

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY
JOHN W. RAWLINGS SCHOOL OF DIVINITY

A CORRELATIONAL STUDY BETWEEN SPIRITUAL BIBLE READING AND SPIRITUAL
FORMATION OF LEADERS IN PENTECOSTAL CHURCHES

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

by

Mark Kwablah Buku

Liberty University, Lynchburg, VA

May 2024

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to understand the nuances of spiritual Bible reading and how it connects to the spiritual maturity of Christian leaders. The lack of spiritual formation in Christian spiritual leaders motivated this research. Literature abounds with spiritual reading, biblical engagement, interpretation methodologies, and the spiritual formation of Christian leaders. However, only a few studies exist on how people engage with the Bible. There is no empirical data on how biblical interactions impact spiritual development. The theory that guided this study was Jack Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory. With a quantitative survey methodology and non-probability sampling, data was collected from 91 participants from a population frame of spiritual leaders who assist the head pastor in spiritual oversight of the Assemblies of God churches in New England. Two existing instruments, the Faith Maturity Scale and Christian Life Survey, which have proven validity and reliability, carried the data. The quantitative correlational study protocol analyzed the data using the Pearson Product-moment Correlation Coefficient (Pearson's r). The study results showed no statistically significant relationship between Bible reading and spiritual formation in leaders of the Pentecostal churches. Other factors might have been necessary for the spiritual maturity of Christian leaders.

Keywords: Bible reading or Bible engagement, formative reading, spiritual formation or spiritual maturity, interpretation, Christian leadership

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Dedication

This work is dedicated to the memory of my late father and to my wife, Lucia, my best friend. Mr. Daniel Buku was an inspiration who sewed the seed of scholarship in me. This doctoral dissertation immortalizes the quest for knowledge nursed in me. Thank you, Lucia, for believing in me, for your support, and for helping me become who I am today. You shared this journey with me as my number-one cheerleader.

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List of Abbreviations

Assemblies of God Church (AG)

Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI)

Christian Life Survey (CLS)

Critical Reflection (CR)

Faith Maturity Scale (FMS)

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

Southern New England Ministry Network (SNEMN).

Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS)

Transformative Learning Theory (TLT)

CHAPTER ONE: RESEARCH CONCERN

Introduction

Through years of Bible teaching, this researcher has observed a discrepancy between Christians' claimed values and their everyday actions from an instructional standpoint. There are little discernible personality distinctions between the Christian community and non-Christians. The dominant force that Christian leadership represents in shaping societal values is not as widespread as it used to be years ago (Barna, 2002). The impaired integrity among Christian leaders has compromised their ability to inspire others successfully (Packiam, 2022). This awareness increases the need to explore the intricateness of faith and challenges in Christian practice. Hence, how believers develop the fruits of the spirit through the Word of God motivated this study.

There has recently been an upsurge in spiritual formation in the church (Willard, 2000) because it is crucial to developing Christian leaders. Following this, spiritual formation as a concept and an area of study has become popular. Bible reading is foundational to spiritual formation (Mulholland, 2006), yet its impact on spirituality has not been extensively explored. God prescribes regular Bible reading as a requirement for spiritual maturity and leadership success (Joshua 1:8). The Christian community consistently believes the Bible is the primary source of spiritual growth. However, the global church's greatest crisis today is the increasing lack of biblical literacy worldwide (Klet, 2020). The practicing U.S. Christian population has declined from 45 percent to 25 percent within the past two decades (Barna, 2020; Pew, 2019). Barna explains that as the decline is at a rapid pace, half of those who left the Church were lost to atheists, agnostics, or the unchurched (Pew, 2019). This shows that theoretical theology, interpretation methodology, leadership, and management training are inadequate to equip the

Christian leader (Estep, 2008; Pazmino, 1997; Sanders, 2007; Smith, 2009).

There is a lack of data and literature on how Scripture engagement shapes spiritual maturity to form leaders to impact their sphere of influence (Ovwigbo et al., 2016). For this reason, how spiritually equipped are Christian leaders in contemporary secularized society to carry out the great commission through influence? Accordingly, Christian leaders teach who they are, transforming followers into Christlikeness. The Christian leaders' deficiency in spiritual formation imputes the lack of biblical engagement as the controlling factor, hence, this research. This chapter outlines the research topic, its background, and the problem that drives the study. From a social science research perspective, the abovementioned particulars are followed by the research purpose statement, research questions, hypotheses, assumptions, and definitions of key terms. The chapter concludes with the study's delimitations.

Background to the Problem

The search for a comprehensive pattern of Scripture engagement for personal character formation is doubtlessly an ancient human phenomenon. Questions of how we learn the Bible, possess its resources, and respond to the text have not been adequately answered (Klein et al., 2004). These questions highlight the need for research in Bible reading and interpretation approaches that generate values for Christian living. This study's importance regarding the dynamics of spiritual growth through Scripture is due to its theological, historical, sociological, and theoretical antecedents.

Theological Literature

This section outlines the theological foundation of Bible reading that generates spiritual formation. Scripture is foundational to spiritual maturity and central to the instructional process that shapes the Christian (Peterson, 2006). The concept is sourced from God's instruction to

Joshua to meditate on Scripture for nourishment and success (Joshua 1:8). Joshua's ministry and leadership depend on his reliance on the Word of God by interacting with them (Mathews & Mathews, 2016). Another practice of Bible reading for spiritual formation flows from Paul's instruction to Timothy "to attend" the Scriptures, not in a casual manner but regularly, to be an effective advocate and role model in Christian leadership ministry (1 Timothy 4:13). Paul believes that reading the Bible is a mark of a virtuous leader (Wall & Steele, 2012).

Scripture reading was regarded in the Old Testament as a "symbol of office for those who are to assume the mantle of leadership within the community" (Collins, 2013, p. 284). It is a tool to "activate the mind" (Spencer, 2014, p. 147) and for sanctification, setting oneself apart for God's use. Bible reading is a prerequisite for the believer's spiritual growth in an individual's primary call for the benefit of the community (Leviticus 5:17; Pettit, 2008). Therefore, Scripture is the filter through which all truths are examined (Pazmino, 2008). The theological section defines the spiritual authority of the biblical text—the Bible documents instructions for worship traditions for the regeneration of man's inner life.

Historical Literature

This section provides a historical backdrop to humanity's unceasing search for an effective means of drawing textual power from the Bible for spiritual survival. As new as the word spiritual formation is, the concept is as old as the nurturing work of the Holy Spirit (Averbeck, 2008). It is historically known as sanctification, spiritual nourishment, personal spirituality, or transformation through reading the biblical text. God first revealed biblical text in Deuteronomy 6:6-7 for spiritual nourishment. Ezra and Nehemiah kept the word at heart and instructed the Jewish people for spiritual renewal (Ezra 7:10, Nehemiah 8). The Desert Fathers and monks formed Christian monasteries to build personal spirituality through Scripture

meditation, understanding that Scripture nourishes faith (Martín, 2020; Maddix, 2018). The practice was later rooted in scriptural engagement, reflection, and interpretation by St. Augustine and St. Benedict in the 6th century (Leen, 2022). This ancient spiritual practice of deep engagement with texts grew into a Christian practice of developing an intimate relationship with God by the fifteenth century (Martín, 2020). This defined contemporary spiritual reading, formative reading, or spiritual formation—ministry drive for spiritual maturity in communities.

Sociological Context

Christian post-conversion spiritual growth needs a social community of believers to materialize. Hence, leadership, which has ramifications for spirituality (Pettit, 2008), is integral in determining the direction of the change dynamics and the interactions that sustain the change. The human social community and spirituality have a reciprocal transforming influence. Lowe and Lowe (2018) argue, "In God's ecology, individual things and people do not grow alone and in isolation" (p. 5). The process of spiritual growth is situated in the Christian church community, with Christ as the organizing concept and central to the social interaction (Samra, 2006; Pettit, 2008). In a community of spiritual regeneration, experiences that bring into existence a biblical worldview and spiritual growth are guided by conceptual structures.

Theoretical Framework

This section provides context for how the believer acquires knowledge and understanding of God's reality and values. A new biblical perspective gives direction to a believer's spiritual growth process. Understanding the text is crucial to forming a biblical worldview in this growth process. However, no one undertakes the understanding and meaning process objectively, but it comes with presumptions, agendas, and biases (Klein et al., 2004). Therefore, a new experience must render previous experiences unnecessary. Scripture and the Holy Spirit can potentially

affect change in the initial body of experiences (Knight, 2006). They fundamentally transform thinking, change worldviews, alter perceptions about an experience, and facilitate a radical change that permanently changes behavior and establishes new values. This is expressed in the theory of transformation by Paul in Romans 12:2. The transformative power needed for change and growth is already embedded in Scripture and supported by the inerrancy of Scripture—the Word’s ability to teach about itself qualifies it as an agent of change in biblical engagement (Vanhoozer, 2010). In the same way, the above interdisciplinary analysis of the background to the problem points to how man can be transformed through God’s Word.

Statement of the Problem

In a seminar, Dallas Willard, a prominent scholar of Christian spiritual formation, observed that the lack of demonstrable evidence of the fruit of the spirit in Christians is the reason for the sudden upsurge of the spiritual formation concept (Willard, 2000). Empirical data corroborates this position. In a study, Packiam (2022) documents that sixty percent of pastors and eighty percent of Christians do not make time for private spiritual development (pp. 66-69). This results in unhealthy spiritual disciplines and gradual decline (Barna, 2011). Also, there is a gap between what Christian leaders say and what they do (Hawkins & Parkinson, 2011, pp. 88-91). Willard (2000) recorded insignificant differences in the character between Christians and non-Christians. Therefore, Christian leadership credibility is at an all-time low, making them ineffective mentors (Packiam, 2022, p. 105).

The Bible is God’s intended spiritual instrument, which contains the authoritative and formative text to shape leaders (2 Joshua 2:8, Timothy 3:16). Consequently, transformation is achieved through Scripture knowledge that reorders desires towards God, establishes a relationship with God and finally produces a resemblance to Christ (Millar, 2021). The literature

demonstrates that Christian leaders with a strong relationship with God originate spiritual maturity to impact their sphere of influence through mentorship. Therefore, Sanders's (2007) advocacy for leaders' frequent Bible reading to possess a dynamic overflow of spiritual life worthy of imitation needed to be empirically tested. The American Bible Society (2020) records a decline in regular Bible reading. Consequently, the lack of spiritual formation in Christian spiritual leaders points to biblical engagement as the controlling factor, compelling the need for this research. This study explored biblical engagement and patterns, their impact on spiritual formation, and any relationship between them.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this quantitative correlational study was to determine if a relationship exists between spiritual Bible reading and the perceived spiritual formation of deacons of the Assemblies of God churches in New England affiliated with the Southern New England Ministry Network (SNEMN). The independent variable, Bible reading, is defined as a spiritually conscious devotion to meditative reading of the Bible to shape the reader into Christlikeness (Ezra 7:10; Peterson, 2006, p. 91). The dependent variable, spiritual formation for this purpose, is defined as the ongoing process of the Holy Spirit transforming the believer's life and character towards Christlikeness in a community context (Pettit, 2008, p. 24). Church deacons, referenced as Christian leaders in this study, are defined as a ministry team assisting the pastor in spiritual oversight. In this context, Bible reading, spiritual reading or spiritual Bible reading, formative reading, and biblical engagement and approaches are used interchangeably.

Jack Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory (TLT) guided this study. TLT is a "process of effecting change in a frame of reference which is a body of experience, associations, concepts, values, feelings, conditioned responses" (Mezirow, 1997, para. 2). This adult learning

experience fundamentally transforms thinking, alters perceptions about an experience and changes worldview. This research attempted to add to the blended scholarly approaches to scripture interpretations.

Research Questions

RQ1: How do Assemblies of God deacons engage with the Bible as measured by the Bird (2021) Christian Life Survey (CLS)?

RQ2: How do spiritual leaders grow spiritually as measured by the Faith Maturity Scale (FMS) instrument?

RQ3: What relationships, if any, exist between kinds of Bible reading practices as measured by CLS and perceived spiritual formation as measured by FMS?

Assumptions and Delimitations

According to Roberts (2010), “Assumptions are what you take for granted relative to your study” (p. 139). Below are the assumptions for the research:

Research Assumptions

1. Deacons appointed to assist the pastor have appreciable spiritual maturity because they are church leaders qualified according to 1 Timothy 3:8-13 and Titus 1:5-16.
2. Deacons are assumed to be spiritual leaders or Christian spiritual leaders, which are used interchangeably and defined below.
3. The deacons can fully reflect on the impact of Bible engagement and their spiritual lived experiences.
4. It is assumed that participants value or recognize the Bible as the Word of God.
5. Spiritually mature leaders are assumed to influence their communities as role models. Spiritual maturity implies leadership effectiveness (Pettit, 2008, p. 153).
6. The governing structure of the AG churches is assumed to be a suitable ministry model for promoting an environment for spiritual formation because the church polity is derived from the Pentecostal movement and the early Christian-apostolic model.

Delimitations of the Research Design

According to Roberts (2010), “Delimitations are the ways to indicate to the reader how you narrowed your study’s scope” (p. 138). This research was delimited in the following ways:

The study wanted to understand the relationship between how Christian leaders interact with the Bible and the perceived impact of that interaction on their spiritual transformation. Therefore, it was delimited to the deacon board, elders, or spiritual leaders who assist the lead pastor in spiritual oversight leadership positions to ensure experiences and concrete data to share.

Secondly, the impact of leaders’ spiritual maturity on followers was not directly measured, as social observational learning theory states that learning through imitation is strengthened in the observer-follower when the model (the leader) is reinforced (Yount, 2010). Also, the research did not study leadership effectiveness because it is assumed that mature spiritual leaders are role models (Pettit, 2008, p. 153). The study was further delimited to only affiliated and credentialed churches to the Southern New England Ministry Network of the Assemblies of God churches. This denomination is a relevant demographic for research because the Pentecostal background in ministry health states that the best thing members must bring to leadership is their transforming lives (www.snemn.com).

Definition of Terms

The following terms were used in the research:

1. *Biblical Engagement, Bible Reading, Spiritual Reading, Formative Reading* (Used interchangeably in the dissertation): A meditative reading of the Bible and interpretation that allow all spheres of a person’s life to be heavily transformed into Christlikeness (Ezra 7:10; Muto, 2012; Maddix, 2018; Martín, 2020).
2. *Christlikeness*: The ultimate standard of maturity where Christ exemplifies and defines the attitude and actions appropriate to the kingdom of God (Samra, 2006, p. 59).

3. *Church Polity*: How a church or denomination governs through leadership structure (Brand & Norman, 2004; Brown, 2021).
4. *Deacon*: (Also referred to as Christian Leader or Christian Spiritual Leader), Elected or appointed people with a specific definition of functional roles who assist the pastor under their authority in spiritual oversight of the Church (Ephesians 4:11, 12, 1 Timothy 3:8-13, 5:17, Titus 1:5-16).
5. *Leadership*: Leadership is about being a role model with behaviors crucial to inspiration (Kouzes & Posner, 2017, p. 11).
6. *Lectio Divina (also known as Sacred Reading)*: is a traditional method of formative reading rooted in prayerful meditation on the scriptural text engagement, interpretation, and reflection for spiritual growth (Maddix, 2018; Peterson, 2006, p. 91).
7. *Spiritual Formation, Transformation, Spiritual Maturity, and Spirituality* (Used interchangeably in the dissertation): A spiritual process of re-formation to attain the image of God that aims to recover the original shape of a man or Christlikeness (Mulholland, 2006, p. 25; Samra, 2006, p. 57; Pettit, 2008).

Significance of the Study

The research determines if the reader's transformative potency, spiritual value, and discipline impact spirituality. Through empirical studies, Ovwigho et al. (2016) and Ali and Zacky (2018) found relationships between spiritual practices and spirituality. However, their studies are silent on how biblical engagement impacts spirituality. Instead, they use church attendance or moral values as indicators of biblical engagement. Ali's study only concentrates on how spirituality influences organizational leadership.

Secondly, this research documents the praxis of leadership spiritual maturity. Formative reading is central to the purpose of the Christian life, the point at which they encounter Christ for spiritual transformation (Martin, 2020). Consequently, a study of how scripture is engaged, how that engagement impacts the leader, and whether a relationship between them benefits the

community of faith believers. Volumes of literature exist in spiritual reading, but the majority remain at the theoretical level. For example, Harvey (2012) did an extensive academic study on the spiritual reading of scripture, contributing only theoretical scholarly literature to theological studies. Maddix (2012) identifies the role of scripture in spiritual formation and suggests that the biblical text can be utilized as a formative agent in the church. Though Maddix's work moves a step further, the article is left at the theoretical level. It proposes how the sacred text must be read formatively rather than epistemically.

This research empirically explains the relationship between biblical engagement and spiritual maturity. When a leader is formed into a spiritually grounded role model, the church community is the direct beneficiary. According to Palmer (1998), "We teach who we are... and the person within the teacher matters most" (p. 1). Christian instruction is modeled on the principle of mentorship, an apprenticeship program rather than an academic exercise, using Scripture to order lives and minister to others (Wilhoit, 1996). When Paul admonishes Christians to imitate their leaders, he emphasizes mentorship (1 Corinthians 11:1, Hebrews 13:7). How a leader is systematically transformed as a holistic work of God to impact others is significant to this study.

Summary of the Design

This quantitative correlational research explored how Christian leaders interact with the Bible and the effect of this interaction on their spirituality. It was a non-experimental survey to explain and predict the relationship, if any, between Bible reading and the spiritual formation of Christian leaders (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Leedy et al., 2019, p. 89). A correlational design is one in which descriptive statistics will describe and measure the degree of the relationship between the two variables (Leedy et al., 2019, p. 148). The study was designed to provide

knowledge and information on how spiritual reading of the Bible impacts ministry leaders' spirituality and their sphere of influence. This method recorded the nature of the phenomenon under study (Roberts, 2010, p.146).

Two instruments were used. One collected numerical data from Bible reading, and the second from spiritual formation to determine if there is a relationship between the two variables. Non-random sampling was utilized because it was impossible to compile a list of the population (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). In this cross-sectional study, data was collected by questionnaire from deacons of AG churches in New England. The analysis was conducted using the quantitative study protocol and conclusion. Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory (TLT) shaped the research. It is a theory of adult pedagogy that fundamentally transforms thinking, alters perceptions about an experience, changes worldview, and facilitates a radical change of consciousness that permanently changes people's behavior (Mezirow, 1997).

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

This research study explored the nuanced relationships between Bible reading and the spiritual formation of Christian leaders, focusing on how the leaders engage Scripture. In doing so, the document attempts to add to the blended scholarly approaches to Scripture reading, interpretations, and dynamics of spirituality through Scripture. This assessment analysis was done within theological and theoretical frameworks and literature precedent. This section concludes with a rationale for the study, the literature gap, and the current study profile.

Theological Framework for the Study

This section explores the theological framework of the study, focusing on Scripture and its functional role in spirituality. Generally, every Christian must think theologically to grow spiritually (Mizell & Henson, 2020). A practical relationship with God through understanding is required for spiritual nourishment. To achieve this, the Scripture text is an instrument to reach God for shaping personal lives (Wilhoit, 1996; Deuteronomy 6:6-9). The art or science of understanding God and the conceptual expression of spirituality is theology (Erickson, 1998). Therefore, theology is a statement of discipline in commitment to God, unraveling the implications of Scripture for spiritual nourishment (Longman, 2013).

This review section shapes the theological foundation of Bible engagement and spiritual formation and how the latter is impacted by the former in believers. To achieve this, the section explores the subsection of the doctrine of Scripture, spiritual reading, spiritual formation, leadership theology, and church polity.

The Doctrine of Scripture

The doctrine of Scripture is the attribute that characterizes the Word of God (Estep et al., 2008, p. 79). It is foundational to the Christian faith and crucial to understanding the relationship between God and humanity. The doctrine is anchored on truth, trustworthiness, and reliability of the Word of God. It originates in the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century and reflects the rediscovery of the authority of Scripture as the written Word of God (Lillback & Gaffin, 2013). Sola Scriptura is the source of the doctrine of Scripture. Many would affirm Sola Scriptura but would not hold the church's tradition as an equal measure. Attributes of the text are its inerrancy, inspiration, authority, clarity, and the sufficiency of the Word.

Inerrancy of The Word

Inerrancy is the ultimate truthfulness of Scripture. It means Scripture is without error and cannot err. (Vanhoozer, 2010). The grounds for the inerrancy of the Bible are sourced from God's character and the Word's ability to teach about itself. Consequently, Scripture is the filter through which all other truths are evaluated. Vanhoozer explains that "if God is perfect—all-knowing, all-wise, all-good—it follows that God speaks the truth. God does not tell lies; God is not ignorant" (para. 2). The Bible's self-understanding of what is truth demonstrates reliability. Hence, in knowledge acquisition, the Scripture text is an agent of change in direction and guidance (Psalm 119:105). Therefore, God's Word is infallible, consciously not making misleading statements, nor does Scripture contain intentional falsehood and deception (Estep et al., 2008). The New Testament authors, the Church Fathers, and the Reformers depended on this reliability, a central tenet of Christian theology. This concept refers to the belief that the Word of God is inspired.

Inspiration

The Word of God is a divine revelation, humanly documented through inspiration by the Holy Spirit. The inspired Word of God, Scripture, is defined by Estep et al. (2008) as,

The unique work of the Holy Spirit in which He superintended the human authors of Scripture in such a manner that, employing their different theological perspectives, writing styles, grammatical abilities, and personalities, he ensured that what they wrote was precisely what he wanted them to write. (p. 81)

Similarly, Youngblood (2014) describes scriptural inspiration as “God-breathed” (2 Timothy 3:16), sourced into being through the life and work of humans to author experiences just as God wanted them represented. The inspired voice of God assures the infallibility and inerrancy of biblical text. Scriptural power is derived from its source of inspiration. 2 Peter 1:21 is a justification for the inspiration of Scripture because the authors did not author Scripture based on their ideas and desires. Instead, through spiritual gifts and calling, prophets were inspired by the Holy Spirit to document God’s voice. The Word's authority is derived from this inherent quality.

