richard Blackaby to declare that leaders, who try to work under their own power, “will achieve commiserate results,” but those leaders, who see God as the first and as God, will “experience what God can accomplish.”⁵⁰ That is, the work of the leader is approved by God, who has Himself set him or her in the ministry in the first place. To do anything in that ministry without first seeing God as the top priority would be irresponsible.

The strength to remain focused on God is built in the process of seeking Him daily and persevering in doing so. E. Glenn Hinson establishes that God is the ultimate number one in the “hierarchy” of priorities, and that leaders should be vigilant against falling into the trap and then “edge God out,” because of “excuses.”⁵¹ It is easy for a person to sideline God, due to the busyness of life. This situation brings every leader closer to his or her own agenda, while the best thing to do is to allow the Holy Spirit to be one’s guide. Stowell suggests that leaders make

⁴⁸ Wilson, *The Prodigal Church*, 99.

⁴⁹ Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Leader*, 175.

⁵⁰ Blackaby and Blackaby, *Spiritual Leadership*, 257.

⁵¹ E. Glenn Hinson, “Everyday Spirituality for Ordinary Time,” *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology* 67, no. 3 (July 2013): 279, <http://doi-org.ezproxy.liberty.edu/10.1177/0020964313484108>.

Christ the “center,” so that everything will be about Him, making His way and life be paramount in leadership.⁵² In this manner, the self is pushed out of the way and Christ may take His rightful place in the leader’s heart.

Building of a Christlike Character in the Leader

The life of a leader, who has made God first in all interactions, should reflect the character of Jesus Christ Himself. This life requires that the leader will surrender to the leading of the Holy Spirit, and that he or she will align the words and deeds in life with the words, the ways, and the teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ. Stanley argues that there are many cases of leaders who have run their organizations and institutions without character, but that the effective leaders are those who have decided long ago that certain issues about right and wrong are “non-negotiable.”⁵³ It means that the leaders of character have led a life that is built upon the foundation of biblical truth, when it comes to doing the right thing. Therefore, a resounding bell rings in the definition that Stanley has provided for character, that “character is the will to do what’s right even when it’s hard.”⁵⁴ The will of a person is subject to all kinds of manipulation, when the requirements to survive include bending the rules a little and doing the things that will make one comfortable. It is the more reason why the leader, especially in a Christian capacity, should be wired to approach the life in the earth in the manner that Jesus would have him or her do all things.

The pressures that come along in the lives of leaders in the twenty-first century are more than capable of causing them to compromise their character, in favor of the comfort and

⁵² Stowell, *Redefining Leadership*, 127.

⁵³ Andy Stanley, *Next Generation Leader: Five Essentials for Those Who Will Shape the Future* (New York, NY: Multnomah, 2003), 133.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

acceptance of the crowd in this same century. Speaking on the importance of the leader's vision and the significance of leading as with the head of Jesus, Ken Blanchard and Phil Hodges add that "values define the character in a leader," and that these values must be "non-negotiable principles."⁵⁵ It would be wise therefore for the Christian leader to be familiar with the truth, the absolute guiding principles of the Word of God. In this way, he or she will be in the position to walk in accordance with the right idea of how to speak and behave in a manner that is taught by the Lord Jesus Christ.

Again, Blanchard and Hodges argue that the correct values will show up in the daily walk of the spiritual leader, because he or she will have to live them out in clearly "defined" and "ordered" terms.⁵⁶ But it is not automatic for the leader to get to this level of being impervious to the influences of others, or to the organizations, that he or she works for. It takes time and continual surrender to the authority and work of the Holy Spirit, so that the values of the Lord Jesus Christ may become the values of leaders of character. Blanchard and Hodges write that an agent for change embraces "the values of Christ, the Servant Leader."⁵⁷ It makes sense for this argument to be promoted, because Jesus Christ is the ultimate model of leadership, the greatest example of a leader who lives and moves with moral authority.

Serving others is unpopular in the business world, where leaders aim to wield all the power and exert their authority on their subordinates. But the Lord Jesus Christ has taught that it is morally proper and right to serve the men and women who happen to be the leaders' followers. Among the "qualities" that John C. Maxwell proposes for stronger connections, "a heart to

⁵⁵ Ken Blanchard and Phil Hodges, *Lead Like Jesus: Lessons for Everyone from the Greatest Leadership Role Model of All Time* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2005), 90.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 93.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 96.

serve” and “good values,” which must be shown by “words and actions,” stand out above the rest.⁵⁸ Society has its own little realities, which may crowd out the truth according to the Word of God, if one is not careful to know the difference. For example, it might be okay for aspiring or practicing leaders in the secular world to lie in their business dealings, so that they can maximize their profit margins. But it is not so for Christian leaders, who are instructed not to take the name of the Lord in vain and are trained to deal in truth (Exodus 20:7; John 4:24). Maxwell signals that successful leaders must “keep connecting,” but it is imperative that they “live” what they are communicating.⁵⁹ With the heightened tendency for each leader to do the things that are convenient, especially when no one is watching, only leaders who are in the utmost relationship with God, who are built up to exercise the character of Christ, will stand up to the task of turning down all the enticing ways to deceive and cheat other people, including the men and women that may follow them.

The final destination is in view for spiritual leaders, then, as they must allow the Spirit of God to build within them a Christlike character. It means that the goal for these leaders is to arrive at a place, where doing the right things becomes normative and second nature. Maxwell describes how it is easy for any leaders to put forward all those attributes that show their strengths, rather than being their true selves and showing their “weaknesses” and vulnerabilities in all encounters.⁶⁰ The leader who has been trained to exhibit the character of Christ is the one that imitates Him in the daily walk with God. This leader is aware of who is leading him or her, and he or she has come to terms with the reality of becoming selfless. Any other way of life

⁵⁸ John C. Maxwell, *Everyone Communicates Few Connect: What the Most Effective People Do Differently* (Nashville, TN: Harper Collins Leadership, 2010), 226.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 243.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 247.

makes the leader susceptible to bringing back of the old self, so that the leader will look good for the public, while inwardly he or she may be corrupt.

True Christianity is embedded in the righteousness of Jesus Christ, which is imputed unto His disciples (Romans 4:6-7). Therefore, the disciple becomes like the Master as he or she takes on the characteristics of Christ, all of which are wrapped in being transformed into the image of Jesus Christ. Howell explains that Jesus' teachings, especially His sayings on the Sermon on the Mount, go deeper to the extent of searching "the motives, thoughts, and intents of the heart behind the acts of service."⁶¹ The leader cannot reach this level of clean motives and intentions, without a conscious and deliberate attempt to live and be as the Master of righteousness. Howell also agrees that "the conscience" is an integral part of a person's "spiritual health," and the leader will do well to work toward having the moral authority, that is prescribed by the teachings of Jesus Christ.⁶² The Holy Spirit's work in the life of the leader makes it possible for him or her to build a Christlike character, where, in the face of tremendous odds to do the wrong thing, the leader moves to do the right thing, even to the detriment of the self.

Stewardship of the Time, Gifts, and Talents God Has Given the Leader

It is important for leaders to recognize that they are not superhuman, and that only God can do all things. With this understanding, leaders will also accept the fact that they are stewards of what God has given them. According to Scazzero, the "emotionally healthy" leader is the one, who is aware of his own gifts and has the understanding to train and develop others in the church to become stewards of their gifts also.⁶³ It is a sensible way to bear fruit and see that others also

⁶¹ Don N. Howell, *Servants of the Servant: A Biblical Theology of Leadership* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2003), 185.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 265.

⁶³ Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Leader*, 228.

bear much fruit. One does not attempt to do the things that are beyond him or her, in such cases of self-awareness. Henry Blackaby and Richard Blackaby add to the conversation that leaders who know their own limits do not seek to do everything, but they choose to stay on “God’s agenda.”⁶⁴ It makes sense, because remaining on God’s agenda ensures that no time or energy is wasted on extraneous work. God’s plan becomes the leader’s plan.

Boundaries and limits are present for a reason in the lives of leaders. Those limits that are built into each leader’s life by God should not be breached. Mohler writes, “The bottom line is this: We are merely stewards, not lords, of all that is put into our trust. The sovereignty of God puts us in our place, and that place is in God’s service.”⁶⁵ A spirit-filled leader listens to the voice of God and his or her own body and takes heed. Sometimes, tiredness is a signal that one is moving too fast and must slow down. But John MacArthur points to an excellent way to godliness, by asking that leaders devote the time and effort, especially in their leisure, “to the task of cultivating humility, repentance, holiness, and the fear of God.”⁶⁶ None of these characteristics is achievable, independently. It is an indirect way of suggesting that the leader should always look for the limits on the work he or she is assigned, as well as asking God to supply the grace that is necessary to proceed daily.

Even the pauses in the activities of life every day occur for reasons that God has designed for humans. The leader is no exception when it comes to having rest. Ortberg argues that sometimes God causes leaders to take a break, not to “show off” their “giftedness,” but that they

⁶⁴ Blackaby and Blackaby, *Spiritual Leadership*, 243.

⁶⁵ Mohler, *Conviction to Lead*, 135.

⁶⁶ John MacArthur, *The Book on Leadership* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2004), 155.

may have the opportunity to serve.⁶⁷ Therefore, leaders would benefit if they saw certain interruptions in activity to be a blessing from God. Hinson adds that the focus on “acquisition of things” and the crowding of calendars, just to suit a leader’s selfish schedule, take away the proper focus which must be on the “priorities” God has set for leaders.⁶⁸ It all comes down to the leader’s understanding that he or she is human and should recognize that some things are beyond human control.

Christian leaders are not immune to failure. Bill Hull explains that Christian leaders fall short because of wrong motives and selfish ambitions, but they have the responsibility to care for and be stewards of others, which requires them to use their gifts with care.⁶⁹ Christian leaders are supposed to be exceptional, as they are called to impact many lives for their God. There is no denying that they must be careful with how they influence their followers.

Pitt gives a different argument that some leaders aim to work strictly in the clergy but, when the opportunities are not present, they are content to be “credible religious laborers” because “the sacred shadow occupation overlaps the secular tangible one.”⁷⁰ It means that the leader can exhibit his or her stewardship in any capacity, whether in the clergy or in the secular world. But the ultimate goal is to dedicate all time, gifts, and talents to full-time ministry for the Lord and His church. Issler adds that the effective leader is competent as a “parent,” “a CEO,” a manager, and a head of an institution, all because he or she uses the gifts, body, and time,

⁶⁷ Ortberg, *The Me I Want*, 230.

⁶⁸ Hinson, “Everyday Spirituality,” 279.

⁶⁹ Hull, *The Christian Leader*, 80.

⁷⁰ Richard N. Pitt, “Legitimizing New Understanding of Ministry and the Clergy,” in *Divine Callings: Understanding the Call to Ministry in Black Protestantism* (New York, NY: NYU Press, 2012), 227, accessed October 4, 2020. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt9qfhhb.11>.

properly, in the service of others for God.⁷¹ It will therefore not be completely out of the ordinary to state that Christian leaders should endeavor to be God's appointed leaders in whatever corner they find themselves.

Learning and Growing through Suffering and Hardships

Authentic Christianity comes with the acceptance of its leaders that they are not always protected from pain and suffering. As a matter of fact, leaders should embrace the presence of weaknesses and limitations and suffering. Suttle sees the strength in "brokenness," for it is an "essential virtue of leadership," and it is truly the only common denominator when it comes to human experiences.⁷² Since a person who has mourned before can be counted on to share in another's burdens, the pastor who accepts his vulnerabilities can be useful in the healing of others' sorrows. Prime and Begg also perceive the trials and "difficulties" in the leaders' lives as God's way of shaping and molding them to become faithful "servants" in the calling to serve Him and His people.⁷³ With the experiences in the low points as part of the leader's resume, he or she may be in the position to build others up, because the leader has been down before.

The tried and tested leader can be highly effective. This truth has prompted MacArthur to argue in a similar fashion that it is the true leader who maintains the calm and collected attitude while everyone else is "merely flustered, confounded, and perplexed."⁷⁴ Such a leader is not ashamed to recognize that he or she cannot do everything, and that all will be well, because God has brought the victory under similar conditions in the past. Stowell goes to the extent of writing

⁷¹ Issler, *Living into the Life*, 69.

⁷² Suttle, *Shrink*, 191.

⁷³ Prime and Begg, *On Being a Pastor*, 46.

⁷⁴ MacArthur, *The Book on Leadership*, 45.

that “mournful leaders ‘get it,’ attributing their success to their ability to repent, learn from their mistakes, and in so doing “they serve as mentoring influence on others who need to know how to deal with sin as well.”⁷⁵ Though not all suffering is as a result of sin, mourning and pain bring leaders to a place where they seek God, and God alone is the present help that the leaders need in their daily lives.

It is difficult for Christian leaders to let the world know that they themselves have experienced pain and hardships. To fail to explain this reality to those who mourn would be a breach in the trust that must exist between leaders and followers. Hillman points to the incidents of martyrdom in Christianity as examples that leaders in the church of God should expect to be “led to do things that are not pleasurable or enjoyable,” at some points in their ministry for God.⁷⁶ It is the main reason why God’s will is different from the will of men and women. If it were left to the ordinary persons, only the things that will lead to their own pleasure will rise to the top, every time. Wilson shares the proper perspective that, once the gospel has taken over in a person’s mind and life, he or she will eliminate the “idols of the age and the ornaments of the culture,” making way for the gospel and “the change of pain,” which is “seen as better than the pain of staying the same.”⁷⁷ It follows then that the transforming power of God and the Christ cannot be replaced by anything else, even if the things of God involve the pain and suffering that come along with the gospel.

Ortberg argues that suffering serves as a check on the leader’s inclination to return to old habits and describes it in this manner: “Suffering enables us to see the folly of chasing after

⁷⁵ Stowell, *Redefining Leadership*, 144.

⁷⁶ Hillman, “Calling and Spiritual Formation,” 214.

⁷⁷ Wilson, *The Prodigal Church*, 181.

temporal gods, and when people suffer, they often resolve to not return to their old way of life when things normalize.”⁷⁸ It can be inferred, then, that suffering that is related to the things of eternal value should be welcomed. However, it is not easy for any leader to come to this point of accepting the pain and hardships of ministry. Epperly explains that much “fear,” due to financial hardships to the family and ministry, can result in the feeling of “negativity, powerlessness, and hopelessness.”⁷⁹ These sentiments are applicable to almost all leaders in the churches, causing these leaders to begin to strategize and involve themselves in extra work just to earn the financial stability, security, and power. But Epperly reminds leaders that “we are connected to the vine of loving relationships and a loving God,” and that “affirmations focus our minds and energize our actions.”⁸⁰ These affirmations are found in the safe and security of the promises of God in His Word. The leader, who has made God his or her top priority and has that meaningful and intimate relationship with the Son of God, stands in that enviable position to know these promises and to act on them.

Summary

In summary, this review of literature has shown the need for Christian leaders to develop an intimate relationship with Jesus Christ, the necessity of bearing much fruit, as it is pleasing to God, the importance of recognizing God as the top priority in all things, the diligence in building a Christlike character in the leader’s life, the recognition that effective ministry happens in the call and patience that come to the territory when leaders know they are stewards of their gifts, talents, and time, and the blessing of learning and growing through suffering and hardships.

⁷⁸ Ortberg, *The Me I Want*, 241.

⁷⁹ Epperly, *Center in the Cyclone*, 49.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

These six discussion points will allow the conversation to continue, as the problem of the lack of understanding in prioritizing a fully functioning relationship with God is addressed.

Theological Foundations

The desire of every Christian leader should be for him or her to make disciples, which is in line with the Lord Jesus Christ's Great Commission to the church, as in Matthew 28:19: "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen." It means that the leader should also pause for a second and ponder what kind of disciple he or she must be, as a leader of God's church. The Lord Jesus Christ has made it clear what His disciple is made of, as in John 15:8: "Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples." The Lord has shown that the disciple who bears much fruit, the disciple who abides in His love, the disciple who is obedient to His words and deeds, is that disciple who pleases God the Father.

The passage, John 15:1-10, paints a picture of the relationship that must exist between the leaders of churches, and true disciples of Christ for that matter, and Jesus Christ the Savior of the world. In this relationship, bearing much fruit is the highlight of the things that please God. Apart from the Lord Jesus Christ, no one can do anything, as in John 15:5. It is therefore safe for each disciple to remain in Jesus, in His words, and in His love. The words of Jesus have life, and He gives to the faithful disciple, who abides in Him, the things he or she asks Him (John 15:7). The words and ways of Jesus are invaluable in the life of the disciple, or Christian leader. The leader, who is doing the things that bring about glorifying God, is cognizant of the commandments of Christ, and the commandments of Christ are lived out in the words and actions of each disciple (John 15:10).