Authority of The Word

The authority of Scripture is premised on God being the author of the text (2 Pet. 1:21 and 2 Tim 3:16; McKenzie, 2013). Consequently, all Scripture is conventionally authoritative, having power over every creation (Erickson, 1998). According to McKenzie (2013), Scripture is a trustworthy guide to faith and practice. The internal workings of this authority are in biblical engagement in Christ the Incarnate Word (John 1:14) and in the Holy Spirit’s empowerment to do all things as in Acts 1:8. Despite its power to get things done, the Bible does not forcefully demand obedience from man (Merton, 1986). Psalm 33:9 echoes Genesis 1, “And He spoke, and it was done. He commanded, and it stood fast.” The divine authorship through man points to

the authority and power of the Word for human dependence. The Word's authority and power are derived from text interpretation, understanding, and unambiguity.

Clarity of the Word

Biblical interpretation difficulties and the confusion in textual meaning raise clarity issues for the Word of God. Harvey (2012) recounts the Ethiopian eunuch who did not understand the text in Isaiah (Acts 8:26-38). The Holy Spirit sent Philip to him for interpretation, illumination, and clarity. The Holy Spirit provides gifted teachers, pastors, and elders to clarify scripture. With light or lamp as a metaphor (Psalm 119:105), God brings illumination, understanding, wisdom, and guidance in the dark pathways of Christians. The Bible was authored and communicates across cultures and to people with different worldviews. It was written so that all those who read, seeking God's help, will get the required meaning and understanding (Estep et al., 2008, p. 91). This is dependent on the Word's trustworthiness.

The Sufficiency of the Word

Sufficiency of the Word has to do with issues of trust in Scripture. As in Psalm 19:7-11, the sufficiency of the Word pronounces the Law of the Lord as perfect, capable of reviving the soul, making the wise simple, and keeping man assured of the Lord's guidance. The sufficiency of the Bible indicates that the Scripture is composed of every word God wishes for man. It also contains all God wants man to know about salvation through redemption (Estep et al., 2008). Scripture is also sufficient to interpret Scripture. Its self-interpreting nature demonstrates a hermeneutic function (Hathaway, 2021). A distinguishing factor of the sufficiency of Scripture is that the Bible is a source of truth by itself, able to detect extra-biblical knowledge (Vanhoozer, 2021). Attributes of Scripture demonstrate its instructional and meaning-making functions. Therefore, it is through individual or group studies of the Word that its potency is embodied.

Bible Study

God commanded the teaching and learning of Scripture in Deuteronomy 6:5 after it was authored through Moses on Mount Sanai (Exodus 20:1-17). Ezra and Nehemiah read and taught the Laws of God to spiritually shape Israel (Ezra 7:10; Nehemiah 8:1-3; Nehemiah 13:1). The Word of God in the Pentateuch was the spiritual syllabus for instruction and guidance in the synagogue schools (Anthony & Benson, 2003). During the early Christian catechism, Apostolic teachings were sourced from the Scriptures. Following this tradition, small Bible study groups developed for the spiritual discipline of scripture reading, interpretation, discipleship, and connection to God (Maddix, 2012).

Bible study is exploring and making meaning of the text, typically to gain understanding for application to life and spiritual growth. Small group Bible study is done using different approaches and methods. In one approach, a broad topic is chosen, and Scripture texts are found to corroborate and explain the topic (Maddix, 2018). However, the deductive and subjective approach is when the reader comes to the topic with ideas and finds texts to justify them. This may be topic-centered, to validate a point, and emphasize established truths. This study type is often instructor-controlled, and participants gain accumulated knowledge and understanding (Muto, 2012).

An inductive approach to Bible study involves participants interpreting texts or exploring an open-ended topic and listening to the text for personal illumination. The meaning of the Bible text is sorted through reading, reflection, and observation. However, the methods are not practiced exclusively; they overlap sometimes. The study would be biased on a deductive approach when the application of what is learned about a belief is the goal. It may skew to the inductive approach if the aim is to explore the text. Reading the Bible spiritually involves giving

up control over the text by responding to it prayerfully, allowing the Holy Spirit to illuminate understanding. This creates spiritual space for thought and insight into the biblical text.

Spiritual Reading

Spiritual reading of the Bible is slow reading for effective transformation. It is defined as a meditation on biblical texts, contemporarily rooted in scriptural engagement, interpretation, and reflection to encounter Christ for spiritual transformation and maturity (Maddix, 2018; Martín, 2020). This definition centers on Christ as the formative agent, seeking the reader to be transformed from the inside out by the text. It also opens up the formative concept to historical, literary, and religious-spiritual perspectives of interpretation. Therefore, subjective and objective readers can be transformed when God speaks through Scripture. Peterson (2006) explains that the text forms a complex network of relationships between God and man in spiritual reading. Spiritual reading is conclusively central to the purpose of the Christian life, the point at which they encounter Christ for spiritual transformation and maturity. Spiritual reading transitioned to Sacred reading among the Desert Fathers when the text was unavailable.

Sacred Reading (*lectio divina*). Sacred reading of the Scripture is a traditional method of formative reading rooted in prayerful meditation and interpretation of the scriptural text engagement for spiritual growth (Maddix, 2018; Peterson, 2006, p. 91). It is a four-step disciplinary practice comprising *lectio* (reading), *meditatio* (meditation), *oratio* (praying the text), and *contemplatio* (contemplation). A contemporary offshoot of spiritual reading, it was initially a Scripture memorization practice when the text was unavailable in the Jewish synagogue. An ancient Latin term, *lectio divina* became a monastic path to biblical spirituality (Maddix, 2012).

The Desert Fathers abandoned the cities on the Nile into the desert for spiritual vitality in the 3rd century (Baker, 2020). This spiritual discipline was later embedded in scriptural interaction, meditation, and interpretation by St. Augustine and St. Benedict and was established in the 6th century (Leen, 2022). A systematic model of sacred reading called The Ladder of Monks was introduced by the Carthusian monk Guigo II in the twelfth century and organized lectio divina into ordinal steps of processes—lectio, meditatio, oratio, and contemplatio. By the fifteenth century, the ancient spiritual practice of deep interaction with texts (lectio divina) became an entrenched Christian practice by the Reformists (Maddix & Thompson, 2012).

Lectio divina, a method of spiritual reading, remains one of the reinvented pathways to intimacy with God today. It incorporates a contemplative approach to Bible reading, a deeper understanding of Scripture, and life application. Different elements influence formative reading on the path of spiritual growth. The elements reinforce or become obstacles to change.

Obstacles to Spiritual Reading

Muto (1976) and Mulholland (2006) identify obstacles and aids to spiritual reading. This study will deal with obstacles because the Holy Spirit quickens spiritual formation when the reader yields himself to Him. Identification of barriers and their intentional elimination will foster spiritual growth. Imagery, perception of reading, and experiential obstacles have been identified.

The first obstacle to spiritual reading is imagery. According to Mulholland (2006), if we do not recognize ourselves as products of God's image, we will regard ourselves as having a self-image characterized by worldly and flesh undertakings (Colossians 2:8; John 15:19; 1 John 2:15). Also, Muto (1976) recognizes time limitations of symbols and images in spiritual reading. A further explanation is that cultural images may be culturally specific, but the inherent message

is timeless. Mulholland states that resistance to theological aesthetics may hinder the reader's understanding because the Bible is an iconographic document.

Secondly, the perception of reading reinforces formative scripture engagement. If the reader fails to interact with the text, the formative dynamics of reading will be lost (Mulholland, 2006; Muto, 1976). The perceptual dynamics of the source inspire the reader. The role of the text in the Bible to the reader is a significant determinant of how the reader perceives the functions of the text about life development.

Finally, Mulholland (2006) notes two experiential obstacles: performing dynamics and functional. The performing dynamics of experiential obstacles are personal experiences that may influence the meaning-making process of reading the Bible. These biases and assumptions shape experiences and inhibit Scripture's application to life. Functionally, coming into spiritual reading with an expectation of using the text as a tool to achieve a desire blocks formation. For example, some Christians read the Psalms with an imprecatory agenda—reading scripture with the idea that the text would perform the reader's idea in the text becomes an obstacle to formation. However, the conscious elimination of these inhibitions assists spiritual development.

Spiritual Formation

The concept of spiritual formation gained global attention about two decades ago (Teo, 2017). Spiritual growth and development of Christians' post-conversion life have been of concern historically, just as man's spiritual growth has concerned God after creation (Samra, 2006). Human spirituality, loosely interpreted as spiritual formation in the Christian context, has been a human phenomenon since creation. Genesis 4:26 introduces man beginning to worship God for the first time. The book of Psalms is a book of worship. This shows that man's yearning

to connect with God for spiritual vitality has always been with the human race. It is, therefore, a cultural concept that aligns the immanent with the transcendental.

The early Christian church developed and wrote on spiritual transformation (Willard, 2014). It is documented in the “*pholikalìa*,” a collection of early Christian writings (p. 4). Anthony and Benson (2003) document efforts by the Apostles and the early church Fathers to instruct the body of Christ for spiritual maturity. Paul’s letters were replete with instructions for spiritual growth through discipleship. He did not use the term spiritual formation, just as *Triune* is also absent in the Bible. However, it is used in biblical passages that refer to the Holy Spirit forming, transforming, and conforming human life in the direction of Christlikeness (Pettit, 2008, p. 51), as in Galatians 4:19—“until Christ is formed in you.”

Willard (1998) explores reasons for the recent interest in the spiritual formation processes and the disciplines that accomplish it. Firstly, contemporary Christian practices and disciplines are falling below standard because of the lack of biblical literacy worldwide (Klet, 2020), a declining Christian population (Barna, 2020; Pew, 2019), and a credibility crisis among pastoral leaders (Packiam, 2022; Barna, 2022). This leads to the second reason. Christian leaders are pursuing new, effective, practical, and powerful ways for Christlikeness. Past practices and concepts of spiritual growth that have been tried and tested are explored and reinvented to achieve these—spiritual reading and *lectio divina*. According to Teo (2017), some see the solution in “restoration to the spiritual disciplines and practices of the early church Fathers, whereas others have seen it as a discipleship process that believers must be part of as true followers of Christ” (para. 6). These diverse theological journeys towards a workable spiritual formation translate into different concepts and constructs of definitions.

Definition of Spiritual Formation

Spiritual formation is the process of becoming like Christ. Though it is accepted as a sanctification process, a generally accepted definition is unlikely for linguistic, theological, cultural, and practical reasons. Scholarly authors approach the definition from varied but nuanced perspectives (Teo, 2017; Howard, 2018; Chandler, 2014; Tang, 2008). Tang (2008) observes lingual and contextual disparities in the ancient and modern usage of spiritual formation. The ancient usage of the word is associated with the Catholic Church (Teo, 2017) and is reserved for seminary training and the clergy.

Willard (2002), a Christian philosopher, defined spiritual formation from a social science perspective as,

The process of transformation of the inner dimension of the human being, the heart, which is the same as the spirit or will. It is being formed (really, transformed) in such a way that its natural expression comes to be the deeds of Christ done in the power of Christ. (Willard, 2002, p. 22)

The definition points to Christ officially fixed in the depth of our being, where the change process must begin. Willard expects a natural progression of the formation of character through spiritual disciplines. This is because he believes that the core of regeneration to Christlikeness is when all the formation elements (to be discussed later) come together. This process is captured in 2 Peter 1:4, becoming partakers of the divine nature.

Pettit (2008), from a community perspective, defines spiritual formation as “the ongoing process of the Triune God transforming the believer’s life and character toward the life and character of Jesus Christ—accomplished by the ministry of the spirit in the context of biblical community” (p. 24). Pettit acknowledges the process of character transformation towards Christ

but ties in the Triune God community and the church community. Pettit looks at the process as an integrated whole, the love of God and others through relational habits and behaviors.

Howard (2018), from an instructional standpoint, defines spiritual transformation as “A spirit and human-led process by which individuals and communities mature in relationship with the Christian God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) and are changed into ever-greater likeness to the life and gospel of this God” (p. 23). Howard introduces context and means of achieving this transformation because he believes the previous definitions are not context-laden. Different means could be used because not all contexts of change are the same. Chandler (2014) takes an integrative theological approach to the definition,

It is an interactive process in which God the Father fashions believers into the image of the son, Jesus, through the empowerment of the Holy Spirit by empowerment in seven life dimensions: spirit, emotions, relationships, intellect, vocation, physical health, and resource stewardship. (p. 19)

This definition intends to overcome cultural and time limits that Scripture interpretations may impose. All the definitions contain the core ingredients of spiritual formation; Howard and Chandler have instructional tones, emphasizing varying theological perspectives.

Mulholland (2006) defines spiritual transformation as “The process of growing towards Christlikeness for the sake of others” (p. 25). Drawing from Christ as the Word of God in John 1:1,14, Mulholland’s definition is Christ-centered, not only disentangling one from shaped worldviews but liberating us towards a worldview of Christlikeness with God, others, and the self. The researcher believes Robert Mulholland’s definition is the theological-friendly definition that recognizes the process of being conformed, the image of Christ, and others as elements of formation in a community.

Encompassing all other definitions, Mulholland demonstrates that the process is a lifetime activity that must be directed towards the image of Christ while moving away from worldliness, which Paul recaps in Colossians 3:17 as “Whatever you do, in words or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.”

Mulholland crafts spiritual formation as a human existential priority without preference. Spiritual formation is the process of growing towards Christlikeness, giving up control of our motives, and moving away from secular cultures that tame our efforts to reflect the image of God. The sanctification process in search of holiness has been a human phenomenon since creation.

Theological Foundation of Spiritual Formation

Three concepts undergird the theological structure for spiritual transformation. The image of God and the interrelationships of the Church Community come together to shape the life of a formed Christian into the image of Christ. The Holy Spirit is the driving force that guards the process.

Image of God (Imago Dei). Imago Dei is a Latin phrase meaning the image of God is humanity’s identity in God (Peterson (2016). For this study, imago Dei is humans bearing the full image of God in dignity, value, and wealth without reservation. This image is deeply rooted in the character and nature of God demonstrated in the creation narrative. The creative economy, human connectedness, and reflection of God’s image have been established. It is the birthplace of spiritual formation, where man takes on his image from God, as in Genesis 1:26-27 (Chandler, 2014; Kilner, 2015; Millar, 2021). However, how does the significance of God’s image in man and humanity’s role in God’s image play out within the context of the fall?

The fall damaged the image but did not destroy the image of God in man. The redemptive work by Christ restores and perfects the image, achieved through the divine recognition of man's

worth and restored human dignity after the fall. The salvific work of Christ and Scripture, with the leadership of the Holy Spirit, all come together to play functional roles of renewal agents (2 Corinthians 3:19-20). Man's role in God's image is that "We exist to reflect God in the world in which we live" (Estep et al., 2008, p. 180). Functionally, man must be re-established to the former self to function as God intended. This is the role of spiritual formation, the process of growth through Christ after the fall of man.

Peterson (2006) used two New Testament verses by Paul to place Christ central to the concept of spiritual formation. 1 John 3:2 reads, "But we will know that He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as is." Peterson explains that 1 John 3:2 conceptually overlaps with 2 Corinthians 3:18, which states that "But with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror, the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord." Both refer to the transformation of Christians into the image of the Incarnated Christ to glory by the Spirit.

Estep et al. (2008), through the lens of the Christian community (church history), aligned *imago Dei* to human authenticity. Estep asserts that the reason for human life is that "We exist to reflect God in the world in which we live" (p. 180). According to Estep et al. (2008) and Howard (2018), this image is reflected in four ways: (a) substantively human, differentiating humans from other creatures in attributes and character through reason and free will; (b) functional as humans in a stewardship role over creation, it is understood as a Divine mandate; (c) relational, with God and other beings; (d) teleological, moving towards the goal or purpose of human creation and fully formed in Christ (Romans 8:29-30). Believers mature into the image of God through Christ in a Christian community through the formation process of interaction.

Formation in the Church as a Community

Pertinent to this study is how the Christian leader is spiritually formed and influences followers. Formation is not a lone activity but is achieved in a community (Schneiders, 2002; Pettit, 2008). The focus is on the human relational experience of community with the Triune and one another. Community is theologically grounded in Genesis 1:26, when God created man in the Triune community. Lowe and Lowe (2018) underscore the need for ecological interconnectedness for physical and spiritual growth. The apostle Paul emphasizes the significance of believers' participation in community relations as beneficial to maturation. Paul's theological concept of the church is the motif of Christ and the people of God (Samra, 2006). It involves the maturation process in the local church.

The Bible uses relational metaphors like the Triune, the body of Christ, the church, and the vineyard, pointing to relational interconnectedness. The body of Christ is a metaphor for the church and oneness in Christ (1 Corinthians 12:12-13; Pettit, 2008; Samra, 2006; Lowe & Lowe, 2018). Literature has established that community is needed for spiritual growth. For guidance and inspiration in community interaction, leadership is a significant aspect of the growth process.

Theological Foundations of Leadership

Leadership is a complex and fluid phenomenon with different approaches to its definition (Cuilla, 1998; Northouse, 2016; Kouzes & Posner, 2017). Cuilla (1998) and De Pree (1989) believe leadership is an art, while many authors craft leadership as a science. Throughout history, leadership has been conceptualized from many perspectives, especially as a trait or process to define it. The Scripture establishes that leadership comes from God. Consequently, the Biblical-theological perspective of leadership is imperative.

Theological Perspective of Leadership

This study defines leadership as a role model with behaviors crucial to inspiration (Kouzes & Posner, 2017, p. 11). Therefore, Christian leadership is discipleship acquired through spiritual maturity. Leadership is God’s creation, as He first exhibited in the creation narrative. The purpose is to run affairs of the earth through man, explicitly expressed in Genesis 1:28. Symbolically, in a leadership-humility relationship with the Triune, God created civilization, culture, and a leadership concept to rule the earth. The initial premise of Scripture is an affirmation of God’s leadership—In the beginning (Gen. 1:1)—being the lead actor in creation connotes leadership (Doukhan, 2018). This text is reflected in John 1:1, “In the beginning was the Word,” attesting to its theological authenticity within the Hebraic belief system. God’s concept of leadership is later reflected in shepherd leadership, expressed in sympathy, service, and judicious use of authority (Laniak, 2006). It became the metaphor for pastoral leadership, a stewardship-delegated authority from the creator.

The Shepherd-Leader. The shepherd was conceptualized as leadership in service (Laniak, 2006). The shepherd metaphor conceptualizes and communicates the leadership motif in a modest but powerful figurative language. Laniak (2006) theologically states that “the Bible promotes robust, comprehensive shepherd leadership, characterized as much by judicious use of authority as by sympathetic expression of compassion” (p. 21). Placing Laniak’s definition in biblical context, “The Lord is my shepherd” (Psalm 23:1), and “I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays His life for the sheep” (John 10:11) evoke the divine presence of protection, provision, and guidance. Interestingly, shepherding was a prejudiced occupation (Gomola, 2018) and the least wished for, as in Genesis 46:34. From this place of humility, limitations are overcome, and service is learned. Shepherd leadership transforms into pastoral leadership when

hearts and minds are refined in this crucible of refinement. This divine calling leads to the abandonment of life to God, the Ultimate Shepherd.

God called Moses with delegated stewardship responsibility to lead Israel out of slavery from Egypt (Exodus 3:4). As the baton of leadership passed on to Joshua after Moses' death, God promised Joshua's leadership success contingent on engagement with the Scriptures (Joshua 1:8-9), through reading, meditation, and transformation by the text. In Joshua, God emphasizes the relationship between Biblical engagement and leadership spirituality (Mathews & Mathews, 2016).

Finally, in Christ, God completes the Scripture-spirituality-leadership triune. The fusion of the Word, the desired godly image, and leadership is found in Christ. Christ's servant-leadership concept transcends time and cultures, with some of the best organizational leaders exhibiting servant personality, humility, and extreme professionalism (Collins, 2001).

Roles of Leadership

Jesus told His disciples in Matthew 20:25-28 that leaders should not lord it over their followers. Instead, leadership should be about service. Shepherd leadership is about authority and persuasive influences. This study's leadership roles are limited to how care, relationship, and mentorship are exercised through these influences.

Care as a Leader. Jesus, as a good shepherd, knows His sheep by name (John 10:14). He bears affection and takes exceptional care of them. This care extends to loving God with all the heart, the mind, and the soul, loving a brother as oneself, and caring for a neighbor like the good Samaritan did in Luke 10:25-37. As Wilkes (2016) cites, Anderson reminds believers of the dichotomous relationship between a leader and service and the correction and direction situations. The two situations can be tense if it is recognized that leadership is not a position, as

Jesus explained to the ten other disciples when James and John wished to occupy prestigious positions beside Christ. Care is a relationship in action.

Relational Leadership. Leadership presented in Scripture is a relationship between God and man exemplified by God and the Triune. The leadership of Abram was called to form a community of God's people (Genesis 12:3, Acts 2:42-47). Relationships are best exhibited and impacted in association with others in a community. Wilkes (2016) asserts that relationships defined by love, service, and openness are the attributes of servant leadership. They are the critical components of leadership. Jesus called His disciples to be with Him (Mark 3:14) and sent them into missionary ministry (Luke 10:1). Paul ministered in partnership with Barnabas (Acts 13:46) and Silas (Acts 16:19).

The social formation, known as culture, missionary discipleship, and spiritual transformation, occurs in communities. Through relationships, teams are formed to accomplish goals. Jesus said, be my witness in Jerusalem, in all Judea, and Samaria and to the end of the earth (Acts 1:8). Today, in partnership with the Holy Spirit, the gospel spreads beyond the initial "geographical markers" (Wilkes, 2006, p. 22). The social learning theory in communities casts leadership in the mentorship mold—instruction through imitation.

Leadership is Mentoring. Leadership is about impacting the circle of influence and instruction through mentorship. Wilhoit (1998) points out that Christian education, a discipleship commission by Christ (Matthew 28:19-20), is best taught by mentorship rather than academic instruction. Many biblical leaders were mentored into leadership positions. For example, the Moses-Joshua mentorship relationship (Numbers 27:18-19), the Elijah-Elisha apprenticeship (1 King 19:16), and the Christ-discipleship relationship that founded the church. Leaders assist their mentees in forming leadership competencies.

By the example of transformational leadership, Christ washed His disciples' feet (John 13:12-17). Christ's mentorship of the disciples has grown the church and spiritual leaders for ministry of all kinds over two thousand years. The Paul and Timothy relationship is an example of intentional ministry mentorship by a spiritual leader. Scripture addresses leadership's responsibility and the leadership structure in which leaders function among God's people.

Church Polity

Church polity is how a church or denomination governs through leadership structure (Brand & Norman, 2004; Brown, 2021). Christ is the head of the church (Ephesians 1:22). He leads the church through delegated leaders with spiritual oversight, responsibilities of teaching, care, and pastoral governance. However, God has governed His congregation since Creation. The doctrinal basis for the self-governing church is grounded in the church's uniqueness in the Old and New Testaments, explained in the following sections.

The Old Testament Congregation

The theological foundation of God's congregation's governance is in the distinctiveness of dispensationalism (Oats, 2016). Noah functioned in a patriarchal role (Gen. 8:20), and Abram had oversight responsibility of the religious activity of the family in Genesis 12 and 13 when he built altars. He also mediated between God and the people of Sodom. Aaron and his children took the priesthood office in Exodus 28:1 under the Mosaic Law. Throughout Hebraic history, the Levites were the spiritual leaders (Oats, 2016). In Numbers 11, God ordered Moses, the servant spiritual leader, to appoint seventy elders of the Israel community to help him judge his people (Brand & Norman, 2004). Oats (2016) notes that under the church's inauguration by Christ, the priesthood of the Old Testament was eliminated. This gives way to the indwelling

ministry of the Holy Spirit as the high priest and Christians becoming partaking priests (1 Peter 2:9).

The New Testament Congregation.

In Matthew 18:17, when the church appears futuristically, it was proposed as the highest appellant decision maker for the first time; it introduces a pattern of congregational involvement. Brand and Norman (2004) posit that the New Testament church in the first century was ruled by “congregationalism,” a congregation decision-making approach of governance grounded in sola scriptura. The first New Testament church was in Jerusalem with the apostles as leaders (Acts 2:42-47). Deacons were selected and added to the leadership group when there was a rapid increase in the possibility of a breakup because of administrative lapses (Acts 6:1-7). The deacon’s spiritual welfare role was defined upfront. The Jerusalem Council (Acts 15) dealt with doctrinal issues. As discussed above, Brand explains the advent of the congregation representation system of the elder-deacon leadership model in Acts 6:1-7.

In Acts 20:28, Paul called the elders, with pastoral responsibilities, overseers to shepherd the flock. The New Testament elder or deacon spiritual leadership approach is still practiced in some Pentecostal churches today. The qualification of a church pastor, elder, deacon, and spiritual leader is spiritual integrity (Brand & Norman, 2004), espoused in 1 Timothy 3:8-13 and Titus 1:5-16. Deacons serve as examples, leading in the body of Christ while assisting the head pastor. Church governing structures began to take shape during this period.

Emerging Church Polity. As cited by Langston (1996), Sullivan’s primary definition of polity is: “in its simplest a system by which a group of people choose to govern themselves or are governed” (p. 34). Five types of polity were identified: episcopal, monarchical, Erastian, presbyterial, and congregational. Erastian polity is connected to state power; monarchical polity

produced the episcopal polity with power residing in one bishop. According to Langston, denomination polity involves presbyterial, episcopal, and congregational. In the congregational polity, autonomy is found in the right of all members to make decisions in the church. In episcopal polity, apostolic authority flows from the clergy to the church members. The presbyterial polity authority springs from two hierarchies, starting in the middle, the elders, to the lower level of the congregation and the higher level of the denomination.

By the end of the first century, church governance saw no ranking distinctions between bishops and deacons appointments. The hierarchy model began with bishops' elevation to presiding officers representing God and presbyters, assisted by deacons. The church adopted other leadership approaches as the congregation grew more extensive with modernity challenges and management models (Newton, 2023). Though the New Testament refers to elders/overseers' plurality in service to the church, governance modernization resulted in a single elder/overseer (episcopal model) and the three-tiered, hierarchical polity—bishop, presbyter, and deacon models.

The early Christian church demonstrated an organic leadership structure as church governance was evidenced in the letters and epistles (Brand & Norman, 2004). The Christian organization existed and worshiped under the overarching leadership of Christ about “My church” in Matthew 16:18, no matter the governance approach or denomination. Brand concludes that the single-leader congregation functions below the Matthew 16:18 expectation of Christ. At the same time, the other models govern according to the Church population and polity viewpoint and are not an end but a means to church governance. The Pentecostal churches under study have standard approaches to church polity, which will be discussed later. The Bible and church history have adequately documented church governance. Church governing structures are

composed of leaders for spiritual oversight. Through governance, leaders are to generate spiritual development in the congregation.

Leadership Implication for Spiritual Formation

Leadership and spiritual formation have an interdependent complementarity. Both experiences require a change process (Pettit, 2008) and a community. Though spiritual formation starts with an individual for change, spiritual growth needs community and leaders to flourish. Leadership, whether in secular or religious communities, is required to steer the affairs of men on behalf of God. Daniel became a significant leader in a godless community. God sought out David, a man after His own heart, to lead Israel (1 Samuel 13:14). As indicated above, the shrinking church needs mature leaders modeled by Scripture and credible to reverse the tide.

Palmer (1998) submits that Christian leaders teach who they are, transforming followers into Christlikeness. This means spiritually mature Christian leaders in a community are integral for influence. Sanders (2007) advocates “heavy scripture reading for Christian leaders to possess a dynamic overflow of spiritual life worthy of imitation” (p. 102). A Bible-reading leader is spiritually formed for service, discipline, and guidance.

Summary of Theological Framework

The theological framework of the study has been grounded in the biblical foundation of spiritual growth through text engagement. The literature review found that the inter-relationships created by God are fundamental to the spiritual growth and existence of human life (Doukhan, 2018). These include God’s relationship with the Triune, man’s relationship with God through Scripture, and man’s interrelationships in a community. The concept of formative reading and the dynamics of spirituality through the Holy Scripture is a self-revelatory ability of the text. Paul recaps this in Colossians 3:17: “Whatever you do, in words or deed, do everything in the

name of the Lord Jesus.” This characterizes spiritual formation as a human existential priority, a process of growing towards Christlikeness. The following section will review the theoretical structure that supports the study of knowledge acquisition.

Theoretical Framework of the Study

The theological section of this literature review reveals that God’s voice, enveloped in the authoritative text of Scripture, transforms the reader. However, how humans internalize this knowledge to shape their spirituality is a scientific theoretical function. Piercy (2013) explains that “Biblical anthropology embraces human nature as physical, emotional, cognitive, and spiritual with the recognition that adults are capable of learning within each of those realms” (para. 1). This definition offers a scientific perspective to theology. As cited by Blaauw (2012), Albert Einstein states that the works or layers of “creation” can be understood in agreement with the Psalmist that the “works of the Lord are great, studied by all who have pleasure in them” (*New King James Version, 1982/2015, Psalm 111:2*). Therefore, a study of creation’s systematic attributes must be empirically scientific. To gather knowledge to transform worldviews, experiential adult learning for behavioral change or adaptation to a changed environment (De Houwer et al., 2013) must be framed conceptually to understand how knowledge is acquired.

Dirkx and Baumgartner, as cited by Piercy (2013), state that an adult learner's spirituality compels the use of imagination for transformative learning. Therefore, this theoretical framework will shape intertextuality, intratextuality, and transformative learning. This section will comprise two subtopics. The first subtopic will briefly discuss the theory of textuality, and subtopic two will address the transformative learning theory.

Theory of Textuality

This research explores how Scripture text interaction impacts individual spirituality. The theory of textuality refers to how text cognitively affects humans internally. It influences the reader's approach to Scripture text and the impact of that text on the reader, primarily in text exegesis. In biblical engagement, what is read is text, but how the text is read to shape understanding is textuality (Silverman, 1978). The text is present in practice, but its performance is imaginary (Silverman, 1978). The text is an abstract object that flows from a theoretical approach of intertextuality or intratextuality theories to perform an act of speech (De Angelis, 2020). Text theory explores the structures and meanings of texts relative to the textuality approach—intertextuality or intratextuality theory.

Intertextuality Theory

Intertextuality refers to the reader's critical focus on the relationships among individual texts based on patterns, themes, similitudes, generic affiliations, substitutions, or semantic identities (Lee, 2011). Julia Kristeva's intertextuality was developed in the literary field of the Hebrew Bible for canon criticism (Hood et al., 2005, p. 26). In theology, intertextuality is broadly referred to as hermeneutical exegesis. It draws perspectives from church history, practices, and disciplines like liturgy (Moss, 2013). Biblical authors employ this concept in their narrative. Matthew creates an intertextual situation referring to the Holy Family leaving Egypt regarding Hosea 11:1 in Matthew 1:15. Matthew wants his readers to see Christ through the Old Testament (Stamp, 2013).

Intratextuality Theory

Intratextuality was developed in response to other theories considered inadequate in religious and doctrinal usage. It seeks to sort out issues of interpreting texts as a unified whole by

readers in unity with the authors without extra-textual involvement. The theory of intratextuality is that “The text itself determines how it ought to be read” (Hood et al., 2005, p. 22). Lindbeck developed this approach, which claims that Scripture text is the ultimate truth. Those who read from an intratextual worldview would remain true to the text’s interpretations. Intratextuality fundamentalists are open to spiritual reading. They see intertextuality dependants as liberals and speculators who would interpret a text from a historical perspective. Hood et al. (2005) suggest that an intersection between intertextuality and transformative learning triggers disorientation or internal struggle, resulting in an emotional experience that leads to spiritual formation.

Transformative Learning Theory (TLT)

Christian leaders' spiritual maturity and impact on their circle of influence depend on how new knowledge is acquired. The principle of adult learning to transform into Christlikeness is of spiritual significance. Adults come to the learning table with structured ideas, entrenched beliefs, molded values, and concepts that are unverified assumptions. With changing world circumstances and the need for new skills, abilities, and knowledge, adults must let go of limiting beliefs to acquire new truths to understand and navigate human activities (Marmon, 2013). Scripture calls Christians and the church to move from worldly intelligence to Christlike thought patterns and discipleship (2 Corinthians 5:17). Meanwhile, adults frame meanings from different perspectives of experience, understanding, and belief systems. This calls for new interpretations that mold dependable and justifiable opinions. This is because knowledge is fluid, changing with time and context (Mezirow & Associates, 2000, p. 3). It is, therefore, significant to conceptualize this understanding to facilitate knowing. The transformative theory is a way to explain the process of adult learning and its implications on how knowledge is acquired through learning.

Learning is defined as experiential behavioral or mechanistic changes in the organism (De Houwer et al., 2013). Learning can also be a behavioral adaptation to environmental change. In principle, learning is a change of behavior due to experience. Therefore, for a transformational change to occur, a cause or experience must render previous experiences redundant. The spiritual leader must be transformed to facilitate the instructional journey of personal and community spiritual growth. The Holy Spirit has always been a change agent for holiness, known as sanctification. The apostle Paul used the term “transform” in Romans 12:2 to capture spiritual reality, a change-inducing process for holiness.

Origin of Transformative Learning Theory

This study explores transformative learning in leadership spiritual maturity. To achieve this in adult believers, the apostle Paul first established the significance of the transformative concept of the newness of spiritual worldview or frame of reference. He said,

I beseech you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable sacrifice. Moreover, do not conform to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind. (*New King James Version, 1982/2015, Romans 12:2*)

Transformative learning for Christians is achieved through the Holy Spirit’s renewal and empowerment of believers for discipleship. The Pauline concept of transformation is congruent with Jack Mezirow’s learning theory.

Jack Mezirow’s Transformative Learning Theory. Jack Mezirow first developed adult learning theory in research on adult professional women reentering higher education in 1978 (Mezirow, 1997). The basic argument of the learning theory concept is that transformation may occur as learners reexamine current beliefs and worldviews and are ready to reflect critically on new perspectives. The theory determines how learners interpret and reinterpret assumptions. The

concept begins with a person who engages in a disorienting dilemma and then shifts the meaning scheme or meaning perspective—frame of reference (Mezirow, 2009; Mezirow & Associates, 2000). The theory also acknowledges the critical dimension of learning and recognizes the reassessment and acceptance of the structure of assumptions that shape thinking, feeling, and acting (Illeris, 2008; Mezirow & Associates, 2000). In one of his reassessments, Mezirow explains that culture and situation are controlling factors of structures, elements, and processes that shape the theory. The structure of meaning is referred to as a frame of reference.

Transformative Learning Theory is a “process of effecting change in a frame of reference. A frame of reference is a body of experience, associations, concepts, values, feelings, conditioned responses” (Mezirow, 1997, para. 2). It defines the life world of adults who have acquired a rational body of experience and conditioned responses (Illeris, 2008). Transformative learning is a [re]learning experience that fundamentally transforms thinking, alters experiential perception, changes worldview, and facilitates a radical shift in consciousness that permanently changes people’s behavior. Any new ideas that do not fall into the shaped mindset will be discarded.

Transformative learning theory comprises three components: structure, process, and elements. The structure is the “frame of reference,” which is the culture and situations where the process occurs. This space is the meaning-making raw material where the inner and outer man is shaped (Mezirow & Associates, 2000, p. 44). According to Mezirow (1997), “We transform our frames of reference through critical reflection on the assumptions upon which our interpretations, beliefs, and habits of mind or points of view are based” (para. 10). Change in frames of reference and conversion of habit occurs through critical reflection. The process represents the social change of decision-making in the structure, which has been made weak (Mezirow, 1994). The

elements of learning are conceptualized as critical reflections, the role of individual experience, and value (Mezirow & Associates, 2000). These justify what we know, believe in, and value.

The first learning element is critical reflections on existing frames of reference. Piercy (2013) outlines how reflective exercise transcends simple actions and guards against cursory learning. It also guards against making up the mind quickly without thoughtful consideration that could restrain transformative change. Critical reflection is needed to evaluate personal values. It catalyzes transformative learning because reflection is an agent that elicits underlying reasons.

The second learning element is the role of individual experience. Mezirow and Associates (2000) contend that meanings and understanding come in different perspectives and conditions. Expressed beliefs are paramount without constant truths because we may be trapped in our subjective meanings or perspectives. Since we cannot interpret individual experiences without biases, subjecting unique ideas and experiences to critical reflection and dialogue is significant. It compares them to other people's lived experiences to reveal biases or objectivity. This is another pillar of transformative learning.

The third element is the role of dialogue as an internal self-discourse, where assumptions and belief systems are questioned to determine the validity of new knowledge. Mezirow (1997) questions how we can validate the authenticity of a phenomenon, intentions, or meaning of further information. To become a practical learning theory, it has gone through various stages of changes, additions, and fine-tuning through the contributions of several scholars.

Significant Contributions to the Learning Theory

Psychological, psychiatric, and philosophical thoughts and approaches significantly influenced transformational learning (Illeris, 2008). Kuhn's paradigm of conscientization of the women's movement also helped build the transformative learning theory (Kitchenham, 2008;

Illeris, 2008). Kuhn theorized the significance of paradigms, which are recognized as scientific achievements that provide model solutions to a community problem of practitioners.

Transformative learning requires a frame of reference that consists of mental habits and meaning perspectives.

Freire's (1970) conscientization theory of transformative learning also influenced Mezirow's initial theory. Literacy education and the liberation of people with low incomes in Brazil prompted the concept (Dirkx, 1998). Conscientization is "learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions—developing a critical awareness so that individuals can take action against the oppressive elements of reality" (Freire, 1970, p. 19). Freire believes that education transcends the classroom, giving freedom and liberty to individuals. According to Kitchenham (2008), Freire (1970) compared the conventional learning methods to the banking method of learning. The instructor uploads information the teacher thinks is knowledge-worthy for the student.

The work of Habermas in 1981 proposed instrumentalism, controlling and manipulating the learning environment to improve performance. In the domain of learning, Habermas (1984) provided understanding and expanded the field of learning with different purposes like the logic of inquiry, criteria of rationality, and ways of validating beliefs. The second is communicative learning, which involves understanding what it means when someone communicates with you. This learning laid a foundation for the transformative learning theory (Illeris, 2008) and involved values, intentions, and emotions. The context of learning is added to the theory.

Bruner (1996), as cited by Mezirow and Associates (2000), identifies four conditions for understanding: (a) to shape, establish, and maintain intersubjectivity; (b) utterances, relating events and behavior relative to action; (c) interpretations in normative terms; (d) making

propositions deals with standards, obligations, symbolic rules, and rules of inference. These four models did not contain the critical component of making meaning (Mezirow & Associates, 2000). Kitchener's (1983) epistemic cognition contributed to the cognitive processing component of the theory. Kitchener suggests three levels of mental processing. The first level is individual computerization abilities, memory capacity, and reading and understanding skills. The second level is how an adult learner monitors progress regarding the first level. The third level introduces epistemic cognition to clarify how humans monitor problem-solving involving abnormal issues.

Articulating language use, Heron (1988) explained that beliefs might not be word encoded. Non-lingua representations in aesthetics, color, texture, feelings, and inspiration added a spiritual dimension to the concept. Weiss (1997) expanded on this to include affection of art, music, dance, imagination, and intuition as modes of knowing. This is in line with Mezirow's (1994) understanding of symbolic models and images in past experiences playing a significant role in reinforcing new experiences from an earlier experience through metaphors.

Early Development of Transformative Learning Theory

Mezirow, in 1978, first used the concept in a study on women returning to higher education after an extended time. Table 1 is Mezirow's (1991) ten phases of TLT:

Table 1*Mezirow's (1991) Ten Phases of TLT*

Phase	Learning Transformation
Phase 1	A disorienting dilemma.
Phase 2	Self-examination with feelings of guilt or shame.
Phase 3	A critical assessment of epistemic, sociocultural, or psychic assumptions.
Phase 4	Recognition that one's discontent and the process of transformation are shared and that others have negotiated a similar change.
Phase 5	Exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions.
Phase 6	Planning of a course of action.
Phase 7	Acquisition of knowledge and skills for implementing one's plans.
Phase 8	Provisional is trying new roles.
Phase 9	Building competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships.
Phase 10	A reintegration into one's life based on conditions dictated by one's perspective.

Jack Mezirow's transformative learning is primarily a cognitive process. However, other emotional and sociocultural components are recognized (Schneppfleitner & Ferreira, 2021). From this background, transformative learning potentially exists with other disciplines and dimensions. The concept was formulated from philosophical, psychological, and psychiatric approaches. Following this, spiritual, symbolic, sociocultural, and emotional relationships were developed (Illeris, 2008). Then, imagination, intuition, affection, and soul-work connections were added (Wilcox, 2009). Several contributors molded Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory. Below is a graphic representation of a summary of its evolution by year, and significant elements developed by Kitchenham (2008) are listed in Table 2.

Table 2*Mezirow's TLT By Year and Significant Elements*

Year	Significant Elements
1978	Proposed initial 10 phases of theory.
1981	Adapted Habermas's (1971) three domains of learning: technical, practical, and Emancipatory.
1985	Expanded theory to include instrumental, dialogic, and self-reflective learning. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Defined meaning scheme and meaning perspective. • Introduced three learning processes: learning within meaning schemes, learning new meaning schemes, and learning through meaning transformation.
1991	Added phase, stressing the importance of altering the present. Relationships and forging new relationships. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expanded earlier notion of the distorted meaning perspective. • Argued that there were three types of meaning perspectives: epistemic, sociolinguistic, and psychological. • Presented three types of reflection: content, process, and premise.
1995	Stressed the importance of critical self-reflection in perspective transformation.
1998	Articulated critical reflection of assumptions, which included objective and subjective reframing.
2000	Presented a revision of transformative learning by elaborating on and revising his original terminologies.

Table 2 (Continued)*Mezirow's TLT By Year and Significant Elements*

Year	Significant Elements
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acknowledged the importance of the affective, emotional, and social aspects of transformative learning. • Introduced habits of mind and points of view
2003	Provided a clear definition of his theory.
2005	Debated with Dirkx at the 6th International Transformative Learning Conference and conceded that the two points of view could coexist (Dirkx, Mezirow, & Cranton, 2006)
2006	She presented an overview of transformative learning. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Further expanded on the theory about constructivist theory, psychic distortion, schema therapy, and individuation

In summary, Mezirow's Transformative Learning theory is a change process that affects the "frame of reference" in a structure of discourse and reflections, which precipitates a disorienting dilemma. The dilemma develops conflicts between prior knowledge and present experience. When assumptions and present experience do not match, the adult learner is compelled to reevaluate to make a "shift" like Kuhn's idea of "paradigm shifts." Mezirow agrees with Freire that knowledge is constructed by adults concerning others in a dialogue-reflective learning process.

The theory provides a background to comprehensive learning and praxis. Profound in transformative learning, it gives a context for personal transformation and leadership in the

church and workplace (Dirks, 1998). Transformative learning theory provides a context for leadership modeling and growing spiritually.

Connection Between Spiritual Formation and Transformative Learning

Exploring connections between reading the Bible, spiritual practices yielding growth, and transformational learning theory would be worthwhile. Beard (2017) builds on the works of Illeris (2003), Dirks (1998), McEwen (2012), Wilhoit (2008), Peterson (2007), and Willard (1988, 2002, 2006) in connection with Mezirow's theory to build a direct relationship between spiritual formation and adult learning theory. Beard (2017) directly connects spiritual formation to transformative learning based on Illeris' (2003) comprehensive learning model. Illeris (2003) advocates a three-dimensional process of learning cognition, emotion, and environment based on two basic integrative processes: (a) the internal psychological process of accrual and (b) the external interaction between the adult learner and community. The cognitive dimension describes the knowledge of meaning and ability that develops skill. This is the development of personal functionality. The emotional dimension involves mental energy, motivation, and feeling, a function of mental balance that expands personal sensibility. The social dimension is the external interaction of communication, cooperation, and participation that brings personal integration.