The Lord Jesus Christ emphasizes His disciples' need to follow His words and deeds in John 8:31: "Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on Him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed." His words have been about His disciples' obedience to the things He told them, including loving one another and going out and reaching the world with the gospel. Equally important is that the disciples of Christ, or leaders in the church or Christian organizations, are called to imitate the way that Jesus Christ walked. Again, the apostle John supplies this discipline in 1 John 2:6: "He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked." The Lord's walk was in obedience to the Father, in prayer for long hours before the Father, and in knowing that God the Father is the utmost priority in all things. As Walls and Anders explain, regarding the person who is developed in the relationship with Christ, "Made complete probably means 'mature,' not 'perfect' as some people have concluded."⁸¹ For the disciples of Jesus to know God, therefore, the intimate relationship with His Son, Jesus Christ, cannot be ignored. That significance of the personal, intimate relationship with God and the Christ is exactly what the apostle John writes in John 17:3.

Reaching the height of intimacy with God, where the leader is directed by the Spirit of God involves daily worship of God. Gerald L. Borchert explains that the true disciple of Jesus Christ puts in the effort to make the example of Jesus "permeate the life and words of the disciple," and that prayer is the means, by which true disciples are made.⁸² The spiritual leader is therefore sensitive to the things of God, learning daily the instructions of the Word of God. Constant communication must be going on, and it is achieved through prayer and the reading of

⁸¹ David Walls and Max Anders, *I & II Peter, I, II, & III John, Jude: Holman Bible Commentary*, ed. Max Anders (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing, 1999), 173.

⁸² Gerald L. Borchert, *John 12-21*, vol. 25, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville, TN: B&H, 2002), 145.

the Word of God. As time passes, Borchert argues that the selfish ambitions of the leader, or disciple, will be displaced by his or her gradual alignment “with the will and purposes of God in Christ.”⁸³ At such a juncture, the leader can be perceived as abiding in the love of Christ. The result is that true discipleship is formed, which Borchert further identifies as a relationship in which the follower of Jesus Christ is glorifying Him, and Christ is glorifying the Father,” as in John 15:7-8.⁸⁴ It is the deliberation, dedication, and devotion of the leader, or disciple, in his or her daily walk with God, which leads to the fruit bearing life. That fruitful life becomes the sort of thing that influences others to engage in the same type of intimate relationship with Christ.

All work pertaining to the kingdom of God should, then, be left in the hands of God, who is the Head and Overseer of all things. Michael J. Wilkins writes, with regard to Matthew 6:33, “When his disciples pursue God’s kingdom and his righteousness in their daily priorities and activities, they will have all their needs met by their ever-caring, ever-watching heavenly Father – ‘and all these things will be given to you as well.’”⁸⁵ A good portion of the stresses that Christian leaders encounter could be attributed to the insecurities and fears in their lives. Jesus’ words are explicit. Leaders must rely on His words for the victory in their daily walk with Him.

The spiritual leader, the leader whose goal is to make God the highest priority in life, is encouraged by the narratives of the Bible, in which God is faithful in blessing His servants for elevating their relationship with Him to the very top. As the apostle Paul has reminded the Romans and Christian world, the hope of the believer receives a major boost and faith increases, when he or she learns from the stories and events of the Scriptures: “For whatsoever things were

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 146.

⁸⁵ Michael J. Wilkins, *Matthew: The New NIV Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004), 299.

written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope” (Romans 15:4). There appears to be no better models, or success stories, to the spiritual leader, then, than God’s own work in blessing His faithful servants and stewards, as presented in the Word of God. Enough with the secular models of wins and successes of business leaders. The Christian leader should take note of the unchanging ways of God, who has always kept His promise, blessing His children always through the Lord Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 1:20).

Notable Leaders of the Old Testament

The Example of Joshua as a Leader of God’s People

Consider the example of Joshua, who was obedient in his special relationship with the God of Israel and of all creation. Chet Roden explains that the people of Israel knew the “importance of their leader being connected to God,” and that a leader of God’s people is “successful” only when he or she is “first a servant of God and leading in a God-ward direction.”⁸⁶ God’s commandment was for Joshua to remain faithful to Him, and it required that Joshua would abide in the directions of the book of law. In other words, God’s plan would become the itinerary for Joshua, and the leader of Israel would need to forego all previous personal ambitions, in favor of God’s agenda. The words of God were explicit: “This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success” (Joshua 1:8).

Accordingly, Joshua was careful, sticking strictly to God’s plan for him and His people and, ultimately, reaping the benefits of the blessings of the faithful God. Roden adds that Joshua

⁸⁶ Chet Roden, “Servant of Yahweh,” in Forrest and Roden, 88.

led the people of Israel with a “faith and tenacity toward Yahweh,” and that “the people received all they had been promised.”⁸⁷ Indeed, in the end, Joshua never lost any battles, in which the Lord went before His people. Also, the Lord listened to the voice and prayer of a man, Joshua, when God miraculously caused the sun to shine upon his people for an extra day, as they defeated their enemies in war. Joshua was also successful in bringing the people of Israel into the promised land, which is something that his predecessor, Moses, was not able to accomplish. Robert L. Hubbard, Jr. argues that the author of Joshua is not astounded by the fact that God answers a man’s prayer but that God “heeds a request of such magnitude.”⁸⁸ This miracle by God had a global impact, signifying that the God of Joshua and of the nation of Israel can work his wondrous works in favor of the people, with whom He is pleased. God rewarded Joshua and His people openly, making plain the faithfulness and the majesty of the God of Christianity.

The Example of David as King of Israel

The position of King David in the Scriptures is noteworthy. However, all the stories that are presented in the Bible about David would not be available, had it not been for the fact that David valued his relationship with God as being above any other relationship. The words in 1 Samuel 13:14 are significant, as God indicates His preference for David as king over Saul, who had been the people’s choice for king: “But now thy kingdom shall not continue: the Lord has sought him a man after his own heart, and the Lord hath commanded him to be captain over his people, because thou hast not kept that which the Lord commanded thee.” It is all about being obedient to God, making Him the object of one’s worship, the One to whom all the praises and

⁸⁷ Ibid., 89.

⁸⁸ Robert L. Hubbard, Jr., *Joshua: The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 295-96.

thanksgiving are directed. As F. F. Bruce has written, in connection with the apostle Paul's reference to the son of Jesse in Acts 13:22, David was promoted to the status of king, "because of his readiness to do whatever God desired."⁸⁹ David directed all his attention toward doing the things that please God, and as it turns out, God saw David's pursuit of Him and rewarded the boy-shepherd.

God's blessings, that were bestowed upon David, live beyond the death of the king. Nathan the prophet spoke the words of God's promise to David that there would always be a descendant of David who would reign as king of Israel. The reality of this promise is found in the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the King of kings and the Lord of lords, the risen Lord who is at the right hand of God in glory. Because of David's relationship with God, the Holy Spirit revealed to the king the relationship between God the Father and God the Son, long before Jesus Christ came into the world (Psalm 110:1). Indeed, certain rewards are reserved for those persons who have endeavored to make God the top priority in their lives. Centuries before the outpouring of the Holy Ghost on the disciples on the Day of Pentecost, David the king spoke, sang, and wrote under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

There is a song that reminds the reader of God's Word of His promise to set David's children on the throne of Israel forever, and this song is Psalm 132. The Lord rewarded David because David had in his heart the desire to build a house for His God, the God whom David had pursued with all his heart, and the God that had a special place in His heart for Zion. Even though it was an everlasting covenant, it had a conditional component to it. It means therefore that David and his descendants had a choice, as to whether they would live according to God's

⁸⁹ F. F. Bruce, *The Book of Acts: The New International Commentary on the New Testament*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1988), 255.

instructions and testimonies or not (Psalm 132:12). Steven J. Lawson explains this very point: “But there is a conditional aspect to the covenant, requiring that they keep the statutes of God’s Word. Obedience would usher in God’s blessing.”⁹⁰ These conditions are applicable to leaders in God’s church as well, because the Lord Jesus has taught His disciples that anyone, who follows and teaches His commandments, shall be rewarded. In fact, such a faithful follower of Christ will be called “great in the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:19). It is not advisable then for any person to aim toward being called “least” in the kingdom of God, which is the reward for any teaching and actions that are contrary to Jesus’s own words and deeds.

David’s name is immortalized in the history of Israel, and it is all because he prioritized his relationship with God. The Lord Jesus Christ referred to David on numerous occasions in the Gospels. The writer of Hebrews was also clairvoyant, as he described the men and women who had been faithful in serving God, being mindful to mention David, who was a man that pleased God. Guthrie points out that David was the only king who was mentioned in Hebrews 11, and that David “lived a life of devotion to God, performing outstanding acts for God.”⁹¹ God orchestrated that miraculous victory over the giant from Gath. David’s defeat of Goliath, the Philistine, may be an example of God’s way of rewarding His child openly, as introduced by the Lord Jesus Christ in the Sermon on the Mount. Before David would be rewarded in such an extraordinary fashion, however, David had to acknowledge that God was the head in the relationship he had with Him, and that God was the supplier and provider of all his needs, including protection, security, and deliverance (1 Samuel 17: 37, 47).

⁹⁰ Steven J. Lawson, *Psalms 76-50: Holman Old Testament Commentary*, ed. Max Anders (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2006), 305.

⁹¹ George H. Guthrie, *Hebrews: The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998), 383.

The Example of Solomon as King of Israel

What the Scriptures reveal about Solomon should also serve as another example of leaders who flourish because they have prioritized their relationship with God. Despite the knowledge that God had promised to make him king in the room of his father David, Solomon had the presence of mind to please God in a similar manner as David had in his relationship with God. Solomon knew he was already called to lead God's people, but he was aware that he needed to be that special leader, whose duties included being obedient to God in the process of leading the peculiar people of God. This initial awareness moved Solomon to ask God for wisdom and insight, "an understanding heart," which can come from no better source than God (1 Kings 3:9). Don N. Howell, Jr. argues that "wisdom is not a reservoir of spiritual success," and that "obedience alone would secure personal and national blessing (3:14)."⁹² It is important to note, nevertheless, that Solomon knew where his help came from, and he looked upward to God for direction, initially.

Solomon's rewards included that distinct privilege of being the king who would build a house for God. It is an incredible opportunity that was reserved for Solomon alone. But Solomon had to consider the immensity of the task before him, and then he committed to keep his focus on God's mission for him. Solomon did not ask for ephemeral things, as God Himself outlined in 1 Kings 3: 11. Therefore, the result was that God was pleased with Solomon: "And the speech pleased the Lord, that Solomon had asked this thing" (1 Kings 3:10). Here again, God is glorified, when His servants are obedient and they do cherish their relationship with Him, regarding Him as sovereign and the rightful ruler in their lives.

⁹² Don N. Howell, Jr., *Servants of the Servant: A Biblical Theology of Leadership* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2003), 104.

God's blessings that were showered on Solomon were so magnificent that the Lord Jesus mentioned them in the Sermon on the Mount: "And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these" (Matthew 6:29). Jesus ascribed a word that is typically used to describe God, "glory," to Solomon, a man, signifying how important God's faithful children are to the Father. Wilkins explains that people with "the eyes of effective faith" will accept that God's creation is beautiful, and that they will do well to "learn daily how to follow God's guidance and how to trust in his gracious provision."⁹³ The inference here is that the flourishing life of a leader gains its beginnings from the recognition, that the leader's relationship with God is superior to all other relationships.

Here again, in the case of King Solomon, one finds another example of God's faithfulness in rewarding His servant openly, as taught by the Lord Jesus, because Solomon had the primary recognition of God as being first in priority: "Lo, I have given thee a wise and an understanding heart; so that there was none like thee before thee, neither after thee shall any rise like unto thee" (1 Kings 3:12). It is indeed a reward that is given openly, because the whole world, including the believer and the non-believer of the words of Scripture, knows that the wisest man that ever lived was Solomon. Therefore, Solomon prospered immensely during his reign as king of Israel. Obedience to God was maintained, as long as Solomon's focus was on God. And God would have still rewarded Solomon with long life, above and beyond the riches, honor, and wisdom, if the king had remained loyal to God (1 King's 3:14). However, Solomon did not meet that condition of obedience to God, but he became involved in idolatry. The bottom line is that obedience to God means a daily realization that the leader is dependent on God, and

⁹³ Wilkins, *Matthew*, 298.

that God will reward him or her with a life that is flourishing, just as God did with King Solomon in the beginning and during their intimate relationship.

The Example of Hezekiah as King of Judah

King Hezekiah brought reforms to the nation of Israel, especially to Judah. He lived a life that was similar to his father David's. Hezekiah removed the groves and took away the idols in the land of Judah. The faithfulness of Hezekiah was remembered by God when the king was taken ill and was about to die. Hezekiah's plea to God is presented in Isaiah 38:3, when he said, "Remember now, O Lord, I beseech thee, how I have walked before thee in truth and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good in thy sight." What was God's reward for Hezekiah's faithfulness? God added fifteen years to the king's life, and God made this blessing openly, by giving Hezekiah a sign: "So the sun returned ten degrees, by which degrees it was gone down" (Isaiah 38:8). Oswalt argues further that God's sign is "perhaps" the evidence that "just as God can move time backward, so he could add days to our lives."⁹⁴ This incident is the specific occurrence in the Bible, where God gave the exact number of years He would add to a person's life, and He made His promise good.

Here is the sum of Hezekiah's relationship with God: Hezekiah pleaded with God because he knew the kind of relationship that he had with God. Hezekiah was bold and sincere, in asking God to consider how he, Hezekiah, had served Him and done the things that pleased God. God "heard" Hezekiah's "prayer" and gave him fifteen more years (Isaiah 38:5). This extension of life was supported by the sign that followed, which was done openly. This event was public, because it affected that part of the world and the people who lived through it. Though the sign was specifically for Hezekiah, it was not restricted to the king alone, as the

⁹⁴ John N. Oswalt, *Isaiah: The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 428.

return of the sun's shadow up the steps of Ahaz was a public display of the wondrous work of God. It was a miracle of global implications.

Notable Leaders of the New Testament

The Apostle Paul's Example as a Servant of Christ

Imitation of the Lord Jesus Christ is the major calling for all believers. The apostle Paul calls the followers of Jesus Christ to imitate his ways also: "Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ" (1 Corinthians 11:1). Craig Blomberg assumes that the apostle Paul might have been saying that if any person would want to experience the balance between "freedom and restraint," then he or she must "watch," "follow," and "live with" him, as he imitated the "selfless life Christ lived."⁹⁵ The Scriptures give an accurate record of the faithfulness of the apostle Paul, whose calling was to present the gospel of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles (1 Corinthians 9:16-17; Galatians 2:9). Therefore, the apostle saw the need to live in accordance with the directives and commandments of the Lord. In other words, the apostle Paul was called to say, behave, and live out the teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ, endeavoring to imitate the Master in all spheres of his life.

Again, the apostle Paul explains to Timothy that he was looking forward to that moment of rewarding by the Lord Jesus Christ, when he will receive "the crown of righteousness," at the Lord's appearing (1 Timothy 4:8). Thomas D. Lea and Hayne P. Griffin, Jr. agree that Christ's reward for the believer's faithfulness in "Christian service" should be "an incentive to godly living."⁹⁶ The crown of righteousness is not limited to the apostle Paul only. The good news is

⁹⁵ Craig Blomberg, *1 Corinthians: The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 205.

⁹⁶ Thomas D. Lea and Hayne P. Griffin, Jr., *1, 2 Timothy*. Vol. 34, *The New American Commentary: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture* (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 1992), 249.

that, in the same place, the apostle Paul speaks directly of the Lord's reward to everyone who loves Him and is awaiting His return. Lea and Griffin add that Paul wanted to encourage his fellow pastor that God's reward is available for him as well, emphasizing the truth that God is indeed the righteous Judge.⁹⁷ Therefore, God will reward those people who have served Him faithfully accordingly, and He will have an equally proportional reward for people whose works are evil. This argument is in line with the teachings of Paul, regarding God and His rewards, "who will render to every man according to his deeds," as in Romans 2:6.