Spiritual formation was a process that influenced missionary discipleship. Beard (2017) cites missionary discipleship as "the experiential process of identity formation which results in a disciple who exhibits tangible evidence of mission, community, and obedience in his or her life" (para. 6). Products of missionary discipleship that are congruent to that spiritual formation have a standard fundamental connection with adult learning theory on the side of andragogy, developed by Knowles. Beard posits that commonalities between adult learning and spiritual formation run

deep and that this connection is a rich foundation for the implication of transformative learning theory for spiritual formation.

Backfish (2021) draws a connection between Scripture text and learning theory. Drawn from Mezirow's "reflective transformation," Backfish integrates transformative learning theory and cognitive linguistics in hermeneutics, symbolism, and neurobiology. The complex context of learning with the brain, emotion, and experience is placed within the community as the mind does not operate autonomously. Backfish asserts that the Old Testament reveals a prominent example of Job facing a "disorienting dilemma" when he lost his family, property, and dignity. Job did not understand the experience until a divine revelation was created through dialogue with others. The Psalms manifest transformative learning through orientation, disorientation, and reorientation (Backfish, 2021). Hood et al. (2005) directly correlate intertextuality and transformative learning. Hood believes an emotional experience leads to spiritual formation during disorientation or internal struggle. This is because the sanctification experience is an intertextual experience shaped by the interaction of multiple texts and influences.

Kuhn's transformative learning theory argues that changes in paradigms or perspectives on an idea of communities are not in a linear direction. This is synonymous with Van der Merwe's (2015b) and Schneiders' (2016) text interpretation perspectives. Van der Merwe (2015b) claims that semantic richness and the polyvalence of words generate varied textures of meaning that are available for the contemporary Bible reader to interpret more profoundly spiritually. Schneiders' (2016) theopoetic model of formative reading adds to the multidimensional texture of the connection between spirituality and transformative learning.

Dirks (1998) acknowledges Freire's reflective-discourse learning theory. It is deep in transformative learning and provides a context for personal transformation and leadership in the

church and workplaces. It also provides a background to comprehensive education and praxis. However, the transformative learning theory still has seen changes since its inception. There are still limitations and gaps to be bridged and fine-tuned. McEwen (2012) concludes that Christian transformative education helps others change their assumptions, align their principles with God, and solve contemporary ethical and integrity challenges facing God's kingdom.

Limitations and Criticisms

Current literature on evaluating, understanding, and defining transformational learning reveals a gap between theory and practice (Desapio, 2017). Kuhn's instrumentalism raised the context issue, which Mezirow (1997) adapted. Stuckey et al. (2014) also acknowledge context as an issue in recent research on the theory. Another criticism by Desapio (2017) is how the idea can be practiced and replicated, but those who offered answers still looped back into theories. Stuckey et al. (2014) developed an inclusive evaluation of TLT on the flip side of the criticism. It assesses the outcome of processes and experiences of college students.

In a critical review, Taylor (2017) detects a weakness in the Critical Reflection (CR) component of Mezirow's theory. As a theoretical construct, CR is the core of the transformative learning theory. Finally, there is a challenge in the field of practice regarding researchers and practitioners in advancing CR. In an instructional context, there is the challenge of who triggers CR. This is because there is a shared agenda between educator/instructor/leader and student/follower within the three dimensions of CR.

The fluidity of the components in theory, practice, and replicability is evident. However, this does not weaken the structure. The issues of no solid understanding of the learning theory's core concept, validated organization, context, and praxis are at the center of the age-old

criticisms. This is why the window is still open for other disciplines to enter. The opposite of this criticism shows a strength in its accommodative nature compared to other disciplines.

Summary of Theoretical Framework

The theoretical section started with how to make meaning of a theological phenomenon in scientific research and connect a spiritual act to a practical outcome. Scientific framing of the concept reveals how Bible reading impacts spirituality. Piercy (2013) connects the transcendental and the immanence. Biblical anthropology denotes man as spiritually created, physical, emotional, cognitive, and spiritual, with the assurance that adults learn within each realm. Links between Scripture text interaction, textuality, and transformative learning have been established. In the theological hermeneutical process of interpretation, the works of Ricoeur, Vanhoozer, Gadamer, and Schneiders are key (Van der Merwe, 2015b).

In Jack Mezirow's transformative learning, a person is permanently changed in beliefs, behaviors, values, and worldviews (Mezirow & Associates, 2000). The disorienting event, dilemma, crisis, or affliction triggers this process for an alternate experience. The inner turmoil sends one into a deep reflection for a paradigm shift of thought. This is how adults learn in relationships with others, through discourse. This forms the basis of transformative learning applicable to leadership spiritual formation. To this end, in its sufficiency, the Word of God disorients and can change an existing frame of reference to a new worldview or paradigm.

Related Literature

Understanding how Bible reading can predict Christian leaders' spirituality has led to various approaches to formative reading in literature. The theological perspective revealed that the Scripture could shape the reader's life. The theoretical framework section has established how biblical text can cognitively transform the worldview and life of the reader. The theological

fields related to the topic in literature are so vast that this section would not pretend to be an exhaustive review of theories and the formative phenomenon. This segment will be structured as a literature survey relevant to underlying topics and subtopics that shape and inform the research. This section will be divided into four sections: 1) Perspectives on Interpreting Scripture, 2) Spiritual Formation, 3) Christian Formation and Leadership, and 4) Church Polity. The section will conclude with the study's rationale, literature gap, and study profile.

Interpretation of Scripture

The core of this study is to predict the outcome of Scripture reading on Christian leaders. The text and understanding of what is read determines the effect on the reader (Teo, 2017). In this case, text interpretation is significant for spiritual formation. Theologians vary in ways to make meaning of Bible passages, though all believing Christians generally believe that Scripture is the authoritative text that offers them understanding to order their lives (Mulholland, 2006; Moberly, 2009; Schneiders, 2016; Maddix, 2018). Moberly (2009) defines theological interpretation as “reading the Bible with a concern for the enduring truth of its witness to the nature of God and humanity, to enable the transformation of humanity into the likeness of God” (para. 9). This definition connecting text interpretation directly to spirituality, underscores the significance of the topic under study.

Biblical theology is the discipline that focuses on what a text means (The Baker illustrated Bible dictionary, 2013). Therefore, theological perspective determines one's interpretative preference. Some theologians view Scripture as a living word, eager to hear the text. Others depart from this perspective and believe the word must be engaged historically (Moberly, 2009). Cunningham (1999) and Hood et al. (2005) suggest that a way to determine how to engage a text correctly is to determine if the text provides a clue as to how it should be

read. In this light, biblical interpretations are broadly practiced between two ideologically opposed theological perspectives, the “two source theory” and “sola scriptura” (Moss, 2013). These two theological perspectives ground broad biblical interpretation models.

Sola Scriptura

Sola Scriptura is a Latin construct meaning Scripture alone (Moss, 2013). It was started by Martin Luther, a sixteen-century German monk who broke away from the Roman Catholic church (Peters, 1999). The doctrine stipulates that the Bible is an infallible and inerrant authority for the Christian faith, containing all the necessary knowledge needed for salvation and holiness (Moss, 2013). Melancthon and his Lutheran followers gave the Reformation proposition of Sola Scriptura the height of prominence. The foundational question of the authority of scripture was the underlying theological issue of justification for the reformation.

Boice (1979) and Peters (1999) state that the reformers believed the Bible is the only source of all Christian knowledge and the church’s final authority. The reformation principle of Sola Scriptura uniformly acknowledged general revelation as a source of knowledge. The concept went beyond and pointed to the sufficiency of Scripture as the only and unique source of written text. Thomas (2010), in defense of Sola Scriptura, states that the Bible is not a comprehensive history but theological history, that Scripture speaks of its sufficiency as in 2 Tim 3:14-17. It is still possible to approach the Bible historically, elevate the sufficiency of Scripture, and interpret it in its cultural context.

Sola Scriptura, the sufficiency of Scripture, and the concept of Bible interpretation present the Bible as the sole source of spiritual growth. They hold the individual solely responsible for spiritual maturity. Sola Scriptura also emphasizes direct access to God in promoting spiritual disciplines. It places more burden on the text for spiritual formation than on

other factors. Just as intratextuality is the framework through which Sola Scriptura operates, intertextuality also gives way to the two-source theory of Scripture interpretation.

Two Source Theory

This model of scripture source and authority of biblical knowledge is grounded in two sources of authority. It includes Scripture sources and sources of tradition, such as the history of the church's doctrines of belief system, teaching, and liturgy. The two-source theory of Scripture originates from the church Fathers who considered tradition a faithful conservation and conveyance of the Gospel from generations of faith believers (Moss, 2013). Moss explains that the church Fathers believed the gospel is holistic and would be understood clearly from the perspective of church history, practices, and disciplines like liturgy grounded in the church's rule of faith. As cited by Moss (2013), Tertullian, an ardent proponent of the two-source theory, states that the Scripture must be a reference source to the fundamental teachings called "Regula fidei" in the apostolic churches' belief system. Moss cites Tertullian that:

We must not appeal to scripture...one point should be decided first: Who holds the truth to which the Bible belongs, and from whom, through whom, when, and to whom was teaching delivered by which men became Christian? Only where the actual Christian teachings are evident will the true Scripture, the proper interpretation, and all the authentic Christian tradition be found. (para. 8)

The exponents of this model believe the apostolic tradition flowed from apostolic instruction and was handed down through documentation to successive generations of Christian leaders for continuity (Moss, 2013; Boice, 1979). The apostolic teaching is authoritative and an ultimate rule for Christian doctrine, discipline, and practice because these teachings were handed down as written documents and unwritten oral traditions. Recognition of the two-source theory of scripture interpretation provides a dynamic perspective on spiritual formation. It empowers the reader to embark on a more profound spiritual development journey.

Sola Scriptura and the two-source theory of interpretation are founded on the authority of Scripture and church tradition. They form the background to hermeneutical-exegetical perspectives. However, literature is dominated today by historical criticism, critical spiritual exegesis, and aesthetic interpretation. These interpretation perspectives guide readers' engagement with the Bible, help them understand it, and are spiritually shaped by the text.

Historical Criticism Concept of Interpretation

Exponents of historical criticism propose that Scriptural texts must be interpreted historically, focusing on the source (Raskow, 2022). As the concept implies, historical criticism of the theological and spiritual meaning of its objects of study focuses on the original time, environment, and context of the Sacred texts. Rashkow explains that historical criticism investigates and evaluates the text itself, a historical circumstance that affects the text, the customs, and the stakeholders of the scripture text. Scholars interpret these texts by referencing the possible meaning of the author.

Sandra Schneiders, a professor of New Testament and Christian spirituality, proposes a comprehensive hermeneutical theory that integrates the strengths of all the approaches. Schneiders does not outright dismiss the Historical-critical approach but recognizes some clear benefits hidden in the problems pointed out by its critics. Schneiders (1992) states:

The result of such [historical] research should commend itself as simply correct to anyone who can follow the presentation of data. In digging out historical information and the theological positions and cultural practices of the early church, historical-critical exegesis is fully vindicated as an autonomous discipline. (p. xxxiv)

Schneiders believes the criticism is in the methodology because exegesis of the gospel concerns the relationship between the text and the subject matter. Schneiders' position is collaborated by Maddix (2018) in the statement that the primary reason for studying the Bible is to gather

appropriate information. As posited by Schneiders, an information-oriented approach to Bible reading is beneficial but is inherent with two constraints (Pittman, 2022). Initially, this concept compromises and flattens the divergence of the content of the Bible, reducing Scripture into a guide or manual of information. Mulholland (2006) calls this linear reading seeking to “master the text” (p. 52) and a “problem-solving mentality” (p. 53). Secondly, the holistic nature of the reader is lost in the intellectual-hermeneutic approach to the text. Congregational preaching, Bible study, and teaching are noted with this model.

Bible readers who side with historical criticism gain a rich understanding of the Bible while taking a complicated journey into the text to develop spiritual maturity. On this journey, the reader benefits from the historical and cultural context of the text. Nevertheless, other theologians believe the text must speak to the reader spiritually, hence the rise in the critical exegesis model of biblical interpretation.

Critical Exegesis Concept of Interpretation

The exegetical community recognized formative limitations in the historical-critical methodology. They presented (meta)narratives as an alternative (McMahon, 2021) and post-critical studies that focus on the interpretation of Scripture as formative instead of information gathering (Maddix, 2018; Mulholland, 2006). Though the exegetical model is a twenty-first-century post-modern theological interpretation concept, it is rooted in Sola Scriptura, a text-centered Scripture interpretation framework (Maddix & Thompson, 2012). This community would want personal formative development from biblical interaction rather than hermeneutical instruction (Pittman, 2022). This reader-centered approach, text-engaging discourse, and interpretation focus on the text’s meaning to the reader to experience God (Maddix, 2018).

The objective approach to the Bible text with an open mind, regardless of whether one has a high knowledge of Scripture or not, allows the Word's true meaning to impact the reader's life. This is possible even in a group study situation. Maddix and Thompson (2012) and Schneiders (2002) assert that scriptural spirituality is transformative when an individual engages in a community Bible reading because Scripture shapes life. This means that transformation does not occur in an individual's situation alone but in an objectively engaged group Bible study.

Bible readers who embrace the critical exegetical concept of interpretation are expected to synthesize all the above approaches for change. This interpretation perspective is expected to produce more profound spirituality and be text-centered. This study predicts that Bible readers who adopt the critical exegesis concept for text interpretation can develop a spiritually informed and nuanced perspective of the Bible. This could lead to a meaningful and intense formative reading.

Historical criticism, critical criticism, and other interpretation concepts play vital roles in spiritually shaping the reader. However, recent trends in theological interpretation recognize a gap introduced by these general hermeneutics models (McMahon, 2021). Aesthetic interpretation seeks to fill this gap.

Aesthetic Theological Interpretation

The literary methods of textual analysis depend on theological, biblical interpretation, and beauty (Schneiders, 2016). Schneiders explains that understanding texts from the aesthetics (beauty) drawn from contemporary literary theory has proven fruitful and an interest in modern scholarship. Agreeing with Schneiders, Mulholland (2006) cites Wesley, suggesting that "the cognitive and the affective dimensions of human existence must be conjoined in mutual interdependence if Christians were to avoid falling into the extremes of sterile intellectualism"

(p. 66). Accordingly, literary methods of text interpretation that take symbolism, allegory, and iconicity seriously attract attention in spiritual reading (Mulholland, 2006; Brown, 2011; Van der Merwe, 2015b; McMahon, 2021; Pittman, 2022).

In a twentieth-first-century interpretation of Scripture for spiritual embodiment, Van der Merwe (2015b) notes an integrated methodological approach to interpreting biblical texts. The approach serves not only as a confluence of the various perspectives but also as a multidimensional approach. In addition to the main two methodological approaches to Bible interpretation, a multidimensional third methodology, the texture of spirituality, can be added. Van der Merwe explains that this method complies with the needs of the readers and the gospel.

Just as Van der Merwe used Schneiders as a point of reference, McMahon (2021) referred to Schneiders' nonreductive critical biblical interpretation as theologically sound. It is also a mediator between the antagonistic historical-critical and theological interpretations perspectives of interpretation. Van der Merwe (2015b) states that this multidimensional interpretation approach gains access to transformation just as the Old Testament authors intended. Pittman (2022) and Burrows (2002) state that symbols and other literary imagery are latent imaginations that communicate metaphoric meanings embedded in Scripture text. This language transcends its powers to enter new realms and conveys spiritual meaning. Van der Merwe (2015b) explains that studying a biblical text is not an analysis of the constituent elements of the text but receiving the illumination of the interpretation of the text. This is because textual meaning is not limited to an author but is open to every reader across cultures.

The Bible is a cultural document of aesthetics. The iconographic aspect of the biblical text is an overlooked way of drawing understanding for spiritual formation. Because the Bible is

characterized by the culture that produced it, the text can best be understood through the beauty of its production, leading to spiritual growth.

Summary of Scripture Interpretation and The Researcher's Multi-Dimensional Perspective

This researcher advocates for a multi-dimensional interpretation approach in the context of theological hermeneutics. Traditionally, attempts to make meaning and understand Scripture through theological interpretation appeal to the doctrine of Scripture or scientific hermeneutics (Watson, 2010). Modern philosophical hermeneutics is populated with multiple methodologies and the continued development of new trends and rules. Historical criticism situates the text in the original context. It is information and method-driven but sometimes less formative. The new criticism is text-centered and does not move the reader beyond doctrinally set boundaries with inherent limitations in text-reader interactions. By contrast, those who come to interpretation on the side of the doctrine of Scripture regard scientific hermeneutics as a subsidiary method with rules and guardrails. The doctrine of the Scripture interpretation approach relies on sola scriptura and intratextuality—only what the text illuminates in the passage, at the expense of context, which could be a significant component of understanding the voice of God. On the other hand, allegorical reading has no coherent method because it is limited to self-expression through imagination, personal emotions, and subjectivity.

The text, an authoritative font for spirituality, is the foundational instrument for illuminating God's voice. The text has a source (author), is loaded with tradition and culture, and is associated with historical events and processes. The reader's knowledge of all processes the text endures enforces the text's potency because reading the Bible is primarily for information gathering. In this regard, this researcher proposes a multi-dimensional approach to text interpretation, with the doctrine of Scripture as the guide, utilizing aesthetics as a conveyance

tool for the imagination to understand a mysterious God. The emphasis should be on the text and its embodiment because that is where God lives, the source of spiritual regeneration.

Perspectives of Spiritual Formation

The study aims to determine the consequence of Bible engagement on Christian leaders' spiritual growth and if there is any connection. The previous section has demonstrated that "The Bible provides the biblical content and source for spiritual formation to take place in the lives of believers" (Teo, 2017, para. 17; Mulholland, 2006; Peterson, 2006). Promoting true Christlikeness in Christian attitudes and behavior is the purpose of spiritual formation (Averbeck, 2008). A review of recent literature on spiritual formation from all approaches points to spiritual growth as the core of the phenomenon. However, the concept is challenging because of its interdisciplinary nature (Tang, 2008).

It has been demonstrated that theological perspective influences how one interprets the biblical text. In the interpretation of text subtopic precedent to this, it is indicative that textual meaning and understanding of the reading affect the reader's spiritual formation. Because of these theological approaches, authors use different spiritual practices to denote spiritual formation (Tang, 2008; Ovwigho et al., 2016). The meaning of spiritual formation in priesthood training in the Roman Catholic church has changed to various dimensions of spiritual formation within contemporary faith-believing organizations. As recently used to denote spirituality in believers, the term spiritual formation is not a biblical expression. However, Averbeck (2008) argues that just like the term Trinity, it has its roots in the Old Testament through the New Testament. For these reasons, authors define spiritual formation from different perspectives.

Approaches to Spiritual Formation

Tang (2008) reviews and categorizes five different approaches to spiritual formation that define the phenomenon from each perspective: 1) Social science, 2) Spiritual practices, 3) Christian traditions, 4) teaching, and 5) Community.

Social Science Approach. Dallas Willard stands out as a prominent scholar of spiritual formation, defining it as a “spiritually driven process of forming the inner world of the human self in a way that it becomes like the inner being of Christ Himself” (2002, p. 22). Willard’s social science approach is the thought change process through Scripture knowledge, social interaction, and relation with God through Christ as empowered by the Holy Spirit. It is a form of character formation through “a discipline, an intentional act towards one’s own experience” (Howard, 2018, p. 96).

Spiritual Practices Approach. The Christian narrative shapes Christian spiritual formation found in the Scripture (Howard, 2018). As Tang (2008) cited, Gerald May describes spiritual formation as the concept of intentional disciplines and practices that deepen faith into spiritual growth. The voice in the text shapes practices and introduces new spiritual disciplines. These are meditation and reflection in *lectio divina* (Peterson, 2006), worship, prayer, and chastity (Chandler, 2014), which motivate others to commit their lives to spiritual formation (Tang, 2008).

Christian Tradition Approach. The belief is that the spiritual formation of the Christian is not optional but a Church tradition to form the believer through a lifelong phenomenon. The early church’s traditions, liturgies, writings, and lives inform the understanding of spiritual formation (Tang, 2008). According to Pettit (2008), boundaries are communicated by word of mouth through traditions, group symbols, rituals, and ceremonies that are core to the worship

style. It includes a history of identity around which to grow spiritually. This model is inclined towards the teachings of the Desert Fathers, whose mode of worship inspires the interpretation of the text.

Teaching Approach. The teaching approach is drawn from Deuteronomy 6:6-9. Ferris et al. (2018) state that to be transformed, it was not enough to receive the law but to act and give us the word for its instruction and influence. The early Christians used the Pauline instructional model and the Didache teaching instruments to instruct converts to good Christian living (Anthony & Benson, 2011). The community approach is closely related to the teaching approach to spiritual formation.

The Community Approach. This approach is towards a Christlike character of the individual in a congregational setting. Community is where attitudes for influence are highlighted and a place to connect with like minds. Pettit (2008) and Samra (2006) emphasize the community as the crucible of spiritual transformation because the image of God is transmitted from the individual to the community (Chandler, 2014). Wilhoit (1996) argues that Christian education should be by mentorship, without which change may not occur. Within the Christian community, elements of spiritual formation synergize to shape people.

All the models are not mutually exclusive regarding their inclinations. Community and social teaching participants need social contagion and convergence to shape one another. However, the Christian tradition and spiritual practice models share similarities. They can manifest without direct instruction while inspiring spiritual or meditative reading like *lectio divina* by a stand-alone individual who depends on the text for spiritual growth. The teaching model is the mainstay of contemporary spiritual formation, collaborating with the community of

believers to inculcate spiritual practices and disciplines through teaching and interrelationships for maturity.

The Elements of Spiritual Formation

The element of spiritual formation is defined by Willard et al. (2010) as “The key concepts that have to be present in our personal lives, in our communities, and God-given mission if real transformation is going to take place” (p. 11). This definition affirms a personal walkabout with God, community-focused and mission-oriented. The process generates transformational learning of unlearning old things and learning new truths. It also invokes the Pauline advocacy in Romans 12:2 to be transformed by the renewal of the mind. Willard breaks critical elements of spiritual formation into process elements and theological elements. Process elements are those regarding the human practice of formation. Theological elements involve significant core biblical belief systems transformed into Christlikeness.

Evans Howard recognizes all the elements and their importance. However, context and means are identified as gaps. Howard (2018) defines spiritual formation as a “Spirit and human-led process by which individuals and communities mature in relationship with the Christian God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) and are changed into ever-greater likeness to the life and gospel of this God” (p. 23). The definition points to the context, the cultural environment, and the means of achieving growth as integral parts of the maturation process. Howard (2018) and Akerlund (2016) identify leadership roles neglect and their impact on mission discipleship as an obstacle to spiritual formation in individuals, churches, and communities of discipleship. Intentional practices of spiritual disciplines need attention for sustainable spiritual growth.

Spiritual Disciplines of Spiritual Formation

Spiritual disciplines significantly influence a Christian's maturity beyond formative reading. Spiritual discipline, an ascetical practice, is an intentional behavior about one's human experience (Howard, 2018; Willard, 1998). It refers to those practices and habits that enable connection to a deeper spiritual depth, leading to personal growth. These deliberate practices aim to achieve Christlikeness for one's own sake and the sake of others. It is a position where one puts on the character of a "new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him" (*New King James Version, 1982/2015, Colossians 3:10*), as Paul argues. Spiritual discipline engagement is not a formula for transformation but a sustained experience with God. Chandler (2014) explains that spiritual practice, like the Pharisees, can become performance bondage if it does not spring from the heart (*Galatians 5:16-17*). However, when animated by a pure heart (*Matthew 5:8*), it inspires a walk with God and a reciprocal communion with the Holy Spirit. Conversely, as Chandler cites, Howard Thurman asserts that spiritual discipline could be foisted on man through trials, suffering, and hardship (*Romans 5:3-4*) to induce perseverance and character.

Theological perspectives influence elements of spiritual formation classification. As Chandler (2014) and Tang (2014) cited, Richard Foster and Dallas Willard have categorized them differently. Tang (2014) classified spiritual formation into six approaches: Behavioral science, psychological studies, Christian spirituality, theological, and social and postmodern perspectives (para. 3). Teo (2017) adapted Christlikeness, community, and mission as spiritual formation goals into spiritual formation elements. Averbek (2008) departed from Teo's model and adapted three fundamental spiritual formation themes, spirit, Community, and Mission, to ground the concept's success without calling them elements, though they are. Though the

perspectives may differ, they all achieve the same result. The result is personal spiritual maturity through Christ into the community of influence. The following subsection of the study will examine the behavioral, psychological, and communal or goal approaches.

Behavioral Approach to Elements of Spiritual Formation. Foster (2005) recognizes three disciplines: 1) Inward Disciplines—meditation, prayer, study, and fasting; 2) Outward Disciplines—simplicity, submission, solitude, and service; and 3) Corporate Discipline—worship, confession, celebration, and guidance. These elements cater to the three essential elements necessary for a Christian leader’s spiritual growth in a community (Pettit, 2008). Forster’s inner renovation through meditation, Scripture reading, and fasting is in *lectio divina* (Peterson, 2006), focusing on God on the inside. Outward practices are behavioral mentorship processes that influence others with inner godly attitudes and formed characters. Spiritual transformation is forged in a community of others but not an individual activity (Samra, 2006).

Psychological Approach to Elements of Spiritual Formation. Willard (2002) defines spiritual formation as a “Spirit-driven process of forming the inner world of the human self in such a way that it becomes the inner being of Christ himself” (p. 22). The definition places the entire process as a psychological construct, making personality the model’s center. Willard bases his classification on 1) Abstinence—solitude, frugality, fasting, secrecy, chastity, and sacrifice; and 2) Engagement—worship, study, service, celebration, prayer, confession, submission, humility, transparency, and fellowship. Other authors classify spiritual disciplines differently.

Willard (1998) advocates psychological research and instruction on spiritual formation through spiritual disciplines. Willard’s pattern of spiritual formation is derived from a vision of

kingdom life, an intention to become a kingdom person, and the means to be transformed, with the belief that a fully formed character will influence others' behavior.

Communal or Goal Approach to Elements of Spiritual Formation. Teo (2017) categorized three goals of spiritual formation: (a) believers acquire Christlikeness at the personal level, (b) believers become the kingdom of God at the community level, (c) believers establish the kingdom of God at the missional level (para. 13). According to Teo (2017) and Tang (2014), the three goals of maturity are achievable if transformation occurs at the convergence of the personal level, the Bible, the Holy Spirit, and the people's lives as the elements. Tools for the three goals have become the elements of spiritual transformation.

The goal approach is similar to the *Renovare* concept of spiritual formation. After Richard Foster publicized *Celebration of Discipline* in 1978, with Dallas Willard, they formed an organization called *Renovare* dedicated to spiritual formation (Howard, 2018). *Renovare's* initial emphasis was on spiritual formation, centered on discipleship. It was later based on the church or congregation (Tang, 2014). *Renovare's* definition of spiritual formation emphasizes the transformation of the inner spirit of man through Christ for the benefit of others.

The various approaches to spiritual discipline have been sketched. Spiritual discipline is a vital component of an individual's transformation journey in daily life. Different practices may resonate with other people on this personal journey. The convergence of these spiritual disciplines and formative reading produces a grounded spiritual maturity.

Formative Reading, A Synthesis of Biblical Reading and Spiritual Formation

The overarching purpose of Christian education was to help individuals and communities change to embody Christ's kingdom through Scripture (McEwen, 2012). Even so, the field of study encompasses ongoing dynamics of discourses between theoretical positions, empiricism,

experiential investigations, and subjective concepts of interpretations (Muto, 2011). Schneiders (2016) claims that revelations from texts for spirituality are contingent on understanding the Bible. Hence, a single methodological approach to biblical interpretation is unsustainable.

Schneiders (2002) defined biblical spirituality in three terms to summarize formative reading: (a) patterns of spiritualities expressed in the Bible whose witnesses we identify with, (b) the meaning of spirituality as pointed out by Scripture, and (c) an individual and communal transformative process as directed by the biblical text. These models complete the cycle of spiritual formation for the scholar, faith practitioner, and non-specialist. Schneiders stresses that this approach cannot ignore historical-critical and exegetical analysis but a synthesis of all because the text must be allowed to be itself and “to speak in its voice” (para. 10).

Schneiders (2016) asserts that “Christian spirituality is biblical” and defines spirituality as a “lived experience of the Christian faith”—a progressive approach to formative reading (para. 2). Schneiders, from that definition, derives three meanings. The first is that spirituality constitutes a lived faith experience. Secondly, the biblical text expresses spirituality; finally, the Bible gives rise to spirituality through Christian history (para. 6-8). These meanings are shared by McMahon (2021), Van der Merwe (1015), and Muto (2011, 2012), who state that one perspective of the hermeneutical process of interpretation is not enough for formative reading.

Van der Merwe (2015b) recommends adding another texture to the existing dimensions. In this way, spiritual maturity would be achieved through a multi-dimensional approach with openness to textual meaning so that the text transforms the reader’s subjectivity (Schneiders, 2002). McMahon (2021) describes Sandra Schneider’s authoritative exemplar approach as a nonreductive critical biblical exegesis. This formative reading transforms a cognitive interaction with text into solid spiritual maturity without sacrificing any aspect of Scripture interpretation.

Schneiders argues that the actual task of the gospel of growth concerns a relationship between the text and Christ and that the Old Testament authors' intent to introduce Christ, the subject matter in the text, is integral to interpretation. Schneiders (2002) further explains that the most crucial approach to spiritual formation is not by exegetical, historical, or aesthetics alone. By utilizing all through formative reading, the Holy Spirit illuminates the biblical text in a transformational manner because "God never leaves Scripture alone" (Porter, 2018, p. 19).

This literature review has demonstrated that formative reading for spiritual formation needs to be more balanced with different theoretical positions, experiential explorations, and subjectivity. Though the biblical text is consistently claimed to be the source of Christian spirituality, a single methodological approach (in theory and practice) to spiritual maturity must be more conclusive. This has been the reason for many studies into reaching Christlikeness.

Research Literature on Formative Reading

This study's primary mandate was to determine if spiritual Bible reading can predict spiritual transformation with a sharp focus on how the Bible must be engaged. This literature review has reviewed precedent literature in Scripture interpretation and perspectives of spiritual formation. The interpretation section reviewed the literature on "two source theory" and "sola Scriptura" models, a backdrop to the historical-criticism concept of interpretation, critical exegesis concept of interpretation, and aesthetic, theological interpretation. Approaches, elements, and spiritual disciplines cover the spiritual formation section. All these interpretation approaches play various roles in the formative process regarding their strengths and limitations. This research is focused on the functional role of the text, the Word of God, in the biblical canon revealed in Christlikeness. The study will answer whether the biblical interpretation of the biblical text needs critical, contemporary, and systematic theologies.

To this end, Scripture text is central to spiritual formation, the primary source and authority for Christian spirituality (Schneiders, 2002; Peterson, 2006; Mulholland, 2006; Averbek, 2008; Willard, 1998; Maddix, 2018; Muto, 2012; McMahon, 2021). There are theories on spirituality in literature, with Scripture being the foundation of spirituality, but none on formative praxis. There is little literature on how Bible reading predicts spiritual formation, especially empirical research. Most studies that measure spirituality focus on spiritual practices and disciplines (Ovigho et al., 2016). Some studies examine the effects of spiritual practices and values on workplace leadership effectiveness (Ali & Zaky, 2018). Further, studies on spiritual leadership's role in forming Christian values still need to be included (Arkerluand, 2016).

Angela Harvey's dissertation, *Spiritual Reading: A Study of the Christian Practice of Reading Scripture*, did a comprehensive work on spiritual reading. The study explored the theological implications of reading spiritually in the context of the contemporary Western church. Spiritual reading is explored extensively regarding *lectio divina*, focusing on theological interpretations and individual reading of the Bible. The study examined the history, biblical interpretative theories, scholarship, and implications on today's church. Harvey (2012) agrees and emphatically states that spiritual reading must be in practice. However, the dissertation is "less an ethnography of the Christian reading of the Bible, and more a theological exploration of how that reading might be understood" (Harvey, 2012, p. 236). Harvey's dissertation does not explore how Scripture must be engaged to elicit spiritual maturity but relies on assumptions. That is the gap this study sought abridgment.

Westerfield (2014) aimed to determine how formative reading, specifically *lectio divina*, impacts the spirituality of Christians. The research measured the impact of Sacred spiritual

reading, known as *lectio divina*, on the intimacy level of selected members of the First Baptist Church of Cleveland, Tennessee, with God. A self-reporting survey through a questionnaire measured intimacy levels before and after the six-week experiment on the practice of *lectio divina*. Intimacy is the awareness of God and the quality of relationship with Him and *lectio divina*, a spiritual discipline from the monastic era. The literature review covered the history and origin of *lectio divina* from the Old Testament, the New Testament, and the Monastic period. The theoretical framework is experiential learning or education because the experiential learning theory accurately describes what occurs as participants learn new ways of reading the Bible through the *lectio divina* process.

With a mixed research method, the six-week project measured the influence of *silencio*, *lectio*, *meditatio*, *oratio*, and *contemplatio* on the spirituality of regular congregation volunteers. The experiment result indicated a change from the previous state to more intimacy with God. Westerfield's (2014) study targeted a specific spiritual discipline on regular Baptist denomination Christians without *lectio divina* experience. It still lacks the nuanced biblical engagement this researcher seeks for spiritual leaders in a Pentecostal denomination.

Harris (2020) researched to determine a relationship between Sunday School participation, that is, small group Bible study and spiritual formation with congregations of the General Baptist State Convention of North Carolina. The research identified the need for Sunday school and spiritual formation curricula. Sunday school Bible study is just part of Bible engagement. This falls short of the impact of Bible engagement on spirituality, which this study sought to explore.

The growing interest in exploring spiritual formation is grounded in the dynamic, complex, and iterative nature of formative reading. By studying the connection between

formative reading and church structures, leaders would appreciate the influence of that structure on the spirituality of the congregation or community. It would also impact discipleship, spiritual practices, and how leaders are appointed, which are central to church polity.

Assemblies of God Church Polity

In the Assembly of God church (AG), leadership comprises the pastor(s) and elected or appointed deacon board or elders who assist the head pastor in spiritual oversight, grounded in Acts 6:1-7. Because the AG is a cooperative fellowship (Carter, 2021), the deacon board is often chosen based on unique gifts and skills applicable to the congregation. Leaders are selected based on biblical qualifications in 1 Timothy 3:8-13 and Titus 1:5-16, spiritual maturity, and readiness to glorify God through service. The deacon board members advise on spiritual direction and are assigned individual duties by the pastor, especially in areas where a deacon has unique skills for particular tasks. They also represent the pastor in times of need.

The AG church was chosen for this study because it evolved from the twentieth-century Pentecostal movement (Carter, 2021; Bullock, 2016; Langston, 1996). The denomination believes in the manifestation of the Holy Spirit in the lives of Christians. According to their website, www.snemn.com, a transformed life is the best a Christian brings to leadership. AG, or The World Assemblies of God Fellowship, is the world's fourth-largest international body of Christians and the world's largest Pentecostal movement. It is a cooperative fellowship rather than a denomination (Carter, 2021). The World Fellowship does not function as a governing body for all the individual churches but plays the role of consultation and cooperation. The governing style of the church springs from the Pentecostal movement experiences and the early Christian apostolic style of governance.

The Pentecostal Experiences

Bullock (2016) documents two key events that birthed the Pentecostal movement of the AG church: The Topeka, Kansas, experience and the Azusa Street Revival. In 1900, the students at the Topeka Bible School were challenged, prayed for, and received the baptism of the Holy Spirit as in Acts 2:4, that all were filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke in various tongues as the Spirit enabled them. According to Bullock, four other events theologically framed the Topeka experience. 1) D. L. Moody's fundamentalist component of emphasis on verbal inspiration of Scripture, 2) The restoration drive of the second coming of Christ, 3) the Wesleyan contribution of the doctrine of Christian perfection, and 4) The Welsh Revival of 1904 and 1905. The second key event was the Azusa Street Revival by Seymour of the black Los Angeles Mission Church.

The Assemblies of God forcefully emphasized reliance on the Holy Spirit. However, they depended on the authority of the Bible because they believed that the Holy Spirit interpreted biblical text to those who relied on Him. In the context of the Assemblies of God, the authority of the sacred text depended on its ability to be practically successful. They were concerned with the practical results of Scripture principles, not philosophies, hermeneutical, or exegetical questions (Minter, 2011).

Church Governance Models

The governing structure of the AG church is conditioned by the local church autonomy concept and a hybrid of all three traditional church leadership structures. The AG fellowship comprises two classifications of churches: the General Council-affiliated churches and the district-affiliated churches. General Council–Affiliated churches are fully autonomous, self-governing, and self-supporting. However, District-affiliated churches are less developed under

ecclesial supervision and authority of a parent church (Carter, 2021). Langston (1996) cites a document that refers to the AG polity as the Sovereignty of Local Assemblies:

Within the fellowship of the Assemblies of God, there are two classifications of churches: General Council-affiliated churches and district-affiliated churches. General Council-affiliated churches enjoy full autonomy, having developed to the point where they are self-governing, self-supporting, and self-propagating. These fundamental principles have been catalysts for growth in the Fellowship. District-affiliated churches have not yet developed to the point where they qualify for full autonomy. (p. 38)

Local church governance and leadership structure hybridizes the presbyterial, congregational, and episcopal models. According to the AG website (n.d.), The three basic historical models of church governance, episcopal, presbyterian, and congregational, are still practiced with creative modifications with the advent of current organizational management and the need for modernity. However, neither of these three endures in its absolute form, each having some attributes of the others. With the episcopal model, authority flows from above, as the lead ministers are referred to as Bishops, with presbyters and deacons serving in subordinate positions. In some of today's churches, the deacon position is replaced by serving officials. In the Presbyterian model, authority dwells in elected leaders called ruling elders, who govern the local church by teaching elder(s). In the congregational model, the final authority resides in the church membership. There are similarities among the models in the oversight functions, committee roles, and congregational influence (Langston, 1996). As cited by Langton, Kendrick observes the progressive revision of church polity:

Regarding the organization problem, the original has had to be modified several times. Having fears of the weaknesses of the existing types of church government but at the same time being aware of the advantages, the fathers of the new movement formulated a church polity containing features of several of the established systems. (p. 37)

No matter the governing style employed, the early Christian-apostolic root model is always evident, regardless of the time or place. The congregation's governing structure and style create the Christian community ecology for interaction that leads to spiritual development. To this end, church leadership and structure play a qualifier role in the change needed for Christlikeness.

Rationale for Study and Gap in the Literature

How a Christian leader engages with the Bible to become spiritually transformed for impact was cardinal for this study. It also sought to find any correlation between the two concepts. In the literature review, the theological component established that Scripture, as God's voice, is the authoritative and primary text for spiritual formation for Christian leaders. The theoretical section also demonstrated through the Transformational Learning Theory how cognitive internalization of text transforms the spirituality of adult learners. The review finally established the connection between scientific transformational learning and formative reading of the Scriptures.

In the contemporary secular and multicultural world, how the Christian leader is spiritually equipped to face the plummeting image of leadership is of utmost importance (McEwen, 2012). Today's church needs to embody the kingdom of Christ to become transformative agents to confront the challenges and possibilities in this multicultural society. That depends on the nature of the church, which is a community of teaching leaders, growing and learning as living organisms (Bredfeldt, 2006). Accordingly, the review has shown the resilience and power of the voice of Scripture, transforming individuals and communities into spiritual stalwarts for God's kingdom through the text (Peterson, 2006).

Transformative learning theory acknowledges deep formative reading and provides a context for personal transformation and leadership in the church and workplaces (Dirks, 1998).

McEwen (2012) concludes that Christian education is transformative, helping others reshape their assumptions, align their principles with God, and solve ethical and integrity challenges facing God's kingdom. There is little literature on research about how Bible reading impacts Christian leaders' spiritual formation (Ovwigbo et al., 2016). Secondly, leadership roles for spiritual formation must be reinforced by scholarly discourses (Akerlund, 2016). The research seeks to bridge this gap and bring meaning to the recent developments in ministerial leadership and their contribution to spiritual formation in individuals and communities.

Profile of the Current Study

Christian leaders' demonstrable spiritual disciplines and practices are associated with their biblical engagement. Current literature identifies Scripture interpretation and faith instruction as complex tasks regarding instructional methods. Targeting the heart or the mind, formative reading, or instruction through information are still complex processes. The biblical text in Scripture is generally accepted as the authoritative voice of God (Mulholland, 2006; Peterson, 2006). Interpreting the Bible and communicating God's voice to the reader's heart is complicated. That is what this literature review has sought to unravel for a solid background for research application.

Christian educators, over time, have relied on preaching, teaching, liturgical worship, and information downloads to shape faith. Their congregation has counted on faith to transform the believing Christian's inner life, spiritual practices, and outward behavior. However, this strategy has yet to succeed (Willard, 2000). The transformative learning theory reveals elements that congruently fit into the transformative spiritual reading. Spiritual Bible reading aims to engage with humanity and collaborate with the Holy Spirit to extend His formative purpose in the reader's life (Maddix, 2018). This review proposes that intellectual and spiritual formation

compartmentalization in Christian instruction should give way to a redemptive reading. Also, a cognitive-practice approach to spiritual instruction is recommended as a unifying Christian theological education.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The literature review's theological component demonstrates that the Word of God is authoritative and the primary text for spiritual maturity; the Holy Spirit is a disorienting and transformative agent for critical reflection that triggers the change process for alternative spiritual experience (Mezirow & Associates, 2000). How a Christian spiritual leader engages with the Bible to become spiritually transformed for influence was cardinal for this study.

The research sought to find out if there is any correlation between the characteristics of the two factors: Bible reading and spiritual formation. This section contains content details of the study's purpose, the researcher's role and functions, and how respondents were chosen from the targeted population. This method chapter describes the design and strategies that collected and analyzed data for the research. It includes research design synopsis, population, sampling procedures, limits of generalization, ethical considerations, instruments, research methods, data analysis, and statistical procedures, and concludes with a summary of the design methodology.

Research Design Synopsis

The research design of the study was a quantitative, non-experimental correlational study. This section introduced the problem to the topic under study, the purpose statement, the research questions and hypotheses, and the research design and methodology.

The Problem

The American Bible Society (2020) announces a decline in Bible reading, and many Christians are on the way to a spiritual downturn (Packiam, 2022). Meanwhile, Christian spiritual leaders must be formed as mentors by an intentional spiritual transformation process with the biblical text engagement as a tool to minister unto others (Wilhoit, 1996). When a leader engages in the text, meaning-making brings understanding through text interpretation to shape

the leader's spiritual life for influence. This is underscored by the principle that spirituality is human nature and depends on everything people do.

Spiritual values and practices are the variables that factor in research on the reciprocal relationship between spirituality and organizational leadership effectiveness (Ali & Zacky, 2018). The study does not articulate how spirituality is developed and the degree of relationship. This research sought to identify a praxis issue: how biblical and spiritual instruction theory can be embodied and applied to practice to animate personal spiritual growth. A disconnect between biblical engagement and spirituality in practice necessitates a burgeoning interest in research. This study desired to bridge the gap and describe how the biblical text is engaged and its impact on spiritual maturity.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this non-experimental quantitative correlational study was to determine what if any, relationship exists between spiritual Bible reading and the perceived spiritual formation of deacons of Pentecostal churches of the Assemblies of God denomination (AG) framed by Jack Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory.