The exhortation for his listeners to imitate him continues, as Paul wrote to the Philippians also. Paul writes, "Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample" (Philippians 3:17). The ways of the apostle Paul are worthy of emulation, as he aimed to do all that it took to preach the gospel, living out the words, the ways, and the teachings of Christ. He was led by God in his daily walk with Him, making Paul the right person to speak on how far the Lord took him on the journey to reach the Gentile world with the gospel. Here are the apostle Paul's own words: "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith" (2 Timothy 4:7). Lea and Griffin state that it is more likely that the apostle Paul is referring to his loyalty to God, in mentioning that he had "kept the faith."⁹⁸ The leader who depends on God and has made God the highest priority in his or her life will find it appropriate to say these same things as the apostle Paul. In that regard, the leader will be confident that all energy and effort have been put forward to doing the things that please God.

When the focus is on God, it is possible to rejoice, even in the presence of difficulties and discomfort (Philippians 1:17). It could be deduced here, that the flourishing life of an effective

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 248.

leader is seen in the daily recognition that God is leading the way, and that God will reward him or her, whether in abundance or in tribulation. Blomberg shares this sentiment, concerning 1 Corinthians 9:13-18, that “spiritual rewards” exist for “spiritual service,” and that many, who have chosen to use their gifts to serve God and the church, “will confess that no other line of work could have proved so satisfying, notwithstanding all of the obstacles they may have encountered.”⁹⁹ It is the more reason why effective leaders would be wise to learn how to endure in the moments of hardship, which are bound to take place in their work and service for the Lord and His people. Otherwise, the leaders will quit when the going gets tough.

The Apostle Peter’s Example as Servant of Christ

The apostle Peter encourages the elders of the churches to remain faithful, as they lead the followers of Christ. Before the Lord comes back to receive the church unto Himself, however, Peter reminds the shepherds of God’s flock to share in the sufferings of the Lord Jesus Christ. And at the time of the Lord’s return, the stewards and servants of God will receive “a crown of glory that faded not away” (1 Peter 5:4). It follows, then, that there is a reward at every point in the leader’s faithfulness toward God and the things of God. As Peter has made available to the church, he was an elder, who saw the sufferings of the Lord and was “a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed” (1 Peter 5:1). Thomas R. Schreiner explains that the sufferings of Christ are an example of the course that must be taken by His followers, and that it may be construed that “suffering is the path to glory.”¹⁰⁰ Therefore, today’s leaders are also in the

⁹⁹ Blomberg, *1 Corinthians*, 178.

¹⁰⁰ Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*. Vol. 37, *The New American Commentary: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture* (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 2003), 232.

capacity of elders, who are the examples of faithful servants of the Lord Jesus Christ, just as Peter considered himself to be.

In the third verse of the same passage, the apostle Peter exhorts the leaders of God's church to lead in humility and not as "lords over God's heritage" (1 Peter 5:3). How can the leader's own attitude be adjusted in such a way that he or she will not exercise lordship over others? The Lord Jesus taught Peter and the other eleven apostles that "it shall not be so with you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; and whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant" (Matthew 20:26-27). The example, that Jesus was, is the same example, that the elders and leaders of the followers of Christ should be. Schreiner has argued that, by using their "authority to serve," the followers of Jesus "imitate the example of Jesus himself."¹⁰¹ Also, in the words of Peter, elders, or leaders, should be, and their actions should represent them as "ensamples to the flock" (1 Peter 5:3). In other words, the Chief Shepherd has made Peter and other elders of His church shepherds, so that they may have His humility and His attitude toward serving God and the people, for whom He died, faithfully.

The self tries to present itself in the leaders' interactions with others on a daily basis. But leaders, who have been trained by the Holy Spirit in their daily walk with God, have a special understanding of the primacy of their relationship with Christ. Schreiner adds that "elders" are aware that they are to be gentle and humble, and with this attitude "they can exemplify the character of Christ to those under their charge."¹⁰² These elders, or seasoned leaders, bear much fruit, as they allow the Holy Spirit to build them up to the level of doing the things that please God. In that sense, the leaders are always looking up to God, giving them little to no time to go

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 235.

¹⁰² Ibid.

after their own pleasures. Walls and Anders explain that the main idea, in the first portion of 1 Peter 5, is that leaders should willingly exhibit “Christlikeness,” which will ultimately lead them to receive the “reward” from the “Chief Shepherd.”¹⁰³ Peter’s challenge to the elders in the letter is the same rule that must be applied to the leaders of the church today.

The Lord Jesus Christ’s Example as Servant of God

The Lord Jesus Christ practiced the same spiritual disciplines that He taught His disciples. He was the epitome of those same words and deeds that He preached. Jesus lived out His own teachings, in that He gave, He prayed, He fasted, and He observed the Sabbath. First, Jesus was a giver. He gave His life upon the cross for all humankind. Jesus Christ gave of His time on countless occasions to the poor and the sick and the rejected of society, just as He had indicated that He was sent into the world to do (Luke 4:18-19). In His giving, He gave the proper meaning to what should be done on the Sabbath day. Since Jesus was Lord of the Sabbath, He brought healing to the sick primarily on the Sabbath days, offering Himself, His time, and His teachings on the day of rest ((Mark 2:28). Indeed, the Lord Jesus Christ gave the world so much that He, who is the Master, showed His disciples that He was a Minister, and that He came into the world to serve and “to give His life a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:28). Therefore, God the Father saw and had respect unto the Lord Jesus’ obedience, elevating the Son and giving Him a name, which is above every name (Philippians 2:9). God’s reward of Jesus in this manner is exactly as Jesus said Himself: God will Himself reward a person, who gives in secret, openly.

Second, the Lord Jesus Christ found the time to be alone, so that He could pray during His earthly ministry. The Lord sent His disciples in a boat, so that He could pray, soon after He had fed the five thousand men. Again, the Lord Jesus Christ saw that it was necessary to pray all

¹⁰³ Walls and Anders, *I, II Peter*, 88.

night, before He chose the twelve disciples, whom He called apostles (Luke 6:12-13). Then Jesus called Peter, James, and John and went into a mountain to pray. The Lord must have separated Himself from these disciples temporarily, being not too distant from them, so that He could pray alone. God the Father saw the humility and obedience of Jesus, and He rewarded Jesus openly, when the voice sounded over the cloud, “This is My beloved Son: hear Him” (Luke 9:35).

Third, the Lord Jesus Christ fasted for forty days in the wilderness. When the temptations from the devil were overcome by Him, Jesus was empowered by the Holy Spirit to begin His earthly ministry (Luke 4:14). Jesus, who is the bridegroom, teaches that when He was with the disciples, they could not fast. But He, the Lord Jesus, had already gone through the fast for forty days, and He taught the disciples that certain miracles can only happen by prayer and fasting. Jesus was able to cast out the dumb spirit from the man’s son, having the power and authority from God the Father, who was pleased with the Son in all His works in the earth.

The life of Jesus Christ was so pleasing to the Father that God raised Him up from the dead in such a dramatic fashion for the whole world to hear and know about it. It is the ultimate example, that when God rewards the people, with whom He is pleased, He does it openly. The words of the apostle Peter, concerning the risen Lord in Acts 10:40, echo this same truth: “Him God raised up the third day and shewed him openly.” It had to be a public display of God’s pleasure with the Son and His accomplishments in the earth, in that Jesus had finished His works and had overcome the grave, to the glory of God the Father.

The resurrection of Jesus, therefore, is the single most convincing evidence that a life that is led to the satisfaction and pleasure of God, a life that is led after the words and ways of Jesus, will receive the reward of God openly. God’s reward is eternal life and crowns, which are befitting of a citizen, or royalty, of heaven (Philippians 3:20-21). As Groothuis argues, God is

still pouring out His love and grace upon mankind and on all creation, by looking at Jesus and what the Son has done, “because God is in the process of redeeming a fallen and groaning cosmos through the righteous work of Jesus Christ (Romans 8:18-26).”¹⁰⁴

Theoretical Foundations

The review of literature is primarily about the authority on the subject of the leader’s spiritual formation and the accompanying spiritual health. The theoretical foundation looks at specific conditions in ministry, especially in spiritual formation, that are pertinent to this Thesis Project. Aubrey Malphurs explains that it is much more required for the leader of the church to be a mature disciple of Christ, who is also able to influence others to follow the Lord Jesus Christ.¹⁰⁵ In such a situation, the entire community will also feel the impact of the church of God. Malphurs describes the applicability of the spiritual maturity of a leader as presented by the apostle John in his Gospel, in that the mature disciple, or leader, is grounded in the characteristics of “biblical teaching (8:31), love (13:34), and fruit bearing (15:8).”¹⁰⁶ The question then is “How does one get to the point of being close and intimate with these characteristics of spiritual maturity?” Knowing the Word of God is the first step, and living out the instructions, that are contained in it, is another step that must be taken. Malphurs shares a similar sentiment and argues that the practical life of the leader who is living out the “characteristics” of the fruit of the Spirit is equal to “moving toward this goal.”¹⁰⁷ Therefore, it is

¹⁰⁴ Douglas Groothuis, *Christian Apologetics: A Comprehensive Case for Biblical Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011), 646.

¹⁰⁵ Aubrey Malphurs, *Advanced Strategic Planning: A 21st-Century Model for Church and Ministry Leaders* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing, 2013), 113.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 197.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

necessary to take note of the recommendations for spiritual maturity. Here, Malphurs suggests using alliteration, such as “conversion, community, commitment, and contribution,” or using “an acrostic” to represent the values that the leaders abide by.¹⁰⁸

Making the spiritual growth cycle in the leader’s life as practical as can be may also come in other ways. Putman and Harrington give four roles that the mature disciple, or the leader who is fully developed in spiritual formation, should be aware of: “an authentic disciple,” “a discipleship-system builder,” “a developer of leaders,” and “a vision caster.”¹⁰⁹ The roles are qualified. And so Putman and Harrington explain further that the authentic disciple lives out the exemplary life of the follower of Christ in his or her being and in the daily walk with God, the discipleship-system builder makes the idea of community known to each other member of the church, for the spiritual growth of each disciple is experienced in the community of believers, the developer of leaders is aware that he or she is responsible for personal growth, which will in turn lead to the development of others, and the vision caster is constantly reminding others in word or in deed what the mission of the church is for the local community, as well as its contribution to the universal church of God.¹¹⁰ This special leader, the leader who is not ordinary, must be putting into practice the words, ways, and teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ daily. He or she should be cognizant of the importance of the Word of God, of the love of God and neighbor, and the implications of the relationships that exist in the community.

Bill Hull prescribes “the six-fold” notion of being conformed to the image of Christ as a way of maintaining effective spiritual formation: “transformed mind, transformed character,

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 198.

¹⁰⁹ Putman and Harrington, *DiscipleShift*, 119-26.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

transformed relationships, transformed habits, transformed service, and transformed influence.”¹¹¹ For all these activities and characteristics to be practical in the lives of leaders, the common thread needs to be that they allow the Holy Spirit to lead them, to teach them His Word, and to bring about the expected transformation. Hull argues that the teachings of the Sermon on the Mount should be fully alive and displayed in the life of the leader, and that kingdom life becomes the everyday life of the leader.¹¹² When the kingdom life is evident in the leaders’ lives, then the impact can be reproduced and the influence disseminated, near and far. Again, Hull points out that the Lord Jesus’s own practices, such as “silence, solitude, fasting, frugality, prayer, secrecy, submission, humility, obedience, sacrifice, study, fellowship, confession, worship,” should be the kind of stuff that is emulated in the leader’s daily walk with God.¹¹³ These are indispensable qualities in the believer’s walk with Christ. The bottom line is that the Sermon on the Mount narrows them down to the basic requirement for every believer, who must give, pray, fast, love God and neighbor, know what God’s Word teaches, and depend on God.

For God to be the head in all things that leaders do, the daily plan for leaders should recognize Him as the most important person in all interactions. For that matter, Scazzero notes that leaders should make room for God’s involvement in everything they engage in, mapping out their “spiritual practices” around the things that God is expecting in their relationships.¹¹⁴ It means that leaders should include God, even in the private moments and in their secret spheres. Scazzero argues that the love of God, which involves receiving and giving, has four components

¹¹¹ Hull, *Complete Book of Discipleship*, 130.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 131-33.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 143.

¹¹⁴ Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Leader*, 136.

that are to be found in “prayer, relationships, rest, and work.”¹¹⁵ These components are broken down further. Moreover, the outstanding suggestion for all leaders by Scazzero is that leaders should “practice Sabbath delight,” which comes as part of the prayer component above.¹¹⁶ It is a significant recognition for this Thesis Project, particularly, as the leaders seem to be constantly engaged in secular work, not slowing down for rest and meaningful break from the functions of work.

Scazzero first practiced the Sabbath observance on his own. Scazzero found out that the Sabbath has opened his eyes about the things that are important in his life, such as “God, love, delight, joy, Geri, our daughters, friends, extended family,” and he has become a better leader of New Life Fellowship Church because of it.¹¹⁷ This practice has now been introduced to the rest of the congregation and its positive impact is readily seen among the members of New Life Fellowship Church. Scazzero notes, “Teaching about sabbath is part of our membership process and our core spiritual formation course.”¹¹⁸ The rewards from God that Scazzero has noticed in his own life are the same rewards that God is placing in the lives of the members of New Life Fellowship Church.

In this Thesis Project, the focus is on giving, prayer, fasting, meditation on God’s Word, and going the extra mile to show the love of God and neighbor in the leader’s life. When these aspects of the Christian life become routine, the promise of the Lord Jesus Christ is that God the Father will reward the faithful leader (Matthew 6:4, 6, 18). Henry Blackaby and Richard

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 137.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 145.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 169.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 170.

Blackaby highlight the importance of prayer, signaling that it is the “concentrated, fervent, sanctified prayer” that separates a spiritual leader from any ordinary leader.¹¹⁹ James speaks on this same principle, that “the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much” (James 5:16). In other words, the spiritual leader is effective because his leadership is backed by divine wisdom and direction, making it possible for him or her to be prosperous in all works.

Henry Blackaby and Richard Blackaby add that the relationship with God, that is overflowing with God’s blessings, comes as a result of continuing communing with Him, and it is readily noticed by the people in the leader’s interactions.¹²⁰ The hurried lifestyle of today’s worker, whether in ministry or any other vocation, does not allow leaders to be fully dedicated and devoted to God. God grants His servants the grace to endure each day, but the worship of God requires deliberation in prayer and in meditating upon the Word of God. It is the influence of the spiritual leader, the leader who seeks the face of God in prayer daily, that spills over into the community and stirs up the hearts of others to also become imitators of Christ, as Henry Blackaby and Richard Blackaby have described it.¹²¹

Furthermore, the practice of aloneness is beneficial to the development of effective leaders. Reggie McNeal has broken down “the wilderness experience” of excellent leaders and applied them to the relationships in his life, reaching the conclusion that leaders, who understand the importance of aloneness and the wilderness motif, are “comfortable hanging out with God.”¹²² Forty days and forty nights with the Lord happened for Moses. Elijah also had some

¹¹⁹ Blackaby and Blackaby, *Spiritual Leadership*, 184.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 185.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

¹²² Reggie McNeal, *Practicing Greatness: 7 Disciplines of Extraordinary Spiritual Leaders* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2006), 144.

alone time with God, even though it was a desperate time for the prophet. The Lord Jesus Christ had His own wilderness experience, when He was carried into the wilderness by the Spirit, enduring forty days of fasting. The apostle Paul exercised a period of aloneness as well. McNeal has learned from all these biblical examples, which has led him to incorporate some aspect of four practices and observances into his own life: “Observing Sabbath,” “having extended prayer times,” “fasting,” and “journaling.”¹²³ It might appear that little is said about the Sabbath these days. However, McNeal notes that, the additions of “reading,” “writing,” “some exercise or creation,” and “even sleep” to his prayer on the day of Sabbath, gave him tremendous satisfaction and a sense of improvement to his life and relationships.¹²⁴

Fasting is mentioned many times in the Scriptures, and this truth should highlight its significance in the life of the person who seeks God. Differences exist in how much time one should fast. McNeal points out that fasting, “whether for a day or for a more extended time,” enables leaders to “focus” on God, and that “its deprivation and discomfort remind leaders that their hope and their provision are in the Lord.”¹²⁵ It is no wonder, then, that the Lord Jesus Christ explained how fasting has never been about a believer’s acts and behavior that tend to draw attention to himself or herself. The attention should be directed to God.

When the time comes and the need arises, Jerry Falwell recommends that leaders should seriously fast, and that they should fast “for biblical purposes.”¹²⁶ Simply put, the requests that are made to God in the times of fasting must be in line with God’s will. The will of God is laid

¹²³ Ibid., 149-53.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 150.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 152.

¹²⁶ Jerry Falwell, *Building Dynamic Faith* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2005), 145.

out in the Scriptures, and so leaders would be wise to know the things that they may ask God for and the answers that may accompany their requests. Also, Falwell suggests that people of faith “fast and pray” for their “spiritual growth” before they “pray for other things like buildings and money.”¹²⁷ It is senseless for any person to expect God to answer him or her, when that person is living in sin, for instance. Therefore, each person will do well, if the Holy Spirit is invited to help in individual spiritual growth first.

Again, Falwell encourages believers, and leaders especially, to set some time apart in the “future,” when they “can give uninterrupted time to prayer and fasting.”¹²⁸ It is clear that fasting without prayer is more like one’s moment of starving himself or herself deliberately. Combined with prayer, however, fasting becomes a purposeful exercise of one’s seeking of, and dependency on, the God of all creation. Falwell lays out these specifics: “Fast first to know God; second, fast for vision; then fast for money or for the crisis in your life.”¹²⁹ It cannot be overstated, then, that fasting is a major part of the Christian leader’s life, and it is something that must be built into his or her routine in the walk with God.

Jerry Falwell fasted for eighty days, in two separate forty-day fasts, and describes how God used the first forty-days of fasting for him to know God more intimately. God rewarded Falwell after the second forty-day fast, making the way for Liberty University to obtain “ten more years of accreditation” and to get out of debt.¹³⁰ Falwell was obedient, as he listened to the

¹²⁷ Ibid., 145.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 147.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 146.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 144.

voice of the Spirit of God and pursued after the heart of God, during the first forty-day fast. This obedience translated into a better relationship with God, and God was pleased with him.

Falwell prayed consistently and confidently, building a routine out of this practice. He notes that God answered his prayers, by bringing about Thomas Road Baptist Church and Liberty University.¹³¹ Long after the inauguration of both institutions, the same attitude of praying with persistence permeates the lives of the leaders, who are reminded by Falwell to be intentional when they prepare short lists and long lists of prayer requests. Falwell stresses that “if you want to accomplish everything God has put in your heart, then give attention to your prayer life.”¹³² This statement is accurate, and it is in accordance with the teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ in the Sermon on the Mount.

On journaling, McNeal adds that it contributes a component of “wilderness” into the “leader’s spiritual disciplines.”¹³³ When one finds himself or herself in a lonely situation, or in the wilderness, the main aim is for that person to seek help. The leader who knows that he or she cannot do it alone is aware that, whether in the wilderness or in times of abundance, his or her help is the Lord (Psalm 121:1-2). It is high time leaders built this concept of solitude and wilderness into their daily routines, making the effort to allow God to handle those things that are beyond human control. In this way the leaders’ prayer, fasting, Sabbath observance, and journaling will all be moments of worshipping God and communing with Him.

The sanctification of the believer is tied directly into the process of becoming like the Lord Jesus Christ, in His words, deeds, and way of life. The “spiritual practices (prayer,

¹³¹ Ibid., 69-70.

¹³² Ibid., 70.

¹³³ McNeal, *Practicing Greatness*, 153.

Scripture, etc.)” of the leaders of God’s people, according to Harrington and Patrick, “shape our inner life as intentional daily habits,” and these practices set the stage for “dramatic character formation.”¹³⁴ As the spiritual leader engages in the intentional building up into the image of Christ, under the leading of the Holy Spirit, the mind and habits of Christ become the norm for the faithful disciple. As Harrington and Patrick put it, “There is a disciplined, habitual approach to sanctification. These are the historic practices of prayer, Scripture reading, fasting, service, and confession.”¹³⁵ The leader who understands the process of sanctification is attentive to the primary relationship with God, and he or she sets apart the time and the resources for deliberate spiritual development in the various spiritual disciplines and departments.

The God of Christianity is the God who is always giving to His children. God has indeed given the world His Son, He gives good gifts to those who ask Him, and He has given the sun and the rain to the earth, so that the systems of production will sustain the living things on earth (John 3:16-17; Matthew 5: 45; 6:11). Leaders of God’s people should also be in the giving business. Malphurs adds that one’s giving habit is a bigger and “better indication” of where one’s heart is in his or her walk with God.¹³⁶ Leaders must give their bodies, their time, their money, their gifts and talents, and their valuable resources to God’s people and God’s kingdom. All the giving will be meaningless, if a leader fails to first give his life as a commitment to God Himself and His kingdom (Matthew 6:33; Luke 9:23-24). The seriousness in a leader’s pursuit of financial security should never outweigh the pursuit of God Himself, even it means that the

¹³⁴ Bobby Harrington and Josh Patrick, *The Disciple Maker’s Handbook: 7 Elements of a Discipleship Lifestyle* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2017), 136.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Malphurs, *Advanced Strategic Planning*, 257.

leader will suffer and die. From this perspective, it is easier to give financially and to aid in feeding the poor and bringing justice to the needy. The leader should recognize that God sees all the effort in giving, and He will reward the giver (Matthew 6:4). God's rewards include great increase and abundance in one's life and in the assigned ministry of God.

With the above discussion considered, the conclusion is that a gap exists in the conversation, as far as the correlation between the leader's prioritizing of the intimate relationship with Christ and the consequent growth, in the private ministry and public ministry, goes. Scazzero applied the spiritual disciplines of slowing down for loving union, recognizing and participating in the Sabbath, reading Scripture, praying, engaging in faithful worship of God, and He concluded that spiritual growth happens, and that waiting patiently for God's work in the "in-between" is where most people lose hope.¹³⁷ Besides this work by Scazzero, and the contributions from Falwell and McNeal, there is limited literature on the topic of prioritizing the leader's relationship with God, to the extent that God will see the discipline and the dedication of the leader and reward him or her. The opportunity exists, therefore, for the biblical concept of spiritual formation and how the highest level of intimacy with God will produce the fruit bearing in the leader and his or her followers, which will ultimately please God. The Thesis Project which is undertaken within the local churches in Richmond, Virginia, will seek to address this need, initiating new ways, or adding another perspective to the life of the leader, who intends to flourish in both the personal relationship with God and in corporate life in the church.

The theological foundation and the sources that are employed in the body of the literature review have dealt with what it takes to build the relationship that leads to the spiritually mature leader, or disciple of Jesus Christ. The Word of God, with the teachings in the Gospels, as

¹³⁷ Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Leader*, 282.

described in the theological foundation, is sufficient to tackle any misunderstanding that exists in the leader's pursuit of the proper order of priorities in his or her life. Most of the sources speak directly on the flourishing life of the leader, which comes about as he or she values the relationship with God and Jesus Christ. However, the deliberation and patience and discipline of the leader are all woven together to develop the routine that leads to the expected growth by God. The ultimate relationship with God involves constant communication with Him, making it necessary for the leader to have God as the top priority and the center of all attention.

Conclusion

Leadership deserves the attention that is directed its way. Effective leadership, however, requires the deliberation and the spiritual help from God Himself. The spiritual leader in the four local churches in Richmond will be on the right path to please God and glorify Him, if he or she is careful to prioritize the relationship with Christ, reaching forth to attain the spiritual growth that keeps on enriching personal ministry and public ministry. The intentionality must be evident, placing the things of God first, and making the leadership flow out of the intimate relationship with Jesus Christ. The tendency for any leader to operate out of personal power, when hardships are abundant, needs to be addressed, furthermore. This Thesis Project will attempt to provide a link for addressing the problem. In this way, leaders will be prepared when they are enticed to seek the wealth and security of the secular world. Instead, they will, first, be dedicated to God, who alone oversees the fruit-bearing process, individually and corporately.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

In Chapter 3, the interventions that are in place to address the leadership problem in Richmond, Virginia, are discussed, and the details of the intervention design are given. Interviews and surveys form the components of how the problem in leadership is tackled and addressed. All the participants in the Thesis Project are required to do the same things, including journaling, from which the determination will be made, as to the success and the extent of it in the process. The implementation of the interventions also covers this aspect of measuring the effectiveness of the interventions, through reports and the journals themselves.

Intervention Design

The intervention that will form the major component of addressing the ministry problem in Richmond, Virginia, is a combination of practices in spiritual formation. The practices include daily prayer, daily reading of the Word of God, fasting at least one day every week, observing the Sabbath each week, and giving of oneself, time, and gifts to God and others all throughout the week, when appropriate. Just as the Lord Jesus Christ has explained in the Sermon on the Mount, it is when these disciplines are performed that matters. It means that there should be a plan or method to any personal relationship, especially in the intimate relationship with Christ. The idea is then to maintain a routine, being aware of the fact, that the relationship with God involves constant communication and communion, for God is always speaking, and He is ready to bless the people who love Him (John 15:7; Hebrews 1:1-2).

Again, the problem, that is being addressed in the four churches in Richmond, Virginia, is the lack of prioritizing in the relationship with God, among the leaders of the churches. Therefore, the interventions in spiritual disciplines are intended to bring about the highest form of intimate relationship with the Lord, which will ultimately result in the flourishing life of the

leaders. It is assumed that the leaders are already practicing the spiritual disciplines of giving, prayer, and fasting, which are supposed to be part of the daily routines of every Christian. As leaders of the church of God especially, quality time with God must be a priority. It is necessary then for each leader to set apart the time for these practices, working diligently in the walk with God, until the practices become second nature. It is also necessary to explain how the researcher arrived at the times that are prescribed for these interventions in the Thesis Project. The explanation follows below.

For effective results that are based on maximizing the gifts and talents of each participating leader, one hour was required of each leader for daily prayer. Of the twenty-four hours that are found in each day, six to eight hours are to be allotted to sleep and rest. And if a person has a job, other than God's work, he or she will typically allocate eight to twelve hours a day to the duties of that job. The rest of the day, the six or ten hours that are left, must be apportioned appropriately. The foremost relationship in a leader's life, the relationship with God, should therefore receive at least one hour of the leader's time daily. It becomes even more important to dedicate that quality time to God, considering that it takes close to two hours to watch a movie. Looking at things from that perspective, the leaders of the four churches are not taxed with too big a responsibility to pray for one hour a day. The leaders were reminded also that the Lord Jesus warned His disciples in the inner circle, who were watching in prayer with Him, by asking them this question in Matthew 26: 40: "What, could you not watch with me one hour?" Therefore, one hour of prayer every day is sufficient for the participants in the project. But the leader has the liberty to choose between early morning or late in the evening. Whichever time suits the leader is what he or she may dedicate to prayer daily, but the discretion is his or her own.

One hour in each day is supposed to be set aside for the reading of the Word of God. Here too, the leaders were encouraged to read, meditate on, and study the Word of God. A close and attentive reading of the Bible, in the manner as described above, requires time and deliberation. For the period of two months, the leaders would aim to complete reading the New Testament. A quota of chapters, that must be read, needed to be in place then. For that length of time, four chapters should be adequate reading for each leader, each day. It meant also that there would be days that the studies could go beyond the specified one hour.

The leaders were informed that the readings would start from Matthew, with particular recognition for the Sermon on the Mount and the Lord's promise that God the Father will reward the faithful men and women, when they give, pray, and fast as He has described them (Matthew 6: 4, 6, 18). Particular attention should be given to the Gospels, for it is where the teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ are found primarily. It would be ideal for each leader to read four chapters a day, endeavoring to accomplish it in one sitting, but it could be done at intervals throughout the day. The researcher explained to the leaders that they had their own flexibility, and that they had the opportunity to employ it to their benefit.

For the two months following the initiation of the interventions, the researcher communicated that a day of fasting and a day of rest, the Sabbath, would be observed by each participant. Depending on each person's health, the fast could be half a day or for a twelve-hour period, in which the leader would not have anything to eat. The leaders could have the fast, from the first hour of the day, 6:00 am, to the twelfth hour of the day, 6:00 pm, for instance. The fast would be observed with special requests to God to bring about spiritual growth and increase in ministry, both in private and in the public. Each leader was asked to pick the day for his or her fast, based on each person's schedule during the week. It would be great if the day of fasting

could be the same day each week. For example, one leader could pick every Tuesday to be the day of fasting, during the two-month period of the interventions. But the flexibility of the leader could ensure that this time of fast was activated with purpose and intentionality, each week, if the day of fasting happened to be different from week to week.

The Sabbath was to be a 24-hour period, from the evening of one day until the evening of the following day. On this day, each leader was required to rest from manual labor, or secular occupation, but he or she may pursue leisure activities with family. The idea is that each leader would be able to take his or her mind away from making money for the self, but he or she would rather focus on enriching the service to God and the people, for whom Jesus Christ died. Enriching of one's relationships, on the day of Sabbath, removes the focus from the preoccupation with labor in the respective occupations and places the focus on God first, then on family, the immediate family and the church family. On both days, when the fast occurs and the Sabbath is observed, the leader is not separated from God, but he or she is in communion with Him under different conditions.

Lastly, the leaders were asked to take note of acts of kindness and the display of compassion during each week. These special moments could be at one's place of occupation, or in ministering to others in the church community. The point is that it would be beneficial to record those moments of one's giving of self, time, and resources to God and others. A diary or a journal could be useful during the weeks of the interventions. The input and report in the journals were designed to serve as invaluable resources in the measurement of the project's success. Special attention should be given to the times that the Lord responds to the requests, as far as how soon or late, from a prayer or fast, that the Lord answers. Each participant would attempt to keep a personal diary for the length of the research study.

Furthermore, each leader received the understanding that the blessings of God, in Isaiah 58:8-9, 11-12, 14, would be sought during the day of fast and on the Sabbath. The researcher explained to the leaders that these blessings would be evaluated, based on intimate, guiding questions that each leader may ask himself or herself, at the beginning of the institution of the interventions. The questions include the following:

1. Has the leader prepared the heart to pray each day for protection from harm and sicknesses (Isaiah 58:8)?
2. Has the Lord said yes to any of the requests you have made (Isaiah 58:9)? If so, how many?
3. Has the leader prayed and prepared to fast for the Lord to bring about abundance in your life (Isaiah 58:11)?
4. Has the leader been attentive to the needs of others in all interactions (Isaiah 58:7)?
5. Has the leader set in the heart to approach the Lord with a fast that pleases Him?

God made the distinction between the kind of fast that pleases Him and the one that is not impressive, in that passage in Isaiah 58. So, these questions were prepared to remind the leader to repent for all transgressions and ensure that there are no hidden sins. It is important that each leader understood this point, during the time of fasting, in order that God will hear his or her prayer (Psalm 66:18).

Appendix D serves as a template, that is modeled after the Sermon on the Mount and the passage, that is referenced above, in Isaiah 58. The Lord indicates that the things that the disciples do in secret should become normative, highlighting the clean intentions and motives of giving, praying, and fasting. Therefore, each leader was made aware that Appendix D may be employed during the journaling process, uniting the above guiding questions, at the beginning of

the interventions, with the ongoing weekly times of fasting, especially. A copy of the survey questions, that is designed for the length of the institution of the interventions, is presented in Appendix D, as well as below:

1. Did the leader give of his or her time, gifts, and resources on the day of fasting? Yes__ or No__?
2. Was the leader careful not to appear to be fasting? Yes__ or No__?
Did the leader anoint his or her head? Yes__ or No__?
Did the leader wash his or her face? Yes__ or No__?
3. Were there any opportunities to feed the poor? Yes__ or No__?
Were there any opportunities to clothe people who were cold or homeless? Yes__ or No__?
4. Did the leader have any success with witnessing to others? Yes__ or No__?
5. Did the leader share the gospel and teach others by living out the teachings of the Word of God? Yes__ or No__?
6. Did the leader notice anything different in his or her walk with God on the day of fasting? Yes__ or No__?
7. Was the leader able to reflect on the day of fasting? Yes__ or No__?
8. Was the leader able to jot down the activities of the day of fasting in a journal? Yes__ or No__?

All the “yes” responses will be put together, and all the “no” responses will also be put together. God’s timing might be different with each person, but a consistency will develop as a pattern is formed in each leader’s relationship with Jesus Christ. That routine in spiritual disciplines and its results, God’s reward of the leader, may produce a measurable correlation.