Research Questions

RQ1: How do Assemblies of God deacons engage with the Bible as measured by the Bird (2021) Christian Life Survey (CLS)?

RQ2: How do spiritual leaders grow spiritually as measured by the Faith Maturity Scale (FMS) instrument?

RQ3: What relationships, if any, exist between kinds of Bible reading practices as measured by CLS and perceived spiritual formation as measured by the FMS?

Besides research questions, quantitative studies usually include hypotheses, a reasonable guess, which predict particular events about expected outcomes of associations between

variables. Research hypothesis guides the research, tests theories or questions, and postulates about research findings, while statistical hypotheses theorize if results are significant not because of chance alone (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Leedy & Ormrod, 2018; Roberts, 2010). However, exploratory studies without controlled variables cannot establish a hypothesis. Therefore, questions one and two are statistically insignificant. Question three was grounded in a null hypothesis, postulating no correlational relationship between Bible reading and spiritual formation.

Research Hypotheses

H₀1: Statistically Insignificant

H₀2: Statistically Insignificant

H₀3: There is no correlation between Bible reading and perceived spiritual formation.

Research Design and Methodology

This quantitative approach to research was a non-experimental correlational design to explore the relationships between Bible reading and spiritual formation. In this design, the researcher utilized statistical analysis to describe and measure the extent of associations between two or more variables (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Creswell defines quantitative research as “an approach for testing objective theories by examining the relationship among variables. These variables, in turn, can be measured, typically on instruments, so that numbered data can be analyzed using statistical procedures” (p. 4). A quantitative design integrated with statistical correlation was helpful in the study, considering the association between the two variables and the strength of that relationship (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Leedy & Ormrod, 2019).

A survey design was considered the best research method for collecting data for this study because the survey matched a correlational descriptive research design and the population

spread (Leedy & Ormrod, 2019). Using statistical analysis, the survey evaluated likely relationships between Bible engagement as the independent variable and spiritual formation as the dependent variable. A survey is a fit for determining specific information about a group of people's attitudes, trends, and opinions (Leedy & Ormrod, 2019). Two Likert scale instruments in the form of questionnaires were used to collect cross-sectional data, a one-time data collection over a period from the sampled population. The instruments, the Christian Life Survey (CLS) and the Faith Maturity Scale (FMS), operationalized abstract variables, giving them a quantitative value of the phenomenon and measuring the frequency of data of self-reporting. The correlational method was chosen because it determines the degree of relationship between variables. Further, it generates predictions and explanations of these relationships among variables or phenomena (Leedy & Ormrod, 2019).

Population

The population of this study was appointed or elected deacons or elders of the Assemblies of God (AG) churches who assist the lead pastor in spiritual oversight. The population of deacons or spiritual leaders who assist the head pastor in spiritual oversight of these 178 autonomous AG churches affiliated to and credentialed by the Southern New England Ministry Network (SNEMN) in the Southern New England area of the U.S. With an approximate average of 6 deacons per church (4 minimum and 8 maximum), the targeted population was 1,068. The SNEMN covers the geographical areas of Connecticut, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island. These deacons in leadership positions bring their spiritual leadership experiences and concrete data to share. The SNEMN is a network of Pentecostal churches identified under the Assemblies of God denomination with the same faith and spiritual maturity doctrines.

The AG church was selected for this study because it evolved from the twentieth-century Pentecostal movement with the belief that the best a Christian brings to leadership is a transformed life (Carter, 2021). The Pentecostal movement of the AG church was birthed by the Topeka Bible School Holy Spirit experience in Kansas in 1900 and the 1906 Azusa Street Revival by Seymour in Los Angeles, California (Bullock, 2016). Secondly, the AG church is concerned with practical results of Scripture principles, depending on the authority of the Bible, because they believe the Holy Spirit interprets the biblical text to those who rely on Him (Minter, 2011). Thirdly, the AG church polity springs from the Pentecostal movement experiences and the early Christian-Apostolic model.

Sampling Procedures

The sampling design of this study was a non-probability sampling from a sample frame of AG deacons (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The inability of the researcher to list the population frame was the reason for this sampling design. Secondly, the recent unwillingness of the public to participate in surveys made this design appropriate (Kalton, 2021). Thirdly, significant work has yet to be done on this subject (Shields & Twycross, 2008). The Internet survey was expected to recruit more respondents to make up for a larger sample. Probability sampling is a simple random selection of participants from the target population, all of whom have equal probabilities of selection (Leedy & Ormrod, 2016). Non-probability sampling does not guarantee that the entire targeted population will be sampled (Leedy & Ormrod, 2016). A random sample selection for this study was impossible for the above-stated reasons.

Non-random convenience sampling represents the selection of respondents based on convenience will be utilized. This sampling method for the study is exploratory and descriptive. Because there is no way to predict that each population element has an equal chance of

representation, using the internet, Qualtrics, provides a high-tech alternative to cure the aspect of the less probability of mathematical representation (Leedy & Ormrod, 2019). According to Kalton (2021), convenience sampling can also be termed probability or purposive sampling when a particular interest group is selected from a larger population. A purposive sample involves subjects with distinct characteristics or attributes the study seeks to explore (O'Dwyer & Bernauer, 2014, p. 83). O'Dwyer and Bernauer explain that “the individuals or clusters are not systematically selected from the population; instead, they are selected to be in the study because they possess an attribute or characteristic that the researcher is interested in” (p. 83). In this instance, deacons are a mentorship interest group selected from the entire church leadership population, including pastors and committee leaders.

To avoid the introduction of self-reporting biases in measurement, pastors who must read the Bible for sermons and Bible teaching were not part of the population of spiritual leaders, though they are technically spiritual leaders. Kalton (2021) explains that this type of convenience sampling is generalizable—the deacon leadership group represents the more prominent church leadership. Also, a larger sample size produces less margin of error. Though compiling a list of the elements under study was practically impossible, statistical estimates from the sample were used to make inferences or population parameters about the population of interest (Kabir, 2016). With an estimated population size of 1068, a sample size of 283 was calculated from the surveysystem.com website with a confidence level of 95% and a confidence interval of 5%. However, the population was revised to 528 with a sample size of 91 due to new revelations during the data collection phase.

Limitations of Generalization

The limitation that impacts how beneficial a research result and conclusion are to a broader population is the generalizability of the study (Leedy & Ormrod, 2019; Ercikan, 2014). The limitation influences results in applicability and limits the study's external validity. Ercikan (2014) asserts that "Context generalization is a critical concept in all research designed to generate knowledge that applies to all elements of a unit (population) while studying only a subset of these elements (Sample)" (para. 1), representativeness and replicability can limit the validity of the study result.

An initial limitation of this study is its non-probability and nonrandom sampling procedure. Non-probability convenience sampling is not generalizable (Kabir, 2016). However, this convenience sampling passes as purposive sampling, involving a group representing a diverse perspective on an issue (population) (Leedy & Ormrod, 2019, p. 178). The literature review reveals that AG deacons are elected spiritually mature leaders to assist the lead pastor in leadership spiritual oversight, according to Titus 2:5-16 and 1 Timothy 3:8-13. Hence, generalizability is possible because these leaders (deacons) represent the entire church leadership. Therefore, the study result can be extrapolated on the targeted deacon and church leadership population in the context of the variable description.

Further, the absence of prior research on the topic under study is a limitation. This is because of the unavailability of data on biases of participants, self-reporting on spirituality, and measurement of the immeasurable, as inherent flaws in data from respondents that limit internal validity and restrict generalizability. Study results, findings, and conclusions would build a data pool for further research studies.

Ethical Considerations

Social and behavioral science research and the use of human subjects in studies raise anticipated ethical issues during and after these studies (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Leedy & Ormrod, 2019). This is because research requires collecting confidential data from and about individuals who must not be subjected to physical and psychological harm. These ethical issues can be broadly categorized as “protection from harm, voluntary and informed participation, right to privacy, and honesty with professional colleagues” (Leedy & Ormrod, 2019, p. 111). Observance of ethical standards in research spans data collection ethics, adherence to institutional professional codes of ethics, and proposal review and approval by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) before research designs are implemented.

The IRB requires researchers to complete research ethics training per the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) before receiving IRB approval. This researcher undertook CITI training on December 23, 2022, and was certified through December 23, 2025. The research design proposal produced disclosure documents protecting human rights, respondents’ rights to withdraw, confidentiality, and anonymity. These documents included participant informed consent with the choice to participate in the survey and withdraw at will. Anonymity assurance started with providing respondents with Qualtrics link participation. Qualtrics survey platform used to collect data eliminated respondents’ personal contact and email addresses. The study did not collect respondents' demographic and identifiable information. Data collected before destruction after five years has been kept on a computer with password protection. (Creswell, 2014). Reports and documents in computer files in spreadsheets and working hard copies have been kept in a file cabinet accessible only to the researcher for the same retention period.

Though the researcher had a short ministry working relationship with the Assemblies of God church years ago, there are no known professional or friendly ties with the targeted population to engender biases in data collection, analysis, and conclusions. Also, there is no known personal bias regarding the proposed topic of study and its outcome. This introduced a layer of data collection security and eliminated prospective researcher bias.

Proposed Instrumentation

This quantitative correlational survey study used two existing instruments to collect data. The research aims to determine the relationship between biblical engagement and spiritual formation. The Bird (2021) Christian Life Survey (CLS), constructed to measure Scripture engagement, was the first instrument that measured Bible reading. Four additional Likert questions were added to enable rigorous analysis. The Faith Maturity Scale (FMS) by Benson et al. (1993) was the second instrument to measure the phenomenon of spiritual formation. They are constructed to model abstract variables, giving them quantitative values, and calculated numerically.

Christian Life Survey (CLS)

The 24-item Christian Life Survey (CLS) instrument measured adult self-identified Christians' Bible engagement patterns and spiritual principles. Bird (2021) characterized a summary of how Christians approach the Bible in 6 ways of uses—Application to the way of life, studying it, Affective application, Applying to society, Using it to experience the presence of God, and Relating it to their own identity. Each of the six uses of the Bible has six sets of triangulated questions (the same question asked in 3 different ways to ensure understanding). 2 frequency questions with multiple choice responses sought clarity and described respondents' interpretative approaches to their Bible reading. Four questions derived from the frequency

subset and rated in Likert options were added for a rigorous analysis of detailed Bible reading approaches. Each Likert point question of the questionnaire is a 7-Likert Scale response option: strongly disagree, disagree, slightly disagree, neither agree nor disagree, slightly agree, agree, or strongly agree.

Validity

In instrumentation validity, Johnson and Morgan (2016) state that the validity theory is related to the accuracy, whether the instrument measures what it sets to measure. Validation deals with the accuracy of decisions reached or inferences based on score interpretation deduced from the survey scales. Experts from the Taylor University Center for Scripture Engagement followed two processes in developing the survey's validity and reliability. The first process involves strict procedures for the development of the study. Secondly, the process was documented as evidence of validity related to the survey scale. Further, the research clearly states the score interpretations in terms of the concept being measured, the intended interpretations of the instrument, and the assumptions the interpretations depend on (Hagan, 2014). Content validity is the connection between the items in the instrument and the holistic construct being measured. The survey, which started in 2011, has demonstrated validity and reliability.

Reliability

Reliability is termed as the consistency and repeatability of the instrument (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The concept of reliability concerns internal consistency and Test-retest reliability. Internal consistency is the extent to which items on the instrument yield similar or consistent results. The items on CLS have proven consistent results and inferences in multiple study applications. The test is determined by the stability of the scale score when dispensing a retest in similar conditions. Surveys with this instrument have been conducted in several U.S.

universities and with adult Christians in cross-sectional and longitudinal surveys with proven reliability in looking into one's Christian life of biblical engagement. Bird (2021) asserts that validation is done using factor and reliability analyses across 12 years of administration.

Faith Maturity Scale (FMS)

The Faith Maturity Scale (FMS) measures spiritual maturity under two subscales. First is the degree of a person's relationship with God and its influence on social relations (Benson et al., 1993). The scale was developed and guided by eight considerations: (1) faith maturity in a continuum; (2) multiple fundamental dimensions (3) personal connection to God's involvement (vertical faith) and relationship with others (horizontal faith); (4) the scale has heuristic value; (5) the length of the survey tool format must be helpful too; (6) a summary of economic, educational, and racial-ethnic specificity; (7) faith maturity indicators should not assume involvement to institutions; and (8) minimal denominational distinction. The result is a 38-item, 7-point Likert scale measuring faith-maturity scores between 1 and 7. That is, 1 = Never true, 2 = Rarely true, 3 = True once in a while, 4 = Sometimes true, 5 = Often true, 6 = Almost always true, and 7 = Always true. Scores or numerical values of negatively framed questions are reversed or recoded.

The FMS has two subscales: A 12-item FMS-V measures a leader's vertical religious relationship with God and the degree to which this relationship is maintained, honored, and emphasized. A 12-item MFS-H, a horizontal religion, measures how this maturity directs a leader to act toward others with pro-social values, justice, and mercy. (Benson et al., 1993). The FMS is divided into eight core Markers of behavior consequences: Trust and belief, Experiencing the fruits of faith, Integrating faith and life, Seeking spiritual growth, Experiencing

and nurturing faith in community, Holding life-affirming values, Advocating social change, and Acting and serving.

Validity

The validity of an instrument's assessment strategy is the degree of submission of accurate results of the characteristics being sought (Leedy & Ormrod, 2019). This means that the measurement and not the instrument validate the data that support inferences from the measurement. Internal validity, comprising construct and content validity, should be the focus to guarantee validity. Construct validity, recognized as the primary source of instrument validity establishment, demonstrates whether the instrument yields relevant information about the researched characteristics (O'Dwyer & Bernauer, 2014).

The authors and other users have presented evidence supporting face, content, and construct validity. The criterion-based FMS was built by utilizing indicators of eight core dimensions by a panel of experts through three process stages (Benson et al., 1993). Construct validity was assessed by measuring in groups, using expert ratings, comparing scores by age, and other measures. These peers' and experts' approval and further surveys demonstrate content validity. This means the items measuring the content they intend to measure are predictive and correlate with other results (Croswell & Croswell, 2018).

Reliability

Reliability is the extent of an instrument's consistency or repeatability of measurement (Croswell & Croswell, 2018). This refers to internal consistency, the rate at which the items on the instrument perform the same way, and their stability, predictability, and accuracy. A high degree of consistency in an instrument indicates more excellent reliability. According to Kumar (2011), test-retest reliability and internal consistency are two concepts that signify instrument

reliability. The FMS instrument demonstrates this in scale reliability (Cronbach Coefficient Alpha) reported across age and denomination. FMS measures transformation in leadership behavior and spiritual growth (Benson et al., 1993).

Research Procedures

This section provides an overview of the research's procedural steps. It forms the protocol and requires study procedures to collect significant data to answer the research question(s). Therefore, some guidelines must be followed: initial steps, approvals, communications, and data gathering.

Initial Steps

The initial steps involved preparation, planning, and relevant authorizations. The study's purpose was to determine if there is any association between Bible reading and spiritual maturity. Planning involved strategies for collecting data. Research questions were answered using a survey method with a prepared questionnaire. Existing instruments were used to collect information: CLS (Bird, 2021) and FMS (Benson et al., 1993), for which requests were approved.

Approvals and Communications

Prospectus approval after a defense of this research, the first of the approval processes, led to a request and approval from Liberty University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) to continue with the research. Another approval of electronic survey distribution by the program director or research supervisor followed this. The researcher developed the survey instrument into the Qualtrics platform using the study-developed questions from the CLS and FMS instruments. After the IRB approval, the researcher communicated with the lead pastors of respondents' participating churches to ensure mutual understanding, purpose, timeframe, and

needed communication about the research. After all communications for support were established and respondents in place, the research went into the execution stage.

Data Collection

Fresh or primary data was collected from the sampled population (Bairagi & Munot, 2019). Primary data, which is highly reliable and realistic, achieves high accuracy in the research. Questionnaires will collect systematic data. The internet survey was administered to the sampled population of elected deacons of AG Churches affiliated with the SNEMN. The two survey instruments were designed to gather numerical information to questions in two primary data sets—biblical engagement and spiritual growth. Data from 38-item FMS and 24-item CLS were collected by Qualtrics system and fed into the SPSS for computation. Abstract variables of these two data sets captured on the survey instruments were operationalized to quantitative numeric values for analysis.

Data Analysis and Statistical Procedures

This section outlines how the data was analyzed and the research questions answered. This research was designed to ascertain the association, if any, between biblical engagement and the spiritual maturity of Christian spiritual leaders. Data from non-experimental design is used to research behaviors, attributes, or phenomena for descriptive and correlational conclusions (O'Dwyer & Bernauer, 2014). These conclusions can be predictive or explanatory, explaining why and how some attributes are related in the test of theories.

Data Analysis

The data analysis procedure was contingent on the research purpose, questions, and data collection type. To address research questions, descriptive analysis was conducted for data familiarization, raw data summary, and sample description to reveal trends and associations

(O'Dwyer & Bernauer, 2014). To conduct the descriptive analyses, the researcher utilized frequency distributions, measures of central tendency, dispersions, and visual representations to describe internal relationships within a variable. Inferential statistics involving the correlation coefficient, Pearson's r , was utilized to establish relationships between the two variables. The abstract variables of the biblical engagement and spiritual formation phenomena, measured in numerical terms by the two instruments, FMS and CLS, on Likert scales and by frequency, were transferred from Qualtrics to the IBM Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 29, for analysis (as in <https://www.socscistatistics.com/>).

Statistical Procedures

The research used descriptive statistics to describe Bible engagement trends and patterns of spiritual leaders' self-reported attitudes, behaviors, and characteristics associated with their spiritual maturity. Frequency distributions will be utilized to summarize the patterns in the data of the frequency section of the CLS instrument and the descriptive data embedded in the Likert-point section of the instrument. To answer the "what is the relationship" question, the researcher will compute the strength and direction of variables produced by data distributions from CLS and FMS by correlation statistical procedures. Scatterplots will be used to visually represent the strength and direction relationships of the continuous data. Its regression line that will produce the formula or regression model in $Y = aX + b$ can be predictive, computing the dependent variable from the model when the independent variable is known.

Data from primary variables involve continuous data. Therefore, Pearson's product-moment correlation or Pearson's r is appropriate for statistical use (Leedy & Ormrod, 2016). The Pearson Correlation Coefficient, r for describing relationships, is a single numerical value between -1 and $+1$ to indicate the strength and direction of the relationship between the two

variables. The coefficient correct calculation corroborates the relationship between the visual pattern of biblical engagement and spiritual formation on the scatterplot.

Inferential statistical analysis was used to make inferences on attributes from sample statistics (Correlation coefficient, mean, standard deviation, etc.) about unknown population parameters (O'Dwyer & Bernauer, 2014). The data and statistical analysis produced research findings that answer the research questions. Finally, likely practical implications of patterns of biblical engagement revealed by data were discussed regarding the spiritual formation of spiritual leaders and recommendations for future research.

Chapter Summary

The method chapter is core to the entire research plan, describing the design and strategies to collect and analyze data for inference. This correlational research assesses the association between biblical engagement and spirituality in spiritual leaders. A survey will utilize structured questionnaires to collect self-reporting data on opinions, attitudes, and behaviors from a sampled population of AG deacons. The study uses a quantitative correlational design with non-probability sampling to collect data through a cross-sectional survey. In human subject research, observing ethical standards that are key to the study design implementation is indispensable to research integrity.

The two successive chapters will detail the study's results. Inferential analyses will lead to inferences about the attributes of the population through the sample from that population. The study's information, statistical significance of findings, implications, and generalizability of results will be examined, and implications for further research will be discussed.

CHAPTER FOUR: ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this non-experimental quantitative correlational study was to determine what if any, relationship exists between spiritual Bible reading and the perceived spiritual formation of the Pentecostal Assembly of God church leaders, framed by Jack Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory. This chapter provides data and lays out a detailed analysis and results.

Research Questions

RQ1: How do Assemblies of God deacons engage with the Bible as measured by the Bird (2021) Christian Life Survey (CLS)?

RQ2: How do spiritual leaders grow spiritually as measured by the Faith Maturity Scale (FMS) instrument?

RQ3: What relationships, if any, exist between kinds of Bible reading practices as measured by CLS and perceived spiritual formation as measured by the FMS?

Research Hypotheses

H₀1: Null hypothesis.

H₀2: Null hypothesis.

H₀3: There is no correlation between Bible reading and perceived spiritual formation.

Compilation Protocol and Measures

Two statistical processes were chosen for the analysis. Descriptive statistics describe data in a way that can be understood utilizing frequency, central tendency, and standard deviation (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). The second statistical analysis method chosen was Pearson's r , which is suitable for determining statistical association between variables and is widely used. It was used because the data passed the parametric test and was normally distributed (Murray, 2013).

Data Collection Process

The data collection process began on 30th January 2024 and ended on 22nd March 2024. After IRB approval on January 30, 2024, 178 permission emails were sent to AG head pastors of the SNEMN-affiliated churches, requesting to contact their spiritual leaders to take the survey. The Head Office of the SNEMN compiled the churches affiliated with the network. Only 10 participants, representing 3.5%, responded two weeks after sending the permission letters. A researcher-supervisor consultation suggested that the researcher politely contact some church offices to seek approval. It was still impossible to contact certain churches. New revelations from the rounds prompted a modification of the sample size to a minimum of 60. The fluidity of the population frame challenged accurate sample size calculation. One hundred two churches declined participation or were not interested in the survey. Other challenges were the language constraints of non-English speaking congregations and the lack of spiritual leaders in congregations because of local church polity issues. At the close of data collection, 91 participants responded from a 528-population frame.