The following discussion and teachings took place in the course of the research project, beginning on the day of initial interview and receiving reminders each week, in person and over the telephone: First, in no way is there a suggestion that one earns his or her way onto salvation. Every believer is “saved by grace through faith,” as evidenced in Ephesians 2:8. Giving, praying, and fasting come along in the life of the Christian. The Lord instructs His disciples to engage in these practices in a way that is pleasing to the Father who sees in secret, and the heavenly Father will reward the faithful disciple openly (Matthew 6:4, 6, 18). Some people are, however, not able to fast, due to health issues or conditions that limit participation in such a practice. If the leader is able to fast, then, the Lord Jesus’s instructions are that he or she must anoint the head and wash the face, so that there is no immediate indication that he or she is fasting (Matthew 6:17).

Second, if the leader sees no reason at all why he or she must pray, the Lord Jesus’s teachings prescribe that one should pray each day and ask God for “daily bread” (Matthew 6:11). While the leader, or believer, comes before God, the Lord Jesus has also taught His disciples to pray in a certain manner (Matthew 6:9-13). The Lord addresses the following areas in teaching His disciples how to pray:

1. Acknowledge the Sovereign God for who He is and bless His holy name (Matthew 6:9).
2. Express the desire to see God’s will be fulfilled in the earth, as well as it is in heaven (Matthew 6:10).
3. Ask God to provide the basic needs, including food, for each day (Matthew 6:11).
4. Ask God for forgiveness and for His protection (Matthew 6:12-13).
5. Acknowledge once more that the prayer is toward the God of all creation, power, and authority, who takes care of His children (Matthew 6:13).

All the while, this manner of prayer should be sacred, whether by the individual or by the corporate body of Christ, involving an intimate conversation with the heavenly Father. For that matter, the leader would be wise to set apart some time to commune with God daily. As Henry Blackaby and Richard Blackaby put it, “If leaders spend enough time communing with God, the people they encounter will notice the difference.”¹³⁸

Since Christians live in community, individual prayers should also extend into the community. Therefore, the prayer sessions should involve a time of devotion and dedication. The very conversations among the brothers and sisters in Christ must also be full of thanksgiving and prayer, as the apostle Paul writes in Ephesians 5:19-20: “Speaking to yourselves in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord; giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

In addition, the need for prayer in the life of the believer, and much more in the daily walk of the Christian leader, should neither be diminished nor ignored. Just as he did in all his salutations, the apostle Paul was always exhorting the members of the churches to give thanks to God. In 1 Thessalonians 5: 17-18, the apostle Paul writes, “Pray without ceasing. In everything give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.” It is therefore necessary for each leader to be praying consistently, throughout the day, as he or she is encouraged to pray and give thanks “in everything.” It is clear from the above verses that God’s will is for the believer to be thankful in prayer, and that God sees the things in the lives of His children as being important through Christ Jesus, who died for all believers.

Developing a heart, that has the affinity to give generously, is a process which can be taught as well. In accordance with the Scriptures, the leaders in this Thesis Project also received

¹³⁸ Blackaby and Blackaby, *Spiritual Leadership*, 185.

some helpful teachings, concerning the way and manner they should give of their time, talents, and goods and money. James shows the way and the attitude of the leader of faith, as in James 2: 15-16.

The third item, that was taught and discussed, received the following communication: If the leader notices that a neighbor is cold, for example, he or she may give a coat, or jacket, or dole out some money to purchase one. If a leader sees a brother or sister in the neighborhood who is hungry, for instance, the person, who is learned in the Word of God and is a disciple of Christ, should freely give to the individual in need, as the apostle John has described in 1 John 3:17: “But whoso hath this world’s good and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?” Therefore, it is part of the lifestyle of the person, who claims to have faith, to demonstrate this faith by his or her good works toward another human being in need. The Christian leaders were encouraged to familiarize themselves with these Bible verses that talk about loving God and one’s neighbors. Each leader was also reminded to note in the personal journal, or diary, what the Spirit of God is teaching him or her, concerning these passages on giving, as the readings of the New Testament progressed.

There are many other practical ways to give, that the leaders can learn. The Lord Jesus Christ commands His disciples to “give,” and He mentions some sort of reciprocity in one’s giving to others: “For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured back to you again” (Luke 6:38). The leaders of the churches were motivated to learn that, whether they give out of their time, money, resources, or even kindness, God will reward them. It becomes imperative, then, for these leaders to look for the opportunities to be a blessing onto others, through their offerings in the collection box and the offering of their resources to help the poor

and the needy. Not only is it the duty of the ordinary Christian citizen to help his neighbor out, but it is the obligation of those men and women, who are gifted in that service, to give generously and not even brag about it. The leaders were reminded that the apostle Paul, in a similar fashion, describes the proper way to exercise one's gift of being a generous giver: "He that giveth, let him do it with simplicity" (Romans 12:8). The leaders in the Thesis Project acknowledged that the practice of giving will provide many teachable moments in their lives and in the lives of their followers, as the churches will look forward to the blessings and rewards from being obedient and faithful to God.

God knows the heart of every child of His, and His expectation on giving is as Jesus Christ has taught His disciples: "Do not sound a trumpet before thee," and "let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth" (Matthew 6:2-3). The interventions that are in place, with regards to giving, are instituted to ensure that the leaders are trained not to be ostentatious. In this way, their almsgiving will be in line with the Lord's teachings, which deal with the matters of the heart and intentions, and with the apostle Paul's directions, which point the giver towards being simple and uncomplicated (Matthew 6: 1-4; Romans 12:8).

God rewards people who are faithful to Him, and God is faithful to the men and women who give to support His mission. The leaders in the four churches in Richmond were encouraged to give freely and generously, according to what they have already been blessed by God. As the apostle Paul also teaches, "Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver" (2 Corinthians 9:7). By helping the leaders to grasp a better understanding of giving, they may learn to sow the seed of God's love in the hearts of people, spreading and sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ along the way. God's

blessings will follow, as God's "grace" brings about abundance, and the giver continues to be generous (2 Corinthians 9:8).

There are many ways for effective communication now in the 21st century. But much work could be accomplished if a face-to-face update was in place. The first face-to face interview was scheduled to take place at the worship center of Seed International Church, that is within the Lakeside Methodist Church. Due to COVID-19 restrictions on gatherings, only one interview was done at this site. The other interviews were done at the residence of the participants or at the Panera Bread Restaurant, that is located close to the homes of two of the leaders.

At this initial meeting, the regular practices of the participants were identified, as to what their routines had been with giving, fasting, and prayer. At that point, the habits and attitudes toward the Sabbath were also ascertained and recorded. Open-ended questions were more suitable for this setting. It was agreed that it would be feasible for all the participants to receive updates, at least once a week, preferably on the day of Sabbath that each person would select. It was assumed that, once the intervention plan was presented to the participants, they would all be honest in their approach to the activities and practices that are designed. It was communicated then that when each person was invested into the project, the collaboration between the participants and the facilitator, or researcher, could be worked out, being cognizant of the conflicting schedules that may come up.

For the most part, the leaders in the project are all adults who are married and have children. The ages of the leaders in the Thesis Project are between early 30s and late 50s. Eight of the participants are male, and two of the participants are female. The two female participants are married to their husbands, who are the senior pastors at their churches. This situation presents

the two females as the first ladies of the two representative churches. The senior pastors of the four churches in Richmond are all participating in the research study. There are also two associate pastors and two deacons who are involved in the Thesis project. The churches are all headed by leaders, who have been in ministry for a good while, and some of the leaders have been through the seminary curriculum before. With the exception of a couple of leaders, the participants are familiar with the research process and are capable of making decisions toward a shared interest and a common ministry issue. It is appropriate that the researcher has asked the husbands if their wives may participate in this Thesis Project, as well as ascertaining from the wives if the husbands may be offered the opportunity to contribute, in this research project.

The participants for the project were made aware of the possibility that they would be contributing to addressing the particular leadership issue in the Richmond community, a couple of months prior to the final decision to proceed by the Liberty University Institutional Review Board, LUIRB. The researcher has visited each of the four churches in Richmond on numerous occasions. The leaders in these churches are acquaintances of the researcher, and the issue, of finding the time and the need to build the highest relationship with God, has come up in some of the conversations between the researcher and the leaders. The recruitment process began, as soon as the Institutional Review Board, IRB, gave the green light to proceed with the research. It took approximately two months for the IRB to process and overview the intended interventions and make their approval available. A sample of the approval letter from the Institutional Review Board is presented on page 113, at the end of the research study, before one reads the bibliography. See the sample for the full approval letter. Also, a copy of the recruitment letter and verbal script is available in Appendix B.

As previously explained, both male and female leaders had already given their verbal expression and desire to be participants in the Thesis Project. In all, there were between ten and eighteen targets who were interested in participating in this research project. The researcher sought out more than twelve participants, anticipating that some of the targets may decide not to participate, or that any number of the participants may withdraw from the research project. Now, it is official, after the ten participants have already put their signature on the consent forms that were issued. The consent forms also show that the Thesis Project will not be carried out under any coercion or intimidation, and that the participants may withdraw their inclusion in it at any time. Most importantly, the IRB process ensured that the safety and privacy of the participants would be secured, if they wish to protect any sensitive information. See Appendix A for a copy of the consent form.

The main text that is required every day is the Bible, and it was assumed that every participant had a personal copy already. As the consent forms represent, each participant must be able to understand the language of the Holy Bible. A portable voice recorder was in the researcher's possession, and it was the primary tool that was employed in the interviews. The researcher purchased extra triple A batteries for the recording of the interviews, so that the potential for technical issues may be eliminated. Also, lists of Bible verses that deal with fasting, and giving, and the Sabbath had been prepared and were ready for anyone who may need them. It is good news that spiritual disciplines can be taught, and it is much more encouraging that the biblical support is strong to back it up.

At present, it is true that the leaders in the churches in Richmond, and in other parts of the United States for that matter, know that the lack of spiritual growth in the churches is due to a misunderstanding in prioritizing their relationship with God. People step back and make

adjustments periodically, but the leaders are not patiently waiting for God to bring about the increase. Therefore, they revert to the same old playbook, where the effort is to achieve ministry excellence and increase, that is based on personal ability. As time passes, more time and energy become diverted to the secular occupations and models, causing a decline in private ministry to God and the things of the kingdom of God. This decline becomes systemic, as the leaders' example wanes, to the detriment of the local church's congregation.

By the grace of God, each leader is encouraged to engage in the spiritual practices, that are designed for this Thesis project, putting in the time and the effort that are required to become the example for the followers. As the leaders are taught, in accordance with the Lord's teachings from the Sermon on the Mount especially, and from other passages of Scripture, they will become worthy disciples, who are capable of teaching others to build that highest level of relationship with God. As the apostle Paul has written, "And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also" (2 Timothy 2:2). True discipleship is an ongoing process of increase, where spiritual growth is noticed both in the teacher and the ones who are taught. When daily prayer, daily reading of the Word of God, weekly observance of the Sabbath, a day of fasting per week, and the giving of oneself in all things, which enables a person to go the extra mile for God and neighbor, do become routines in the lives of the leaders of the churches, the process will receive its momentum among the followers, who may reproduce this form of discipleship also.

Implementation of the Intervention Design

With diligence and discipline, the leader may navigate the Gospels and Acts of the Apostles within four weeks. And it will require about the same length of time for an intimate reading of the rest of the New Testament. Thus, two months will be an adequate length of time to

expect some meaningful results from following the interventions in this research. The leaders were encouraged to keep a journal or diary, so that they may note exactly those instances of the Lord's increase, in personal spiritual growth, and corporate building up of the congregation, in spiritual health and in the numbers, as far as membership goes. Ideally, it would be beneficial for each leader and the Thesis Project's progress, if the journaling is updated daily. This dedication to the project's design and the recording of the interactions and growth in daily life may present an accurate measurement for the success of the whole process.

Growth in the project will be determined when the leaders reach a point, where the selfish desires are replaced by the will of God. The journals will indicate or note those instances where the leader is moved to do things in accordance with the Word of God, or when the teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ become second nature in the life of each leader. A consequent benefit can be measured by the increase in spiritual maturity of the members of the church, who notice and follow the leaders' own example. That is, the improvement in private ministry, because of the leader's intimate relationship with Christ, will have a direct impact on the public ministry, as old and new members of the churches are drawn to the words and ways of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The journals will highlight the moments, in which the Lord brings about the increase in the personal life, as well as in the lives of the followers of Christ in the churches, who will be influenced by the leaders' imitation of the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 11:1). Fruit bearing is an indication of growth, so mature discipleship is to be expected from the God of increase, who will reward the leaders and make the multiplication of the good fruit in the church possible. God will bring about the exponential growth because the Lord Jesus teaches about this very thing in the Sermon on the Mount, as in Matthew 5-7.

A survey will be performed toward the conclusion of the project, by which the effectiveness of the interventions may be known. At that point, closed-ended questions will help to account for the areas where the interventions worked, as well as the areas that need improvement. Here, some of the questions appear as the following:

1. Did the leader notice a closer relationship with Christ? Yes__ or No__?
2. Did the leader notice a closer relationship with the people in the immediate home? Yes__ or No__?
3. Did the leader perceive an influence of other people because of his or her example in life? Yes__ or No__?
4. Did the leader sense the Lord's increase in the maturity of the disciples in the church? Yes__ or No__?
5. Did the leader receive any report on the disciples' witness in the community? Yes__ or No__?
6. Has the Lord brought any increase to the church membership since these interventions? Yes__ or No__?
7. Have any of the members of the church expressed a major development in their own spiritual growth? Yes__ or No__?

See Appendix E for a copy of these survey questions on the Lord's increase. These questions can be answered with yes or no, or by giving a specific number, or simply by one or two words.

Therefore, this aspect of quantitative analysis is also included to facilitate the measurement of the project's effectiveness.

In this Thesis Project in Richmond, Virginia, it is necessary for the researcher to have at least three ways of gathering the information for analysis, by which accuracy of the results may

be ensured. This method of analyzing the data in a manner, so that the whole investigation will be reliable, is what is termed as data triangulation. First, the surveys on fasting and on the Lord's increase will represent the actual actions of the participants and the personal responses to what type of increase the Lord will release into each person's life and his or her followers. Second, the personal journals for each leader, or participant, will be representative of the hard copy of the actual activities and processes in the lives of the leaders. Each participant will be responsible for his or her own schedule, endeavoring to take note of every interaction and every action in the personal walk with the Lord. There might not be a more intimate way of ensuring that the interventions and the results are recorded accurately than when each leader keeps a journal or a diary.

Third, personal testimony of what God has done and is doing in each participant's life will be a suitable way to make sure that the participants have made known of their time and their diligence, during the period while the interventions are instituted. Testimonies tend to be the true experiences of the persons who tell them. Therefore, the accounts happen to be accurate and reliable. These three methods were employed to facilitate the data triangulation process, contributing to the validity of the research study and its results.

This Thesis Project received the majority of its data collection by face-to-face interactions between the researcher and the participants. At the initial interview sessions, the researcher ensured that the surroundings were comfortable for each participant. It meant that the meetings occurred at a time when the distractions were minimal. The interview at Seed International Church took place in the sanctuary, and it featured the researcher and the senior pastor of Seed International Church. The initial interview for the participants in their homes

occurred when all the children were away and there was serenity and comfort in the living rooms. Four of such meetings in the homes took place.

For the interviews at Panera Bread Restaurant, the researcher and each participant found a table under a gazebo, in the outside dining area. The traffic outside the restaurants, on the days of the meetings, was not heavy, making it possible for the participants to answer the interview questions freely and comfortably. The recordings were clear, and the participants were allowed to express themselves in their own terms, meaning that they were given the opportunity to be themselves. The nature of the questions, being framed as open-ended, made it possible for each individual participant to share his or her spiritual routines with the researcher. Each participant received the reassurance that a pseudonym would be assigned to his or her name, so that confidentiality would be maintained.

When the interviews were concluded, the researcher gave the survey questions to the participants, making each person aware that the surveys would be collected at the end of the two months, when the readings of the New Testament were supposed to be finished. The readings for each participant began the Monday after the initial interview. On average, it took between 30-45 minutes for each interview. Each participant was reminded that it would take approximately 20 minutes to complete the two surveys, and that each survey would require about 10 minutes to finish.

Finally, growth in the project will be determined, when the leader reaches a point, where the selfish ambitions and desires are replaced by the things that please God. The journals will indicate or note those instances where the leader is moved to do things in accordance with the Word of God, or when the teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ begin to become second nature in the life of the leader. The researcher has made it part of the Thesis Project to bring about

connections, so that the participants can share in one another's burdens and learn of the successes together. The plan is to give the participants the opportunity to evaluate their own growth, as they share these moments of victory in spiritual growth, through word of mouth and personal stories of victory. A consequent benefit can be measured by the actual increase in the spiritual maturity of the members of the churches, who notice and follow the leaders' own example. That is, the improvement in private ministry, which is recorded in the journals, or shared through close conversations in the connections, will have direct impact on the public ministry, as old and new members of the churches are drawn to the words and deeds of Christ, because of the leaders' imitation of the Lord in their lives (1 Corinthians 11:1).

The initial interviews, in which the habits and daily spiritual practices of the leaders are recorded, may be evaluated against where each leader will end up at the end of the Thesis Project. That is, if the interventions can bring the leader to a place, where he or she decides to continue the practices, as they are designed in this project, in his or her daily life, it will mean that the leaders have put in the effort and time to enrich their relationship with God. However, it may take longer than the two months, that the researcher has worked into the project, for the results to be fully realized.

Patient anticipation for the Lord to do His work in each leader is required then. Also, intentionality should be key in each participant's daily walk with God. And this deliberate attitude will be beneficial, if the leaders decide to make the appropriate changes to include the interventions of giving, prayer, fasting, and sabbath in their lives, for an extended period, beyond the length of the Thesis Project and, if possible, for the long haul. It will also mean that the participants have gone the extra mile for God and for the people, whom they serve on a regular basis for their God.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

In this chapter, the results of the Thesis Project are presented. The data and the relationship of this data to the entire Thesis Project are made clear, including the things that were gathered from the interviews, surveys, and journals. Therefore, the entire project's success is presented, making available the results of the qualitative and quantitative information that is collected from the participants and their involvement in the interventions. From the collected data, measurements and conclusions may also be derived, which will further give an understanding into the success and contributions of the research project.

The interview data will give an indication as to the level of individual spiritual growth for each leader. As continuous assessment and evaluation occur, measurable outcomes may become available, when the leaders record their own daily communion with God and the answers that they perceive they have received from God. The journals will help to gauge how far each person has moved, from where he or she started to the place he or she may be at the end of the interventions. The answers to the survey questions will allow a determination to be made about the growth in personal ministry and the effect on the congregations. The combination of interviews, journals, and surveys will also present a picture of the overall attitude of the participants' interactions in their collaborative work toward addressing the problem in leadership in Richmond. From all this data, conclusions may be drawn, and the effectiveness of the Thesis Project will be determined.

Results for Initial Interview

The initial interviews were conducted successfully. These interviews offered the leaders the opportunity to share and reveal their spiritual practices in the daily walk with God. The interviews were recorded on separate days, according to the schedules that were convenient for

each leader. The initial interview questions, which can also be found in Appendix C, are presented below.

1. What does a typical day for a Christ follower look like for you?
2. What constitute the regular spiritual disciplines for you?
3. Do your spiritual routines include prayer, reading of the Word, fasting, giving, and a Sabbath?
4. Do you have any medical barriers toward engaging in a fast?
5. What does a typical day of fasting look like for you?
6. How do you observe your Sabbath?
7. Does your daily walk with the Lord involve journaling? Could you explain how you are reminded of the Lord's work in your life?

Summary of the Responses from the Initial Interviews

- The typical day for a Christ follower has a consensus in all the leaders' practices of prayer and reading of the Word of God. All the ten leaders attempt to pray and read the Word of God every day. Most of the prayers go up in the early morning for the leaders. They are aware, however, that they have the flexibility to pray at various times of the day.
- Occasionally, two of the leaders pray before they go to bed, when they are not able to pray in the morning. Prayers vary in content and approach. All the leaders involve worship in their daily prayers. One leader has built consistency into his routines, endeavoring to spend at least 1 hour and 30 minutes a day in prayer. On an average, the leaders spend about 40-50 minutes a day in prayer.

- The time that is allotted to, and the quota of Bible verses that are read, depend on each leader. Having a specific set of chapters to read each day is not common among the leaders. Due to schedules at home and at work, all ten leaders find it difficult to spend great amount of time on reading the Word of God. But it is common among the leaders that they devote the time to prayer and reading the Word of God, especially on the days that they fast.
- Four leaders have incorporated devotionals into their daily readings. For these leaders, they make it possible to squeeze in a devotional when they work long hours and are not able to sit down and read a whole chapter and digest it fully.
- All ten leaders pray, read the Word of God, and fast, at certain times, as part of their spiritual disciplines. None of these leaders has any medical barriers to engaging in a fast. However, one leader mentioned that he cannot have a dry fast, and so he must drink water throughout the fast. Here again, the leaders have various times and seasons, in which they fast.
- Five of the leaders, or fifty percent of the interview answers on fasting, indicated that the fast happens in seasons. That is, the individual fast tends to coincide with the corporate fast of the church, which happens in January or the new year. The other fifty percent of the leaders indicated that they fast during the year, and that it depends on what the Spirit of God is telling each person to fast for, or what kind of fast is suitable for that particular day, or situation.
- One of the ten leaders has a weekly routine, and he is careful to fast at least one day every week. This same leader has a family obligation to engage in a fast together, during the last five days of every month.

- With the exception of one leader, the leaders have expressed that they have difficulty in fasting consistently, and that it might be nearly impossible for them to fast one day a week. When the leaders do fast, they typically skip two meals and eat just one meal on that day of fast.
- Similarly, all the ten leaders have indicated that they have seen difficulties, when it comes to observing the entire 24-hour period of the Sabbath. Therefore, each leader has mentioned that he or she will need to be deliberate, so that the necessary adjustments and attitudes may be in place for a complete observance of the Sabbath. The understanding is 100% that the leaders are supposed to rest from doing manual labor and to devote most of their time to doing the things that please God.
- Nine out of the ten leaders have chosen Sunday as their Sabbath day. On these Sundays, the leaders typically go to church, they fellowship with other believers, and they spend quality time with their spouses and their children.
- Even though they aim to observe the Sabbath every Weekend, two of the nine leaders have regular requirements on Sundays at their places of employment. Both leaders find it challenging to get the time off on most weekends. Therein lies the difficulty in having a complete Sabbath.
- Giving of the leader's self, time, money, and resources to the furtherance of the gospel and the promotion of God's work is a common theme among the ten leaders. Sometimes, it becomes hard for each leader to find the time to go and serve others outside of the home. But all ten leaders accept the reality that they could always give more of themselves and of their money to support the church and their communities.

- Five leaders are consistent givers of their tithes and offerings. These leaders have made it a habit to give a certain percentage of their net income each month. They have also been deliberate in acting on their faith and believing God to bless them, when they give at the collection box.
- Three leaders have built journaling into their Bible reading schedules. All ten leaders have some method, by which they may be reminded of the Lord's work in their lives. In that respect, each leader has a form of journaling, so that he or she can go back to the records for reminders.
- Four leaders have indicated that they have sermons that they have prepared from their notes in their journals. The leaders combine the understanding that the Holy Spirit has given them through the Bible readings and the daily revelations in their walk with God, so that they may build sermons that show the practicality of the gospel and the applicability of the Word of God in general.
- Fifty percent of the leaders have expressed their desire to do better with their journaling. They tend to rely on their memory, and they have noted that this tendency may be problematic.

Discussion on the Results of the Initial Interview

- The initial interviews were set up in such a manner, that the leaders would be themselves and give details as to their spiritual disciplines and the routines in their lives. The responses were genuine. All ten leaders had the self-awareness that they all needed help to arrive at a place, where they could practice their spiritual disciplines seamlessly.
- Each leader expressed clearly that a problem did exist in finding the proper balance between ministry for the Lord and serving friends and family and in meeting the

requirements and obligations of the secular occupation. This reality was one area that caused the ten leaders to consider making the changes in their schedules, in order that they would be able to make great progress in prioritizing the most intimate relationship with God.

- The momentum to be intentional and the attitude to maintain this impetus were both on the side of all ten leaders, at the start of the research study. All ten leaders were ready to engage in the interventions as soon as the interviews were completed. The reason is that the leaders could determine from the interview questions that a biblical imperative was in place for the disciples of Christ to engage in the practices of giving, prayer, fasting, reading of the Word of God, and observance of the Sabbath.
- The leaders had the agreement that the Thesis Project had come at the right time, and that it was high time a major shift of the leaders' time was made toward focusing on the things that pleased God first.
- Flexibility in the approach to practice the spiritual disciplines existed already in some fashion in the daily walk of all ten leaders. The leaders admitted that there were times that they could not pray at the normal times, that they were accustomed to. On those days, they could all sense that they were drifting away from the assignment that God had given them for each blessed day. This situation made them return home and seek the Lord with much fervor, even after a busy and hard day of work.
- With the leaders, who already had a robust schedule of spiritual disciplines, the interviews revealed that they would use the research study to exercise their desire to go the extra mile for their God. It meant that two of the leaders would keep the routines they

already had in place, working diligently to align a couple of their spiritual practices with the interventions, especially in the sixty days that these interventions were in place.

- All ten leaders shared the sentiment that the interventions were appropriate, in that they did not see them as being laborious. However, each leader knew that it would be challenging to be consistent day in and day out. This realization added to the leaders' need to be more intentional each day.
- The leaders agreed that they needed to have something like the interview questions each year, so that they may evaluate their walk with God and recalibrate in the areas where they must be deliberate in their relationship with Christ.

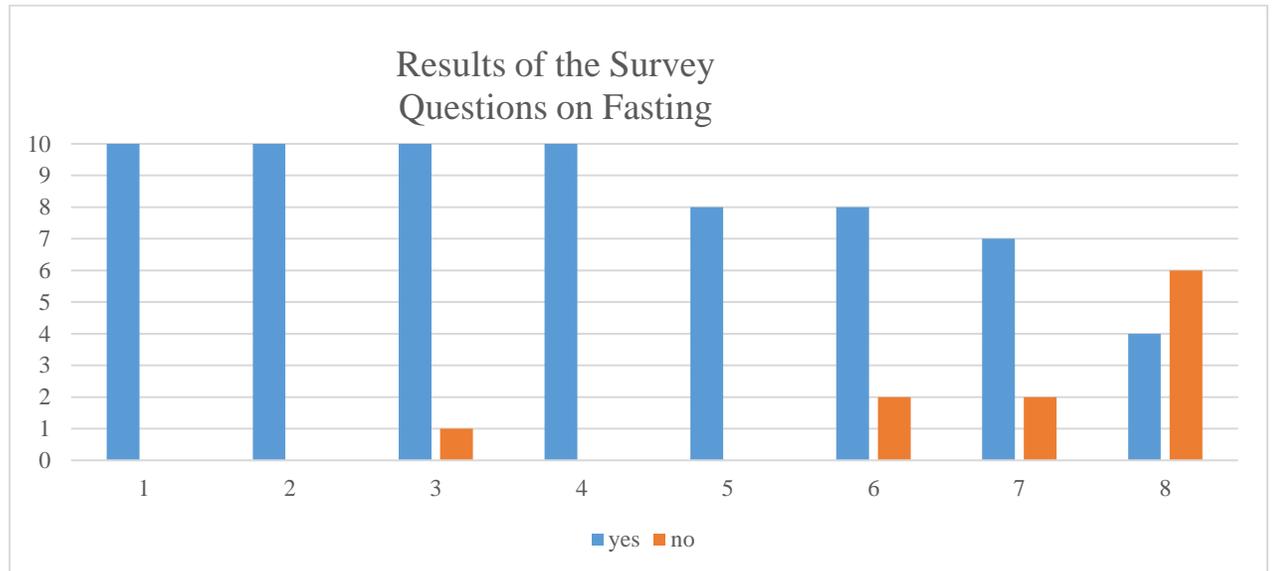
Results of the Survey Questions on Fasting

1. Did the leader give of his or her time, gifts, and resources on the day of fasting? 10 Yes and 0 No
2. Was the leader careful not to appear to be fasting? 10 Yes and 0 No
Did the leader anoint his or her head? 5 Yes and 5 No
Did the leader wash his or her face? 9 Yes and 1 No
3. Were there any opportunities to feed the poor? 9 Yes and 1 No
Were there any opportunities to clothe people who were cold or homeless? 4 Yes and 6 No
4. Did the leader have any successes with witnessing to others? 10 Yes and 0 No
5. Did the leader share the gospel and teach others by living out the teachings of the Word of God? 10 Yes and 0 No
6. Did the leader notice anything different in his or her walk with God on the day of fasting? 8 Yes and 2 No

7. Was the leader able to reflect on the day of fasting? 8 Yes and 2 No

8. Was the leader able to jot down the activities of the day of fasting in a journal? 4 Yes and

6 No



Notes on the Results of the Survey on Fasting

- The leaders were 100% involved in giving of their time, gifts, and resources on the day of fasting. That is, every leader, who participated, was able to give on the day of fasting. The activities varied, as some leaders found the time to give to their immediate family and to the members of the community that they live in.
- Every leader was careful not to appear to be fasting on the day of fasting. Different methods were employed, in order that the leaders would do the fast in secret. In this area, the yes responses were 100%. But when it came to the specifics, as far as outlined by the Lord Jesus Christ, the responses varied.
- One leader was not sure if he took the time to wash the face and to ensure that his face did not give him up that he was fasting. However, he indicated that no one knew when he fasted. 90% of the leaders were attentive to how their faces appeared.

- Two leaders, or 20% of the participants, spent time to anoint the head. In all, these leaders employed modern grooming techniques to make themselves presentable to those outside, so that their fasting would be in secret.
- All, but one leader, were able to notice the opportunities that were available for them to feed the poor. The leaders did not strictly go out and seek for people who might need help, but they happen to work in environments where they see their services are needed. On the day of fasting, these leaders rendered their services and their money to the causes of feeding the poor. Four out of the ten leaders clothed those who were in need, either directly or indirectly. Of the four such leaders, two were responsible for sending clothing overseas to people in Africa and other parts of the world.
- All ten leaders were able to witness to others on the day of fasting. The momentum that these leaders gained in their witnessing to others continued throughout the week for them. They could all sense that God was doing His work through them, and that God was influencing lives through them.
- There was 100% yes response to whether the leaders were able to share the gospel and live out the teachings of God's Word. The ten leaders saw that their witness to others was also the opportunity to exemplify the directions of the Word of God, and that it was more imperative that they lived out the teachings of the Scriptures, especially on the day of fasting.
- Eighty percent of the survey answers indicated that the leaders saw that certain things were different in their walk with God on the day of fasting. The two leaders, who answered no to this question on the survey, were leaders who have engaged in weekly fasts for many years.

- Eighty percent of the survey results indicated that the leaders were able to reflect on the activities of the day of fasting. It meant that the eight leaders sat down and evaluated how the fast had gone and on the things that God had accomplished in them and through them.
- The responses were split, 50-50, when it comes to the leader's ability to journal on the day of fasting. As part of the Bible reading on the day of fasting, the five leaders, who responded yes, took the time to jot down some things in their journal, to which they expect to go back and check off at the appropriate time.