Demographic and Sample Data

This research study adopted non-random convenience sampling. Though randomly selected samples represent and infer ideal population attributes for research (Leedy & Ormrod, 2016), it was not possible for this study. Spiritual leaders who assist the head pastor in spiritual oversight were the population of interest. The number of these spiritual leaders must be known to select and form the sample size. It was impossible to know the number of these AG leaders in SNEMN-affiliated churches in Rhode Island, Massachusetts, and Connecticut. With an estimated population size of 528, a sample size of 91 was calculated with a confidence level of 92% and a margin of error of 8% from an online sample size calculator (goodcalculators.com).

Out of the 91 leaders who participated, 18 did not submit responses at various stages, and one respondent indicated he was a pastor, so his response did not count. The survey had clean data from 72 leaders, who made up 79% of the total response.

Data Analysis and Findings

Data was exported from Qualtrics to the IBM SPSS, Version 29 software platform for cleaning, statistics data generation and description, complex calculations, and graphs for statistical analysis. Negative-worded FMS questions 5, 10, 20, 25, 26, 32, and 35 were reverse-coded to reflect the participant's intended response score value. Spiritual leaders' perceptions were analyzed as the independent variable—Biblical engagement (CLS), and the dependent variable—Spiritual formation (FMS). CLS, the 24-item instrument, had two subsets: Frequency counts (Questions 1, 2, 21, 22, 23, and 24) and rated 18-item six Bible Uses (Questions 3 to 20). FMS, the 38-item instrument, is constituted by eight Markers of formation and subdivided into two subscales, FMS-V and FMS-H, to measure spiritual maturity.

Descriptive Statistical Measures

Descriptive statistics is the method used to describe and summarize data with features such as frequency, central tendency, distribution, and variability (Leedy & Ormrod, 2019). This section introduces the frequency counts and independent and dependent variables for the analysis.

Frequency Counts or Frequency of Occurrence (CLS Questions 1 and 2)

The frequency of occurrences is counted to understand the performance of specific actions within a defined period (Roever & Phakiti, 2018). This frequency counts to know how often leaders read the Bible and their preferred interpretation perspectives. CLS question 1 tried to find out how often leaders read the Bible. See Table 3 for frequencies and percentages.

Table 3

Frequencies and Percentages of How Often Leaders Read the Bible

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	A few times a year	1	1.4	1.4	1.4
	Monthly	2	2.8	2.8	4.2
	A few times per month	7	9.7	9.7	13.9
	Weekly	6	8.3	8.3	22.2
	A few times per week	22	30.6	30.6	52.8
	Daily	34	47.2	47.2	100
	Total	72	100.0	100.0	

Figure 1

Histogram of How Often Leaders Read the Bible in Percentages

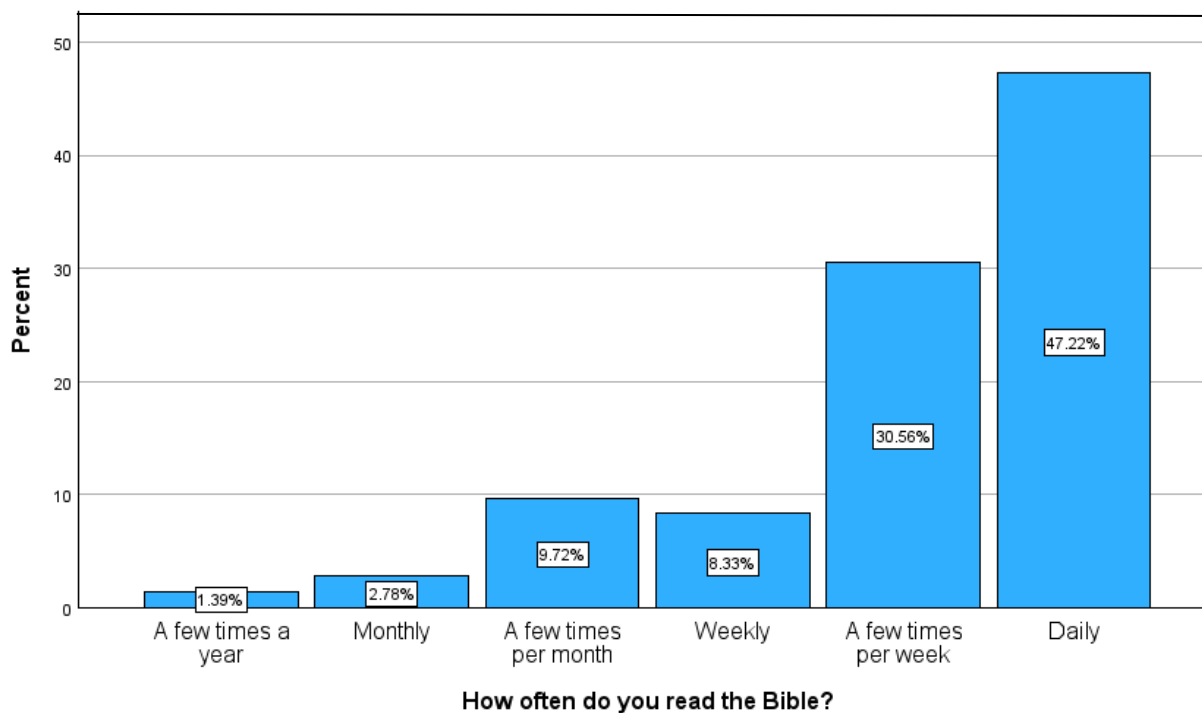
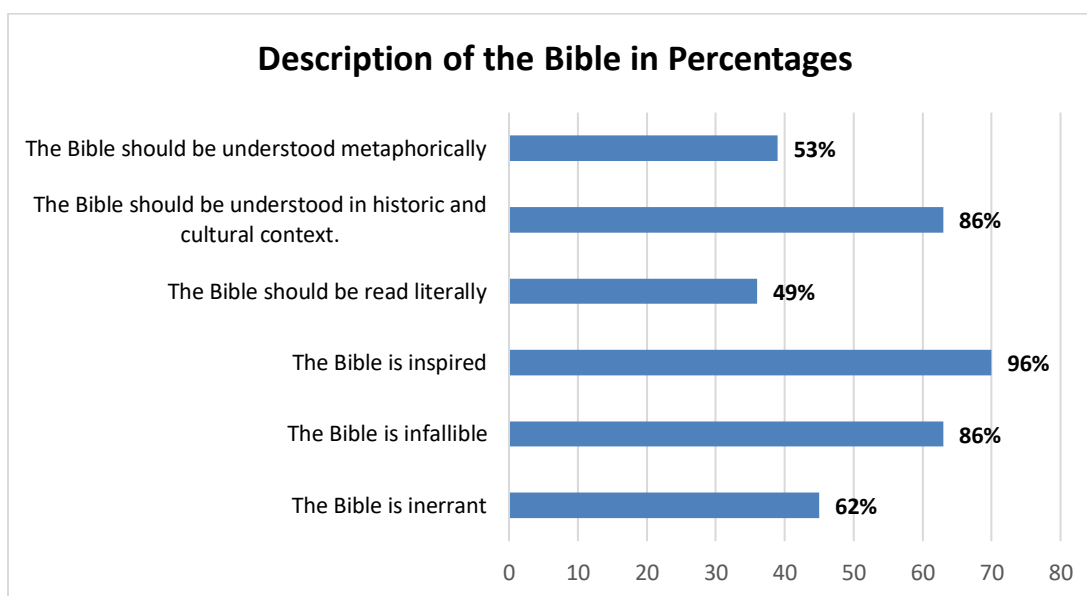


Figure 1 is a graphic representation showing the percentages of how often leaders read the Bible.

CLS question 2 tried to find out leaders' descriptions of the Bible to reveal their interpretation approaches to Scripture. Respondents were asked which term(s) best describe the Bible. They were asked to choose all, some, or none from "inerrant," "infallible," "inspired," "literal," "historical and cultural context," and "metaphorical" in their answers. Figure 2 is the graphic depiction of leaders' description of the Bible.

Figure 2

Bar Chart of How Leaders Describe the Bible in Percentages



Number of Respondents, N =72

Of the 72 respondents, 96% said the Bible is inspired; 86% said the Bible should be understood in a historical and cultural context and the Bible is infallible; 62% said the Bible is inerrant; 53% said the Bible should be understood metaphorically; and 49% said the Bible should be understood literally.

For a robust analysis of the Bible's descriptive terms to further reveal their interpretation approaches, respondents were asked to rate their description of the Bible between 1 and 7 points,

using four selected questions from CLS question 2. In addition, the average of the “spiritual” triangulated questions from the six Bible Uses (Page 110) was included for analysis. The mean score for each rating was analyzed. Scripture is accurate, scored 6.6; Scripture must be understood spiritually, scored 6.5; Scripture must be understood in historical and cultural context, scored 6.4; understood metaphorically, scored 5.4; and Scripture must be understood literally, scored 4.9. These mean values were consistent with leaders’ descriptive terms of the Bible in percentages, as in Figure 2. All Bible interpretation approaches were used, and in this order: Doctrine of Scripture approach, Spiritual approach, Cultural and Context approach, Metaphorical approach, and Literal approach. See Table 4 for the rated mean scores.

Table 4

Statistics of Leaders' Rating of Biblical Meaning-Making

	N	Range	Minimum	Maximum	Sum	Mean	SD
Scripture is Accurate	72	3.00	4.00	7.00	475.00	6.597	.725
Understand Spiritually	72	2.33	4.67	7.00	469.67	6.523	.594
Scripture should be understood in Historical and Cultural Contexts.	72	3	4	7	464	6.44	.669
Scripture should be understood Metaphorically	72	6	1	7	388	5.39	1.67
Scripture should be understood Literally	72	6	1	7	386	4.94	1.71
Valid N (listwise)	72						

This descriptive measure section introduces the independent and dependent variables for the analysis. This descriptive statistic will use the mean and standard deviation or dispersion

from the mean. Before the descriptive statistical measures, a Cronbach alpha analysis was run on CLS and FMS instruments to test the survey instruments' reliability and ensure that the scales consistently measure the same characteristics. See Table 5.

Table 5

Cronbach's Alpha Coefficients for CLS and FMS

	CLS (Bible Uses)	FMS
Cronbach's Alpha, α	0.838	0.845
N of Items	18	38

The Cronbach alpha coefficients, α , were high. The test produced α values of CLS = .838 and FMS = .845, indicating instrument reliability.

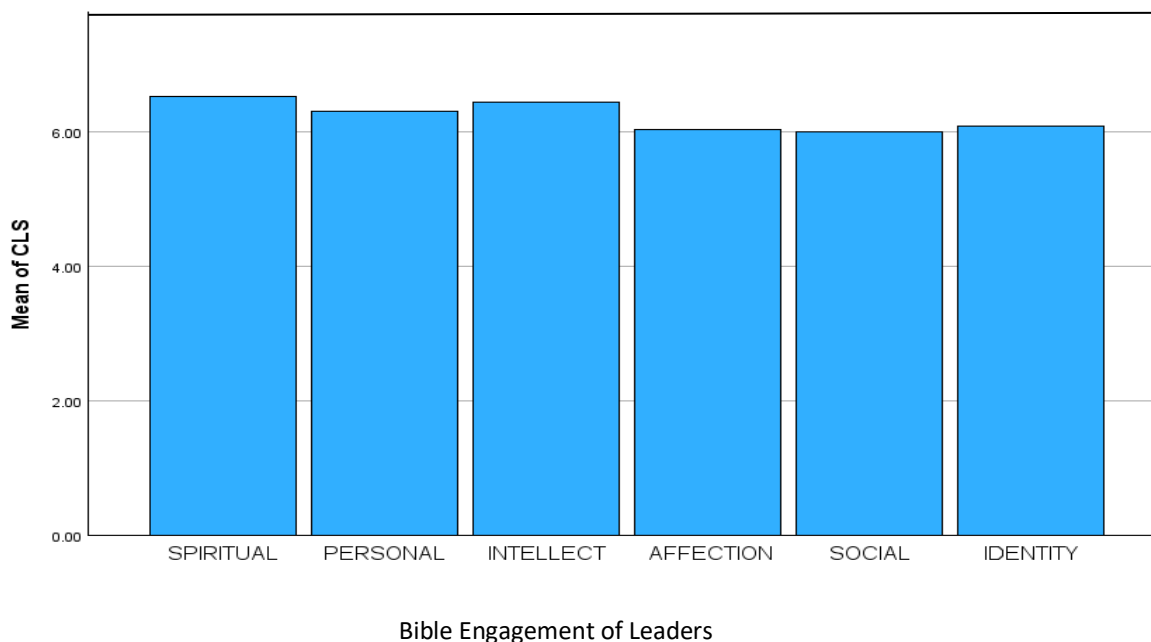
Independent Variable (CLS Questions 3 to 20)

For this study, the independent variable, Bible engagement, was derived from the 18-item CLS Bible Uses (Question 3 to Question 20). This summarizes the characteristics of how Christians engage the Bible in 6 ways. These six Bible Uses are application to the way of life—Personal, studying it—Intellect, affective application—Affection, applying to society—Social, using it to experience the presence of God—Spiritual, and relating it to their identity—Identity. Data for the descriptive statistical measures were rated on a 7-point Likert scale, where 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=slightly disagree, 4=neither agree nor disagree, 5= slightly agree, 6=agree, and 7=strongly agree. Each of the six ways of Bible Uses had six sets of questions asked in 3 different ways (triangulation). An average of each set of triangulated questions indicated a respondent's understanding. A person's score in a triangulated question ranges between 3 and 21 according to how the questions were answered and averaged to a mean between 1 and 7.

Figure 3 is a graph showing the mean of each way of use. The mean scores are as follows: Spiritual = 6.52, Intellect = 6.43, Personal = 6.30, Identity = 6.08, Affection = 6.04, and Social = 6.01. The mean of CLS was calculated by totaling the means of all the six ways of use and dividing the sum by 6, $[6.523 + 6.305 + 6.439 + 6.046 + 6.013 + 6.088]/6 = 6.235$. The standard deviation is .538, meaning the data is clustered around the mean.

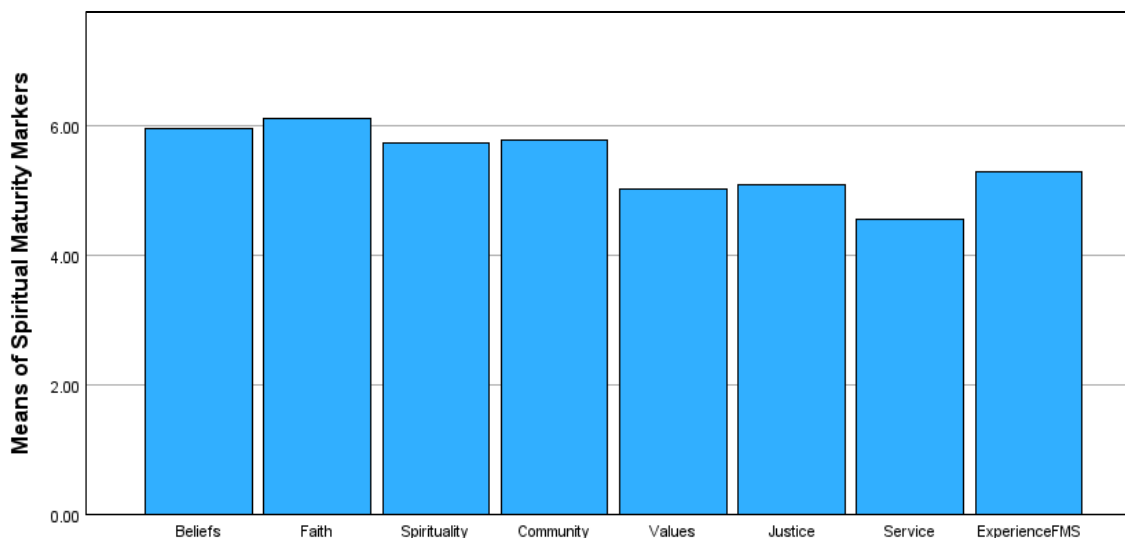
Figure 3

Graph of the Mean Scores of the 6 Bible Uses (CLS)



Dependent Variable (FMS)

The dependent variable, FMS, was a 38-item 7-point Likert scale that measures through 8 markers of behavior consequences of leaders. That is, 1 = Never true, 2 = Rarely true, 3 = True once in a while, 4 = Sometimes true, 5 = Often true, 6 = Almost always true, and 7 = Always true. The lowest possible score is 38, the highest is 266, and the average is 152. Figure 4 depicts the distribution of the mean score of each of the eight FMS markers of the leaders captured by the survey and calculated by SPSS.

Figure 4*Mean Scores of the Eight FMS Markers*

The mean scores of the 8 markers are Faith = 6.11, Beliefs = 5.96, Community = 5.77, Spirituality = 5.73, Experience = 5.52, Social change = 5.09, Value = 5.02, Service = 4.56.

Correlational Analysis

A correlational analysis is a statistical measure of the strength and direction of the association between variables (Leedy & Ormrod, 2016). For this study, Pearson's r was chosen to determine if any relationship exists between Bible reading and the spiritual maturity of AG leaders. The correlation coefficient is between -1, a strong negative correlation, and +1, a strong positive correlation, with 0 as no correlation. Pearson's r was chosen because the data distribution of the variables passed all the normality tests and is widely used (Murray, 2013; Roever & Phakiti, 2018).

A normality test was run on CLS and FMS to determine the distribution of the variables. As shown in Table 6, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk p-values are all less than .05. CLS's $p = .005$, and FMS's $p = .024$. The p values indicate variable normality where $p < .05$.

Table 6

Table of Normality Test for CLS and FMS.

Tests of Normality						
	Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Bible Engagement	.096	72	.099	.948	72	.005
Spiritual Maturity	.098	72	.081	.960	72	.024

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

After a determination that the data (CLS and FMS) follow normal distribution, Pearson's r was computed with the formula: $r = [n(\sum xy) - \sum x \sum y] / \sqrt{[n(\sum x^2) - (\sum x)^2] [n(\sum y^2) - (\sum y)^2]}$, where x is the independent variable, y is the dependent variable, n is the sample size, and Σ is the summation of all values.

Research Question One

Research Question One sought to determine how AG leaders engage with the Bible, as measured by the Christian Life Survey (CLS). It is divided into two parts: the Frequency Counts section and the Descriptive Statistics section. The frequency count explores how often leaders read the Bible and their interpretation approaches to Scripture. The descriptive measure statistically describes data distribution.

Frequency Counts

Almost half of the respondents read the Bible daily, and a third read it a few times a week, as shown in Table 3 and Figure 1. This number sharply contrasts with the rest, making up a fifth of respondents who read the Bible weekly, monthly, or a few times a year. Almost all the leaders, 96% of them, said the Bible is inspired. 86% of the leaders indicated that the Bible is infallible and understood in historical and cultural contexts. More than half of all the leaders believe the Bible is inerrant and should be understood metaphorically and literally, as shown in Figure 2. The rated version of question 2, how leaders describe the Bible, confirms the frequency count result. See Table 4.

Bible Use (Descriptive Statistics)

The six ways leaders use the Bible determine their approach to Scripture. These Bible uses computed from the triangulated questions are: Spiritual = 6.52, Intellect = 6.43, Personal = 6.30, Identity = 6.08, Affection = 6.04, and Social = 6.01. The scores show high means with a range of 0.5 between the minimum and maximum, as shown in Table 7. The mean of CLS was calculated by totaling the means of all the six Bible uses and dividing the sum by 6, $[6.523 + 6.305 + 6.439 + 6.046 + 6.013 + 6.088]/6 = 6.235$. The mean of the CLS distribution is 6.235, with an SD of 0.538 as computed by the SPSS.

For a descriptive statistical analysis, the goodness of fit for normality using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk Test for CLS was conducted, as seen in Table 6. The p-value, .005, was less than .05, suggesting a normal distribution. Also, an SD value of 0.538 indicates that data is clustered around the mean.

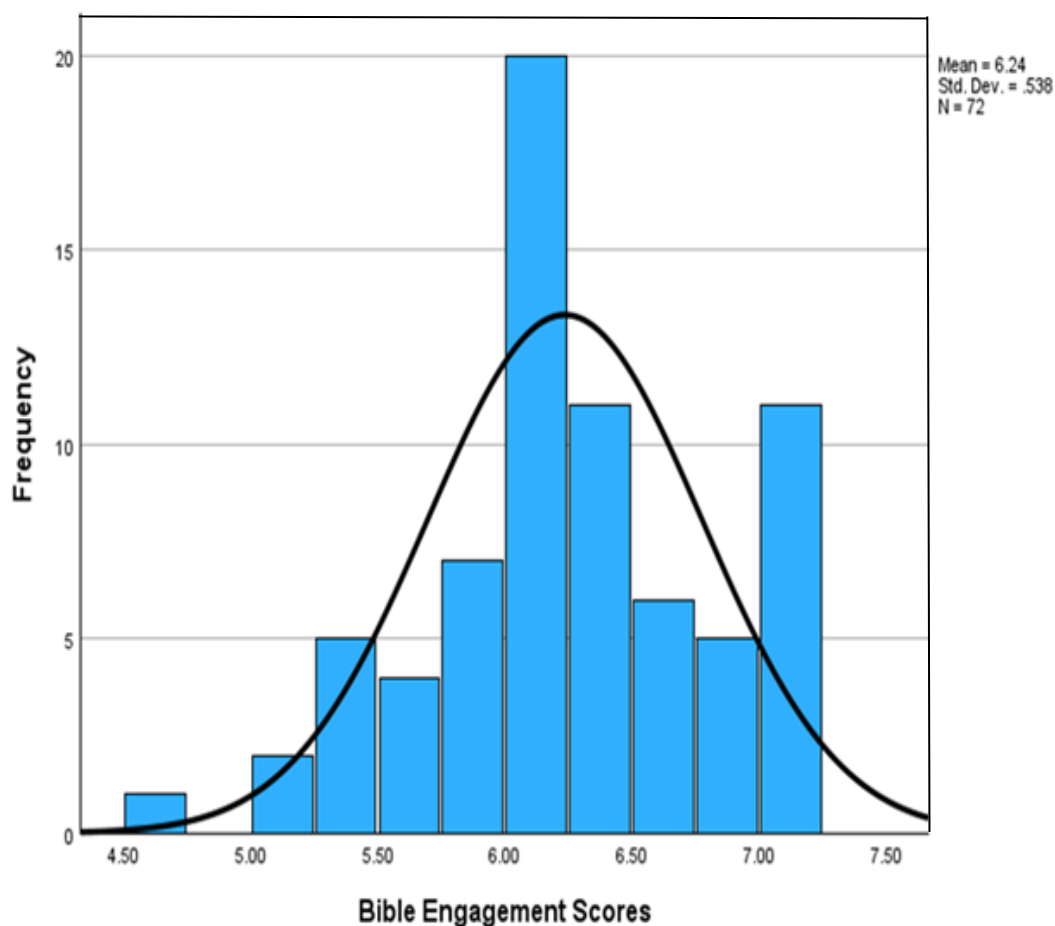
Table 7*Descriptive Statistics of the Six Ways Leaders Use the Bible (CLS)*

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Sum	Mean	Std. Deviation
SPIRITUAL	72	4.67	7.00	469.67	6.5231	.59425
PERSONAL	72	4.00	7.00	454.00	6.3056	.70932
INTELLECT	72	5.00	7.00	463.67	6.4398	.55897
AFFECTION	72	4.00	7.00	435.33	6.0463	.84347
SOCIAL	72	3.00	7.00	433.00	6.0139	.82874
IDENTITY	72	4.00	7.00	438.33	6.0880	.75887
Valid N (listwise)	72					

Figure 5 shows a graphic distribution of CLS frequencies, indicating that the dataset of CLS is normally distributed.