Discussion on the Results of the Survey on Fasting

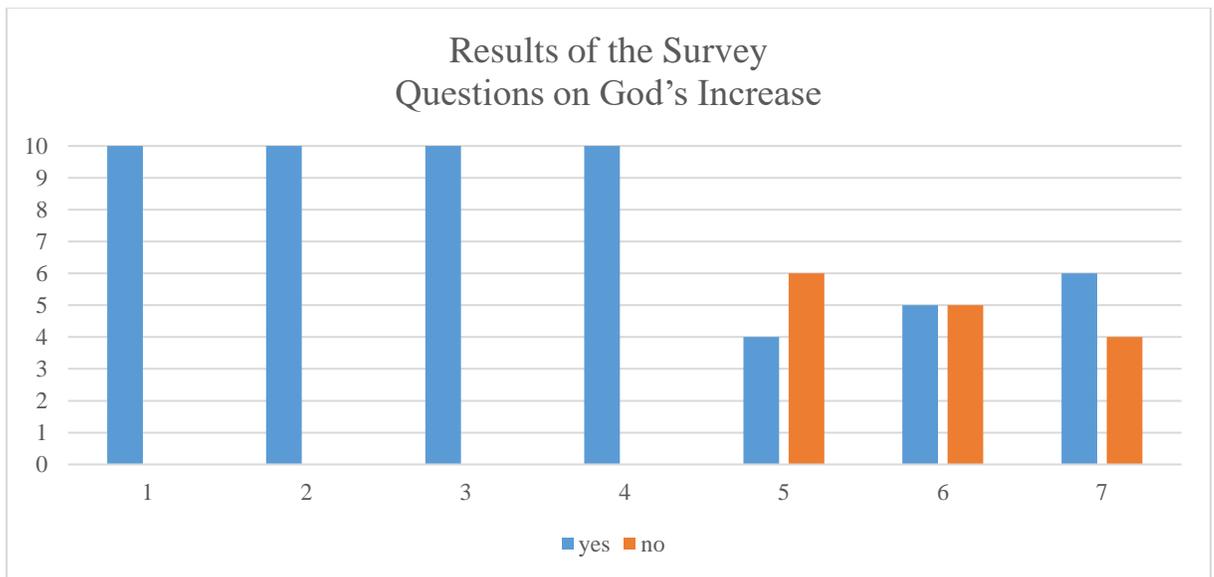
- All eight questions were designed to reflect the Lord's teachings from the Sermon on the Mount and Isaiah 58. Each question involves an action and the chance for the leader to be deliberate in his or her behavior and attitude in the day of fasting.
- The responses to question 1 were 100% "yes" that the leaders were careful to give of themselves, their time, their gifts, and their resources on the day of fasting. The solid blue bar on the graph shows that the leaders' intentionality in their giving is in accordance with what the Word of God teaches about a fast that is pleasing to God, as in Isaiah 58.
- The responses to question 2 were all "yes" responses, meaning that each leader was careful not to be seen as fasting. The "yes" answers are depicted on the graph by a single, solid blue bar.
- The actions of the leaders on the day of fasting came in different forms, however. As instructed by the Lord Jesus Christ in the Sermon on the Mount, the leaders knew that they should not "disfigure their faces" and appear to be fasting. Therefore, nearly all the leaders washed their faces, and five leaders were particularly careful to anoint the

- head. In these ways, the leaders appeared presentable and not unkempt, making their fast to take place in secret. This type of fast is pleasing to God.
- The opportunity to serve the poor and the needy is always present. As described in Isaiah 58, the type of fast, that pleases God, incorporates the leaders' ability to reach out to feed the poor and clothe the people that are naked, cold, and homeless.
 - Nine of the ten leaders were able to provide food or money to aid in feeding the poor. Even though the sixty days for the interventions began and ended in the summer months, nine of the leaders took the time out of their busy schedules to provide the appropriate clothing for the homeless and those people in need. These actions are admirable, and they are equally pleasing to God. The reward from the heavenly Father is promised by the Lord Jesus Christ.
 - A long and solid blue bar indicates that all the leaders were able to witness to others on the day of fasting. As the leaders shared the gospel with others, they could also give of themselves and identify the areas where needs could be met. It means that the leaders were going the extra mile on the day of fasting, telling people of the goodness of God, and showing them the leaders' faith by their works.
 - Question 5 is a continuation of question 4. All ten leaders were able to share the gospel and demonstrate its influence on their lives, by living out the teachings of God's Word. It means that the leaders had taken a major step in following the Lord's instructions in the Great Commission: The leaders taught others how to live, by their own lifestyle and Christ's way of life, which is pleasing to God.
 - Had it not been for two leaders, whose routines already included one day of fasting, the answers to question 6 would have been 100% "yes," signifying that the leaders

- were seeing the hand of God move in their favor. It could be inferred that the leaders sensed the nearness of God, as they spent quality time in prayer and reading the Word of God on the day of fasting.
- The shorter orange bar, here, indicated only that the two leaders were accustomed to being in communion with God on the day of fasting, and that the other eight leaders would get to a point, where fasting with expectation from God would become second nature.
 - Eight out of the ten leaders could set a few minutes aside, so that they may reflect on the day of fasting. It is at that juncture, that each leader may identify where he or she was able to pray, read the Bible, give, share the gospel, and teach others about the love and goodness of God.
 - Repetition of this reflection act may help the leader to build some sort of routine into his or her daily walk with God, because the strengths are maintained and the areas, that need change, receive the necessary adjustments.
 - Question 8 is also a continuation of question 7. After the reflection on the day of fasting is completed, it is behooving for the leader to record the activities of the day somewhere. Unfortunately, only four leaders could document their thoughts and the activities of the day in a journal. These same four leaders were consistent with their journaling throughout the sixty days of the interventions.
 - The six “no” responses meant that there may be the opportunity to develop a new habit of journaling, starting with the leader’s record of activities on the day of fasting. The journals may help the leaders remember when God worked a miracle in their lives or exactly what things the Lord made happen in their walk with Him.

Results of the Survey Questions on God's Increase

1. Did the leader notice a closer relationship with Christ? 10 Yes and 0 No
2. Did the leader notice a closer relationship with the people in the immediate home? 10 Yes and 0 No
3. Did the leader perceive an influence of other people because of his or her example in life? 10 Yes 0 No
4. Did the leader sense the Lords's increase in the maturity of the disciples in the church? 10 Yes and 0 No
5. Did the leader receive any report on the disciples' witness in the community? 4 Yes and 6 No
6. Has the Lord brought any increase to the church membership since these interventions? 5 Yes and 5 No
7. Have any of the members of the church expressed a major development in their own spiritual growth? 6 Yes and 4 No



Notes on the Results of the Survey on God's Increase

- Every leader indicated that he or she noticed that a closer relationship with Christ was present. Therefore, there was 100% indication that the leaders had become more intimate with Christ, compared to when the interventions began.
- Each leader responded that he or she had experienced a closer relationship with members of the immediate family. The 100% yes responses indicated that after the 60 days were passed for the interventions, there were stronger bonds between the leader and each person in the immediate family.
- All ten leaders perceived that other people were influenced because of their example in life. The 100% yes responses here also represent that the leaders were cognizant of their private ministry, and that the leaders could tell of any impact that this private ministry had brought about in the public ministry.
- Ten out of ten leaders noticed that the disciples in the churches had gained maturity since the interventions began. These leaders interacted with some of the disciples, and the disciples experienced the leaders' own maturity, first-hand.
- Forty percent of the survey results on the Lord's increase indicated that the disciples in the churches had reported that they had been able to witness onto others and had seen the Lord's hand in their work for Him. Some of the disciples could not witness, however, because of the present situation with COVID-19.
- Fifty percent of the responses showed that the Lord had brought about an increase in the church membership, after the requirements of the interventions were met. Again, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic must be factored in. Face-to-face gatherings, or

meetings in the sanctuaries, were limited, and if they did occur, the same familiar faces showed up at that time.

- The responses were 6 yes and 4 No, when it comes to the spiritual maturity of the members of the church. Interactions were minimal, but the few members of the churches, who were in contact with the leaders in the research project, did express that they had experienced spiritual growth individually.

Discussion on the Results of the Survey on God's Increase

- Questions 1-4 are questions that deal with the leader's own spiritual maturity.
- The ten "yes" responses for question 1 indicate that the individual's practice of the spiritual disciplines has led to the sense that a closer relationship with Christ was alive and well. This result is represented by a solid blue bar on the graph, which reflects a positive correlation between the interventions and the outcome.
- The ten "yes" responses for question 2 also indicate that all ten leaders had experienced a closer relationship among the members of their immediate households. It means that each leader's spiritual growth has contributed to stronger bonds in the relationships in the immediate family. This result is reflected in the solid blue bar in the graph. Here too, there is a direct correlation between the interventions and the outcome.
- For question 3, the leaders gave ten "yes" responses that they had perceived an influence of other people because of the leaders' example in life. It means that, after the sixty days of interventions, each leader's way of life, or the routine that he or she had built during that period, had spread onto the next person, and had had a positive effect on others. This positive outcome could be attributed to the changes that were in place because of the

interventions and the practices. The direct correlation is represented by another single, solid blue bar on the graph.

- Another single, solid bar reflected the leaders' perception that the Lord has brought about an increase in the maturity in the disciples of each leader's church. It could be interpreted that God has blessed the leader and the leader's church, because He is pleased with the leader's attention to prioritize an intimate relationship with Him. A correlation between the practices of the spiritual disciplines and the maturity of the disciples is, hereby, identified.
- Questions 5-7 deal more with the Lord's increase in the corporate body of Christ.
- The answers to question 5 are divided, and they are reflected on the graph by a shorter blue bar for the "yes" responses and a comparatively longer orange bar for the "no" responses. It may be explained that the disciples were able to witness to others, as it is their duty to do so in the community, but not all the disciples had been able to report on these instances of witnessing. It could also mean that the reports will come, even after the interventions have been completed in the sixty days. It also means that the Lord is faithful and has brought about an increase of opportunities for the disciples of the churches to share the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.
- The responses for question 6 are split at 50-50. These responses are represented by two bars of equal length, with one bar in blue and the other in orange on the graph. Here again, the Lord is faithful, and He is still blessing the leader and the church, that he or she is leading. It might be gathered from the results that the other five churches have not yet seen the increase in the church membership, but this increase is to be realized soon.

- For question 7, the blue bar is slightly higher than the orange bar, signifying that the “yes” responses are more than the “no” responses. Six leaders had heard from some of the members of the church that there was a major development in the spiritual growth of these members. It means that the spiritual health of the corporate body of Christ is stronger for six of the churches. It could mean that the remaining four churches may also have experienced major growth, spiritually, among the members, but that no one had reported on this new development yet.

Notes from the Leaders’ Personal Journals

- Four out of the ten leaders were able to keep a journal for the length of the interventions in the Thesis Project. None of the four leaders could write in his or her journal every day. Even though all four leaders managed to read the Word of God in some fashion daily, it was not a habit for any of them to journal every day. Rather, it made sense for these leaders to note the things that God had done and revealed to them on a weekly basis. These leaders tied their journaling into the activities of the day of fasting.
- The remaining six leaders could not manage journaling as part of their routine. There were instances, where three of the remaining six leaders recorded the events of their witnessing to other people in the community. But the act of journaling was not kept and developed in the sixty days.
- All ten leaders have expressed the goal of reaching a point, where they may be able to journal every day, in addition to reading the Word of God daily.
- The prayer life for the four leaders, who journaled, received deliberation. These leaders made the time to seek the face of God more often. The leaders report that the prayers were specific at certain times for specific countries in the world, especially the United

States and India, where the COVID-19 pandemic had taken the highest toll on the populations.

- All four leaders were consistent in their prayers for the local churches. The spiritual health of the members, as well as the finances of these churches, formed some of the topics of the prayer requests.
- Three of the four journals indicated that the Lord has brought about increase in spiritual growth, making mention that the spouses were pleased with the new energy and vibrancy in doing the things of God. The spouses of these leaders had also experienced the direct benefit of the leaders' growth on their family relationships, in that the children were even happy about the dynamics in the family.
- One leader saw a positive outcome, even though he was moved to get on his knees more often, due to friction at home and at the place of employment.
- Two of the top leaders were able to give to the people in the churches abroad, as part of being a blessing to the poor and those in need overseas. The supplies included clothing and medical supplies to poor, pregnant women, that are admitted at the hospital, and school resources, such as books and laptops, to school children overseas.
- One of the four leaders, who could journal, noted that it was possible to do some form of giving to the members of the local community. In this particular outing to help the poor and those in need, single mothers and their families received a blessing from the leaders of the church.
- Fifty percent of the journals reveal that the leaders plan on continuing with the interventions of the Thesis project, beyond the sixty days that were required.

- The other fifty percent of the leaders would like to include some practices, particularly the one day of fasting to their weekly norms.
- All four leaders aim to read the Bible more often, and they see the added benefit of reading devotionals. But the main goal for each leader is to spend more time studying and meditating on the Word of God. Therefore, the leaders intend to make the time to study the Bible, being intentional every day, but being more focused to get it done on the days that they happen to be off work.
- All four leaders intend on being intentional with the observance of a complete Sabbath. The circumstances for two of these leaders have not changed, as far as getting the time off on Sundays to do the things of God the entire day. But they have also put the requests in, so that they may get certain specific Sundays off and be able to enjoy the necessary rest from manual labor.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

Conclusion

In Chapter 5, the implications and conclusions are given for the thesis project that was undertaken in Richmond, Virginia. The success of the entire project is identified, and the effectiveness of the study is shown. That is, it will be possible to come up with the argument that the interventions in this Thesis Project led to an actual instance of realized benefits of prioritizing the leader's relationship with God. The benefit of the flourishing life of the leader to the leaders themselves and to the community will contribute to the success in the local context. Here also, the areas where difficulties might have occurred will be addressed, being cognizant of the churches' ability to take up any issues and devise new ways to bring about a meaningful resolution. The next step will be the impact, or implications, of the project on any other context that might be similar to the one in Richmond. Also, the process for replicating the research is presented, and further additions, or answers to any questions that are relevant for future studies, are given in Chapter 5.

The interventions have passed. The data is in. It is time to evaluate the data. The Thesis Project in Richmond, Virginia, was an enterprise, an undertaking, in which the leaders of four small churches looked to prioritize their relationship with God. In the sixty days that followed the approval by the Liberty University IRB to proceed with the research study, the interviews were conducted first. As the results of the interviews have shown, all the leaders, who participated, had the spiritual disciplines of prayer and reading of the Word of God in some degree in their daily routines. At the end of the interventions, all the leaders had dedicated more time, or had made the required adjustments, to prayer and the reading of the Word of God. Even though the leaders struggled with their commitment to fasting at least one day a week, each

person saw the need to have a consistent schedule for fasting. The same attitude to be intentional in prayer, reading of the Word of God, and fasting is applicable to each leader's acts of giving and the observance of the Sabbath. The benefits of having these practices in place, in the daily walk of the leader with God, were great, even when the effort to adhere strictly to these practices in the sixty days was partial. In the end, the leaders, and the people in their immediate family, experienced spiritual growth, and they experienced closeness and nearness to God.

When one looks at the graphs, which represented the results of the surveys on fasting and of the Lord's increase, the "yes" responses were almost all 100%, when it comes to individual spiritual growth. It could be determined that a direct correlation exists between the intentional practices, or spiritual disciplines, and the increase that God has brought into each leader's spiritual health. That is, the leaders and people, who happened to be around these leaders, were able to see the transformation in their private ministry, being aware of where each leader was at the beginning of the interventions, and of the state each leader was in at the end of the interventions. The research study was successful in this respect, that the goal to achieve the highest form of intimate relationship with God was met, because the benefits in private ministry had been realized. A great part of the goal had been met, now that each leader had attained spiritual growth, which was made possible because God had rewarded him or her, just as the Lord Jesus Christ had promised in the Sermon on the Mount.

Another component of the overall goal of the Thesis Project was that the results and the collected data may give insight into how the interventions impacted the public ministry of each leader. In this department, the goal was partially met. A great portion of the issues, that made it difficult to meet the goal in full, is that human to human connections were limited, due to the COVID-19 pandemic and its sting on society, and especially on the church. The notion was

activated that, as each leader grew spiritually, the members of the immediate household and the members of the local church, that he or she happens to lead, would see the leader's example and be drawn to imitate him or her. In this way, the achievements in private ministry would turn out to be influential in the spiritual health of the closest church members and then progress on to the whole church. For those leaders, who were able to interact with other members of their respective churches, the report was positive that the leaders' example was impactful, causing these members to watch and learn to prioritize their own relationships with God as well.

The research project in Richmond, Virginia, has produced results that are in line with the discussions in the literature review. The spiritual practices that were incorporated into the Thesis project, namely prayer, fasting, reading of the Word of God, Sabbath observance, and giving of the leader's self, time, money, and resources have been part of the lives of many leaders in the past, as shown in the literature review, theological foundations, and theoretical foundations. The benefits were outlined previously but now, similar benefits are experienced in the context in Richmond, Virginia. Now, the ten leaders have seen a closer relationship with Christ. The ten leaders have witnessed that the pain and suffering of laying bare the tummy, and forsaking to enjoy the delicacies of daily meals, for a season, is worth the effort, knowing that the prioritizing of the leader's relationship with God is indeed pleasing to God. The ultimate lesson is that the leaders have reaffirmed their belief that God is faithful, and that God has, and will, bring to pass the things that He has said He will do in the Word of God.

In a similar way, the leaders of the four small churches in Richmond have gone through the stages of metamorphosis, as they aimed to build that intimate relationship with God. These leaders have drawn closer to Christ, they have learned to bear much fruit, they have made it through the tough times, when they had to bear the pain and the suffering and the adversity of

each day, they became better stewards in their giving, they have built workable routines into their daily walk with God, which has led to the formation of a Christlike character, and finally, they are working diligently on ensuring that God remains the top priority in all things in their lives. The flourishing life of each of the leaders is the example that the immediate family members are inclined to emulate, and it is happening even now.

These positive circumstances have the potential to cause a major impact in the discipleship of the churches. The reason is that the leaders, who have developed the Christlike character in their lives, have become the successful story of how God has carried them and respected their dedication and intentionality to make Him the top priority. Consequently, God has brought about the increase in private ministry, whose benefits will, and have, extended into the entire church and the immediate community. This new dynamic may be the kind of stuff that gets the attention of leaders of other churches, near and far. It might be safe to say that no intentional vertical movement toward the God of Christianity is ever to be considered as a wasteful exercise, because God has an open reward for any leader that engages in such an endeavor. The leaders of the four small churches in Richmond, Virginia, can attest to this very thing, for God has seen their love and labor for Him, and for the people, for whom Christ died.

The Lord Jesus Christ taught His disciples that God rewards His servants who seek Him in secret, by their giving, by their attention to prayer, and by their fasting, and that God's reward is done openly. The leaders in the Thesis Project have noticed the spiritual growth on an individual level, and the people in their homes, especially, are first-hand witnesses of this same spiritual growth and its impact on their lives. It is not farfetched, then, to say that God's increase in the lives of these leaders is to be perceived publicly, because two or more witnesses in the

immediate homes, the spouse and children, are sufficient to testify that God has rewarded the leaders.

A few hurdles reared their heads, from the beginning to the ending of the Thesis Project in Richmond, Virginia. First, it was an arduous process to get a great number of leaders to participate in the project. As explained in chapter 3, the researcher had initially aimed to get twenty or more participants for the research study. The target participants understood the problem, and they were aware that it needed to be addressed in the local context before the universal issue may be tackled. A bigger problem, though, was that some of the targets on the recruitment list were not willing to take ownership of the problem and be involved in the interventions that were to be instituted to address it. In other words, the lack of understanding that existed among the leaders, when it came to prioritizing their relationship with God, could only be lessened if the leaders first made a deliberate decision to be intentional in dedicating their time to God, who is the top priority in all things, including their obligations at the secular jobs.

A common response to the recruitment efforts was that the leader was not able to commit to a research study then. And these responses came long before the interventions for the project were brought forward. It could be deduced, therefore, that the targets rejected the idea of participating in the project, because there was no room on their calendar for the project, and that their time was crowded with other priorities of prominent importance. Secondly, the researcher realized that the problem, that the leaders found it difficult to be intentional in the spiritual disciplines, was still hanging around, even as the Thesis Project took off and the interventions were in place for the leaders. The leaders, who participated in the research, had no doubt that God was the highest priority in their lives, and that channeling all effort and energy to build the

highest relationship with God was paramount. However, it seemed that there was competition for who and what things should come first in the leaders' lives, based on how much time the leaders had to commit to meeting other demands of this life. This reality was reflected in the Thesis Project's processes, because only two leaders were able to finish reading through the New Testament within the sixty days, and they finished the readings, in this time frame, with much difficulty.

Without being intentional, and without aiming for close to complete adherence to the requirements of the interventions as they currently are, the Thesis Project may not be completed within the sixty days. Perhaps, a more reasonable and flexible approach might require the leaders to practice the spiritual disciplines for more than sixty days. It will mean that the leaders may have an input, as to how many chapters of reading they can manage each day and the amount of time that each person may set aside for prayer daily. It may mean, therefore, that the participants have an option to go at their own pace. But it must be made clear that, with such indefinite requirements, the leaders would only be supporting their existing habits, not taking the time out to set meaningful short-term goals, which will involve deliberation and intentionality.

When there are deadlines, however, the need for intentionality is heightened, and the leaders tend to set themselves up for success, in making provisions to meet their short-term and long-term goals. A suggestion is in order here. The research study may be considered in sixty-day segments, even if it is carried out beyond the first sixty days. That is, if the goal is not met in the first sixty days, the participants may give it a second try in the next sixty days. In this way, the leaders may be able to engage in, adjust to, and complete the interventions in their entirety, simply because they are familiar with the process and might be ready to build a routine out of the process, the second or third time around.

It became evident that the leaders and participants of the Thesis Project did not take advantage of the connections, that had been made available, as a result of the affiliations that existed among the stakeholders themselves. The interventions were designed with the idea that the interactions and communications between the participants would contribute positively to the intended goal, and that these connections may give the leaders the sense of being in the same thing together. With the shared interest and the sense of ownership and togetherness in addressing the problem in their own community as motivation, each leader may, then, aim to be successful in his or her own way, which ultimately may lead to the success of the whole group. The facilitator sought and got updates frequently, through phone calls and text messages. During these conversations between the researcher and the stakeholders, the leaders were able to share portions of their testimonies and personal stories. Face-to-face updates happened sparingly. When one such face-to-face meeting took place, it was made possible after many attempts to set one up had failed. This situation has produced the recommendations that are outlined below.

The researcher noticed that the effective use of the various means of communication in the 21st century, that are at his disposal, did more than enhance the forward progress of the Thesis Project. The researcher has also learned that it is necessary to get as much contact information as can be gathered from each participating leader, so that the connections may be applied to the maximum effect. Emails, phone numbers, and other media tools are all available, and they may be utilized, with the permission of the participants, to facilitate the interconnectedness that may come up among the leaders. When phone calls failed, for example, text messages were useful. Similarly, some people may respond better through emails. Still, other leaders may put in the effort to plan for a face-to-face meeting, or debriefing, if the facilitator and the stakeholder can find the appropriate communication medium for both parties

to make it happen. Any future research study may benefit, if the communication tools of this present age are implemented effectively.

The Thesis Project in Richmond, Virginia, has the potential to be reproducible in other settings, that have a similar background. The outlook is hopeful for a more successful research study in the future because it is highly possible that the pandemic will have cleared, and that life will have returned to normal, by the time that the project will be duplicated. It might also be possible to notice the direct impact that the individual maturity will have on the corporate body of Christ, in each respective church. That is, more interactions may occur, when there are few to no restrictions to human movement, which will eventually lead to an open perception of the leader's growth and its influence on the followers. Each church is a community of believers. Therefore, when one leader grows spiritually, he or she leads by example, that has been cultivated by the discipline, the dedication, and the devotion to prioritize the leader's relationship with God. The followers are then moved to engage in the same disciplines, holding to the same determination and diligence that have received the rewards of God's increase in their leaders' lives.

The research study could be replicated in another context, where the participants are more than ten in number. In this case, it does not necessarily have to be comprised of four small churches, but it may be a single church that happens to have many people in leadership roles. Or it may be just a couple of churches which come together to put the interventions into practice. When the participants are many, chances are that a greater number of the leaders will remain in the project and attempt to meet its requirements and deadlines. In such a setting, there may be the opportunity for the persons in senior leadership positions to mentor the people, who are new

leaders, or who are in subordinate roles. This situation may further stimulate many meaningful interactions and cause the participants to sharpen one another.

There may also be the opportunity for the leaders to work on being intentional in putting their spiritual disciplines into practice, in an environment that fosters mentorship. A workable timetable for one leader, for instance, may be what another leader could adopt as his or her own. Stronger relationships at the leadership level can then become infectious in a positive way. This closeness in leadership will be passed on to the rest of the relationships in the church. All of these successes will come about, because the relationship, that the leaders of the church have with God, will have received the love, the care, the deliberation, and the deserved priority.

At the end of the sixty days, the surveys were due. But none of the leaders was ready to send the answers to the survey questions right away. The researcher had to coordinate with the leaders, waiting patiently to receive the surveys and the accompanying journals. It is important to mention here that the facilitator's involvement in the process is invaluable, and that patience is required at all points between the facilitator and the stakeholders. The phone calls and the text messages and the emails, that were exchanged between the researcher and the participants, were helpful, in that they served as the source of the reminders to the participants. There were moments along the way, that it seemed that the participants had to be reminded of the entailments of the interventions and when they should send the surveys to the researcher.

The difficulties, that were encountered during and after the interventions, were great enough to cause disappointment and frustration to set in. Since the Thesis Project was time sensitive, it might be recommended that a future research study will need to be accompanied by material, that outlines the interventions, in a step-by-step fashion. And that material should contain the deadlines and the quotas and the time allotments to each spiritual discipline, making

these interventions very clear in each line of print. This hard copy of the lists should be given out to the leaders, when the interviews are conducted, so that the leaders may have them together with the copies of the survey questions. The future researcher should be prepared to send this list and the survey questions again, because not every participant may be able say definitively that he or she has kept these tools safely. It is equally important for the stakeholders to notify the researcher, whenever the surveys and the other pertinent material have been misplaced. More than one leader, in the Richmond project, had asked the facilitator to forward the surveys to them, as they might have lost the original copies, that were handed to them at the initial interview.

The success of the Thesis Project in Richmond, Virginia, has confirmed the truth that God is pleased with the men and women, who are intentional in their relationship with Him. This research study in Richmond has shown that God brings about spiritual growth in the lives of the leaders of the church, when these leaders prioritize the highest form of intimate relationship with Him. Even though it was hard to notice the increase in the public ministry due, in part, to the effect of the pandemic on human interactions, the benefits in private ministry were above board. It means that it is only a matter of time, before the influences of the spiritually mature leaders, who keep on growing in their private ministries, become disseminated into the immediate households, across the local communities, and carried abroad into distant lands.

The biblical support for the need to establish such an intimate relationship between the leaders of the church and God was laid out in Chapter 2. The Lord Jesus Christ has taught the children of God that God is pleased with the disciple who bears much fruit. This disciple possesses the attitude of Christ and walks in a manner that is pleasing to God. The ten leaders in Richmond have tasted of such an intimate relationship with God, and their efforts and

deliberation are only the beginnings of a journey to go the extra mile for their God. Again, the Lord Jesus Christ teaches that, when men and women give, pray, and fast in secret, God will reward them openly. The leaders in Richmond, Virginia, know what it entails to work toward the goal of dedicating the self, the time, and the energy to pursue God in secret. Now, they are the beneficiaries of the rewards of God, which are displayed in the open, to the benefit of the immediate household and the corporate body of Christ.

When this Thesis Project commenced, the setting in Richmond, Virginia, reminded the leaders of the four small churches that the city and the surrounding counties were the harvest fields, where the work of the flourishing leader needed to be exemplified. Then the problem, that the leaders lack understanding, when it comes to prioritizing an intimate relationship with God, was identified, and accepted as a common situation that must be addressed. The review of literature followed, and the theological and theoretical foundations were established. The interventions, that are intended to address the problem, were put into place, and brought before the leaders that participated in the research study. Sixty days would be set apart for each leader to practice the spiritual disciplines, while each participant worked toward enriching his or her relationship with God. The results were gathered. Next, the effectiveness of the processes and the success of the entire project led to careful examination and evaluation of these results. The preceding four chapters have the content and discussion of this composition. In the end, in this final chapter, it is the hope of the stakeholders, in this Richmond experiment, that their effort in addressing the current problem in leadership and discipleship, in the microcosm of Richmond, may be the point of reference in the endeavor to tackle the same problem in the universal arena.

(Copy of Official IRB Approval Letter)

April 29, 2021

Frank Owusu

Clifford Hartley

Re: IRB Exemption - IRB-FY20-21-621 The Flourishing Life of the Leader Who Makes God the
Top Priority

Dear Frank Owusu, Clifford Hartley:

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.(ii). 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).

Any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research would not reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, educational advancement, or reputation.

Your stamped consent form(s) and final versions of your study documents can be found under

the Attachments tab within the Submission Details section of your study on Cayuse IRB. Your stamped consent form(s) 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(s) 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

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Appendix A

Consent

Title of the Project: The Flourishing Life of the Leader Who Has God as Top Priority

Principal Investigator: Frank Owusu, Doctoral Student, Rawlings School of Divinity

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. In order to participate, you must be 18 years old or older, able to read and understand the language of the Bible, and able to keep a personal diary. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research project.

What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of the study is to teach the leader of the church in Richmond to prioritize a flourishing relationship with God.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

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

1. Sit down with the researcher and do a 30-45 minute interview, which will be recorded.
2. Take two surveys, each one requiring 10 minutes, for a maximum of 20 minutes.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

Benefits to society include improvement in the quality of leaders and discipleship in the church and immediate community.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records. Data collected from you may be shared for use in future research studies or with other researchers. If data collected from you is shared, any information that could identify you, if applicable, will be removed before the data is shared.

- Participant responses will be kept confidential through the use of pseudonyms. Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.

- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer and may be used in future presentations. Recorded information will be kept in a safe box, beyond the reach of others. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.
- Interviews will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password locked computer for three years and then erased. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings.

How will you be compensated for being part of the study?

Participants will not be compensated for participating in this study.

What are the costs to you to be part of the study?

To participate in the research, you will need to pay for a personal diary and some writing pens.

**Does the researcher have any conflicts of interest?
Is study participation voluntary?**

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University or your respective church. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time, without affecting any relationships.

What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?

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

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study is Frank Owusu. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact him at the researcher's personal phone number and email. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Clifford Todd Hartley, at his personal email address.

Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

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

Your Consent

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

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

The researcher has my permission to audio-record/video-record me as part of my participation in this study.

Printed Subject Name

Signature & Date

Appendix B

Recruitment Letter and Verbal Script

Dear participant,

As a graduate student in the School of Divinity at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Doctor of Ministry degree. The purpose of my research is to teach and mentor the leaders of four churches in Richmond, Virginia, in prioritizing a flourishing relationship with God, and I am writing to invite eligible participants to join my study.

Participants must be 18 years of age or older, be able to read the Bible, and capable of leading in a ministry. Participants, if willing, will be asked to sit down for an interview at the beginning, and then survey questions will follow during and at the end of the research. It should take approximately one hour to complete the procedures listed. Names and other identifying information will be requested as part of this study, but the information will remain confidential.

A consent document will be provided to you at the initial interview for the project. The consent document contains additional information about the research. After you have read the consent form, a signature will be provided. The survey questions and accompanying material will also be reviewed. Doing so will indicate that you have read the consent information and would like to take part in the research project.

Sincerely,

Frank Owusu
Doctoral Candidate at Liberty University

Appendix C

Initial Interview Questions

8. What does a typical day for a Christ follower look like for you?
9. What constitute the regular spiritual disciplines for you?
10. Do your spiritual routines include prayer, reading of the Word, fasting, giving, and a Sabbath?
11. Do you have any medical barriers toward engaging in a fast?
12. What does a typical day of fasting look like for you?
13. How do you observe your Sabbath?
14. Does your daily walk with the Lord involve journaling? Could you explain how you are reminded of the Lord's work in your life?

Appendix D

Survey Questions on Fasting

1. Did the leader give of his or her time, gifts, and resources on the day of fasting? Yes__ or No__?
2. Was the leader careful not to appear to be fasting? Yes__ or No__?
Did the leader anoint his or her head? Yes__ or No__?
Did the leader wash his or her face? Yes__ or No__?
3. Were there any opportunities to feed the poor? Yes__ or No__?
Were there any opportunities to clothe people who were cold or homeless? Yes__ or No__?
4. Did the leader have any success with witnessing to others? Yes__ or No__?
5. Did the leader share the gospel and teach others by living out the teachings of the Word of God? Yes__ or No__?
6. Did the leader notice anything different in his or her walk with God on the day of fasting? Yes__ or No__?
7. Was the leader able to reflect on the day of fasting? Yes__ or No__?
8. Was the leader able to jot down the activities of the day of fasting in a journal? Yes__ or No__?

Appendix E

Survey Questions on God's Increase

1. Did the leader notice a closer relationship with Christ? Yes__ or No__?
2. Did the leader notice a closer relationship with the people in the immediate home? Yes__ or No__?
3. Did the leader perceive an influence of other people because of his or her example in life? Yes__ or No__?
4. Did the leader sense the Lord's increase in the maturity of the disciples in the church? Yes__ or No__?
5. Did the leader receive any report on the disciples' witness in the community? Yes__ or No__?
6. Has the Lord brought any increase to the church membership since these interventions? Yes__ or No__?
7. Have any of the members of the church expressed a major development in their own spiritual growth? Yes__ or No__?