Figure 5

Histogram of Normal Distribution Data of CLS



Research Question Two

Research Question Two sought to answer how spiritual leaders grow spiritually as measured by the FMS instrument. Maturity is measured by eight markers of maturity behavior consequences: Belief in Christ, Experiences, Faith and Life Integration, Seek Spirituality, Seek Community, Life-Affirming Values, Seeks Social Justice, and Service to Humanity. An inherent binary divide of spiritual formation creates an FMS sub-scales, the MFS-V, which measures the leader's intimacy with God, and FMS-H, a measure of how this intimacy directs a leader to act

toward others with pro-social values, justice, and mercy to others (Benson et al., 1993). The FMS-V mean is 6.07, and FMS-H mean is 4.82.

As shown in Table 8, God-intimate markers, faith and beliefs scored higher means of 6.11 and 5.96, respectively. Human-relational markers, Service = 4.56, value = 5.02, and Social Change = 5.09, yielded low means, pointing to human relationship weaknesses.

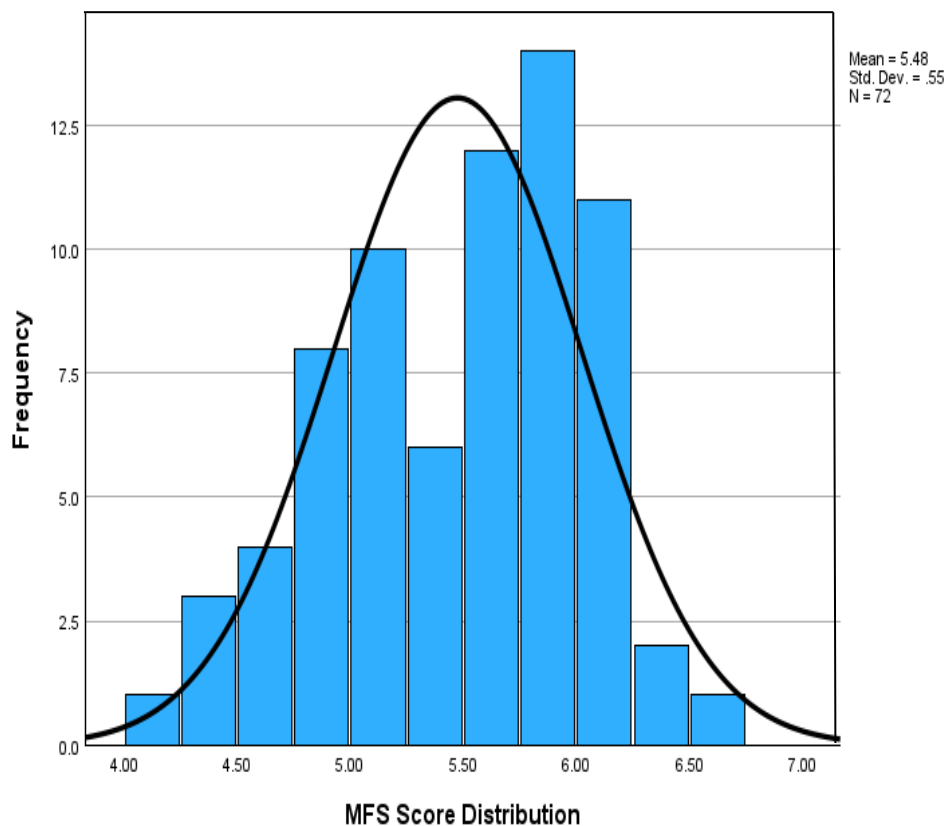
Table 8

Descriptive Statistical Data of the Eight Markers of FMS

	N	Range	Min	Max	Sum	Mean	SD
Faith	72	2.40	4.60	7.00	440.20	6.113	.6331
Beliefs	72	2.40	4.60	7.00	429.400	5.963	.7455
Community	72	3.00	4.00	7.00	416.00	5.777	.7833
Spirituality	72	3.75	3.25	7.00	413.00	5.736	.8587
Experience	72	3.20	3.60	6.80	397.60	5.222	.7782
Social Change	72	4.50	2.50	7.00	367.00	5.097	.9692
Value	72	4.00	2.67	6.67	361.83	5.025	.7540
Service	72	5.40	1.60	7.00	328.80	4.566	1.1031
Valid N	72						

Figure 6

Histogram of Normal Data Distribution of FMS Scores



For a descriptive statistical analysis, the goodness of fit for normality using the Shapiro-Wilk Test for FMS produced a p-value of .024. With an FMS mean of 5.48 and an SD value of 0.550, the data distribution graph of FMS, as shown in Figure 6 suggests that the dataset is normally distributed.

Research Question Three

Research Question Three sought to determine the relationship, if any, that exists between the kinds of Bible reading and the perceived spiritual maturity of AG leaders. Pearson's r-coefficient analysis was used to compute the interrelatedness of the independent and dependent variables and their linear relationship to determine how related Bible engagement is to spiritual

growth. Pearson's r was used because CLS and FMS data sets (a) pass the Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk normality test, and (b) usually are distributed and graphically shown in Figures 5 and 4 (Murray, 2013; Roever & Phakiti, 2018).

Table 9

Descriptive Statistics of CLS and FMS Instruments

	Valid N	Missing	Mean	Median	Mode	SD	Min.	Max.
Bible Engagement (CLS)	72	0	6.236	6.222	7.0	.5382	4.72	7.00
Spiritual Maturity (FMS)	72	0	5.447	5.539	5.41 ^a	.5322	4.15	6.40

a. Multiple modes exist. The smallest value is shown

Table 9 shows descriptive statistics of the two variables for the correlation analysis. The mean and median are similar for both variables, implying that both datasets are evenly distributed, with the same SD of 0.58. Data is clustered around the means. CLS is 6.23 higher than FMS, 5.44.

Table 10

Pearson Correlation Coefficient between CLS Bible Uses and FMS Markers

	Spiritual	Personal	Intellect	Affection	Social	Identity
Service	.159	.216	.079	.089	.044	.101
Justice	.049	.209	.026	.068	-.012	.076
Value	.179	-.028	.155	.001	.022	.101
Community	.188	.232	.269	.053	.310	.170
Spirituality	.256	.358	.245	.079	.249	.229
Faith	.164	.218	.220	-.015	.063	.071
Experiences	.205	.013	.181	.101	-.006	.139
Beliefs	.200	.158	.266	-.142	-.005	.006

Before computing Pearson's r , the coefficient scores among the CLS Bible Uses and FMS Markers were calculated to explore their internal dynamics. As shown in Table 10, all the variables displayed between positive and negative low correlation coefficient values indicate weak relationships according to the Correlation Coefficient Interpretation Guide (Bennett et. al., 2009). See Appendix G.

Finally, to determine if there is a relationship between Bible reading and spiritual maturity of leaders, Pearson's r , correlation coefficient was computed on the SPSS software with the independent variables (CLS) and dependable variables (FMS). The scatterplot chart in Figure 7 shows a graphic representation of the correlation between CLS and FMS.

Figure 7

Scatterplot Chart of Biblical Engagement and Spiritual Maturity

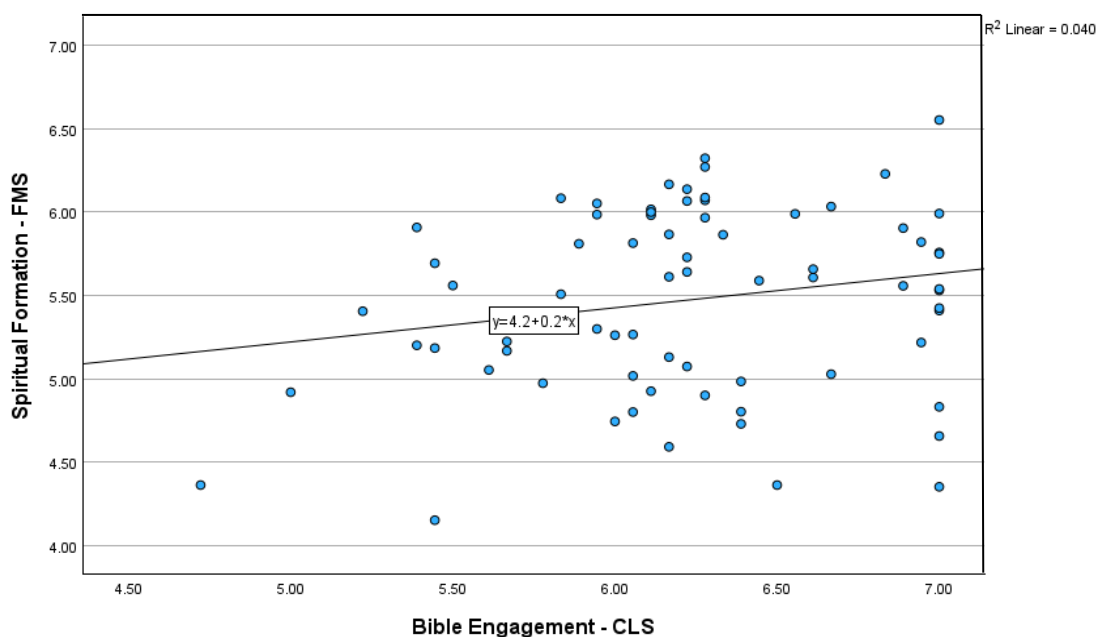


Table 11 shows the correlation coefficient as computed by SPSS. The correlation coefficient for CLS and MFS is 0.205, with a significance level of .084, showing a low positive correlation.

Table 11

Correlation Coefficient Between CLS and FMS

Correlations				
	N		Spiritual Maturity	Bible Engagement
Pearson Correlation	72	Spiritual Maturity	1	.205
Sig. (2-Tailed)				.084
Pearson Correlation	72	Bible Engagement	.205	1
Sig. (2-Tailed)			.084	

Therefore, according to the correlation coefficient guide in Appendix G, there was a weak correlation between Bible reading and spiritual maturity among AG spiritual leaders.

Further Analysis of Research Question Three

Figure 8

Graph of 72 Leaders' Bible Engagement and Spiritual Maturity Mean Scores

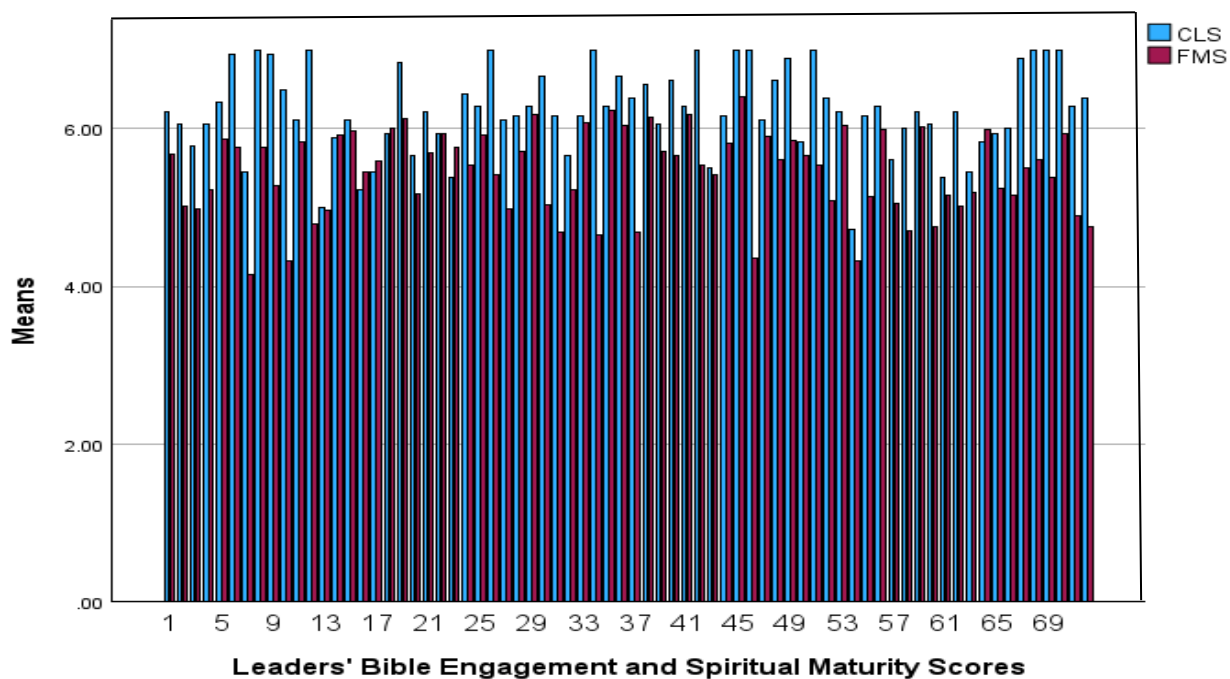


Figure 8 shows the mean scores of 72 leaders on Bible Use and spiritual maturity. 92% of leaders scored higher on Bible engagement than spiritual maturity, confirming a consistency of a higher mean value of CLS than FMS.

Figure 9

Graph of 72 Leaders' FMS-V and FMS-H Mean Scores

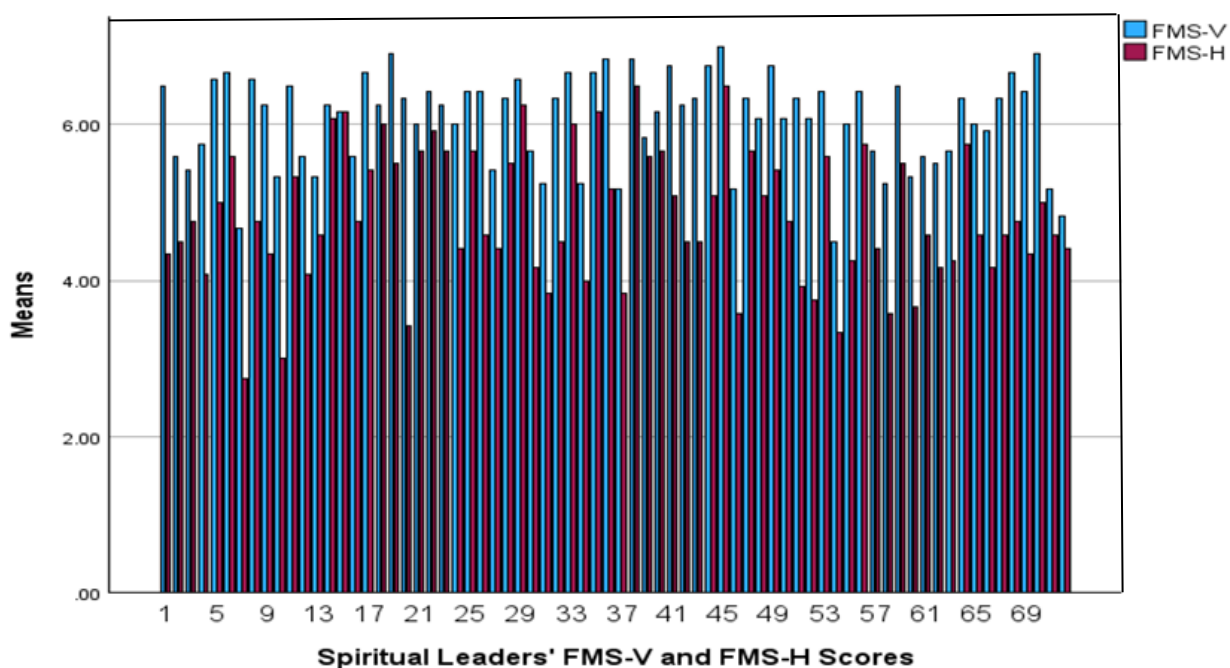


Figure 9 shows that all 72 leaders' FMS-H (Human relationship) values are lower than their corresponding FMS-V (God intimacy) values. Further, the correlation coefficient between CLS and FMS-V and CLS and FMS-H were computed as in Table 12.

Table 12

Correlation coefficient Values of FMS, FMS-V, FMS-H, and CLS.

		FMS-H	FMS-V	FMS	CLS
Pearson Correlation	FMS-H	1	.683**	.881**	.086
Sig. (2-Tailed)			<.001	<.001	.474
Pearson Correlation	FMS-V	.683**	1	.890**	.372**
Sig. (2-Tailed)		<.001		<.001	.001
Pearson Correlation	FMS	.881**	.890**	1	.205
Sig. (2-Tailed)		.086	<.001		.091
Pearson Correlation	CLS	.086	.372**	.205	1
Sig. (2-Tailed)		.474	.001	.091	

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

The r value for CLS/FMS-V, 0.374 was higher than the r value for CLS/FMS-H, 0.086 relationship. The leader-God intimacy is stronger than the leader-others (man) relationship.

Null Hypothesis Analysis

The Null Hypothesis analysis of the results of the leader's Biblical engagement as measured by CLS and spiritual maturity as measured by the FMS surveys were as follows:

H₀1: Hypothesis was not established because there was no difference between groups and no variable relationships.

H₀2: Hypothesis was not established because no experimental factors were assessed on a given observation.

H₀3: There was a very weak statistical correlation between Bible reading by leaders according to the Christian Life Survey (CLS) instrument and leaders' spirituality maturity as measured by the

Faith Maturity Scale (FMS) instrument. The result of Pearson's r correlation was 0.205, a weak positive correlation coefficient value between CLS and FMS. The null hypothesis that there is no correlation between biblical engagement and the perceived spiritual formation of AG leaders was accepted.

Evaluation of the Research Design

This quantitative correlational design sought to obtain information on self-reporting attributes on the association between Bible reading and spiritual maturity. The study chose non-experimental survey instruments to collect data to determine if a linear relationship exists between the two variables (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The data was collected by the Qualtrics platform, a neutral processing source, so that respondents' identities were confidential.

The quantitative descriptive methodology used in this study presents strengths. The design submitted primary data exclusive to the survey analysis. Also, the IBM SPSS software process of data analysis eliminates the introduction of human bias and error that can stain the results. Another strength was that the subscales of the two instruments that collected data from leaders yielded values that revealed the results of the internal dynamics of the variables. For example, data indicated that the leaders reported close relationships with God translated less into discipleship drive.

The study design presents process weaknesses. Participating leaders were to provide useful information on how they are developing spiritually through Bible reading to shape their spiritual lives. However, a low response rate necessitated a downward review of the sample size. Reasons for the low response rate could be attributed to survey fatigue, simple non-interest, and the length of the instrument. The 62 questions that formed the combined questionnaire may have been too long for participants, causing 21% of respondents to abandon their responses at various

stages. That being the case, a small sample size affects research findings, limiting internal and external validity and encumbering the null hypothesis (Leedy & Ormrod, 2019). Another weakness is that convenience sampling utilized in the study is not generalizable, though this sampling technique could be termed purposive sampling and generalizable on all church leaders (Kalton, 2021). Further, reporting self-perception is subjective. Therefore, participants may not have accurately self-assessed, injecting inaccurate data into the study.

A participant who contacted the researcher suggested refining the FMS instrument. This participant pointed to his uneasiness with concepts like "social justice," among others, as inflammatory terms that smack of communism and are loaded with political implications. According to the participant, these terms had a personal negative impact on him.

Chapter Summary

Chapter four opens with the data, computation, analysis, and results of this correlational study. The research presented an assumption that a positive correlation would be found between the independent and dependent variables. Though there was a positive correlation, it was too weak for significance. That initial hypothesis of a linear correlation between the two variables was rejected. The two instruments CLS and FMS solicited adequate responses that yielded information for answers to the three research questions.

Research Question One revealed that spiritual leaders read the Bible frequently. Almost four out of five spiritual leaders engaged the Bible every day or several times a week in various forms. Another significant result was that spiritual leaders appeal to modern hermeneutics and the doctrine of Scripture for exegetical purposes. However, it also emerged that meaning-making through the doctrine of Scripture dominates the interpretation approaches. Research Question

Two revealed remarkably high mean values for leaders' spiritual growth process. However, a leader's growth with God appeared stronger than a leader's growth with humans.

The descriptive statistical analysis was used to assess the distribution of data, describing how dispersed they were from the center. Initial analysis showed normal data distribution in all variables, with data clustered around the means. In this case, Pearson's r correlation was the choice for correlational analysis between the two variables. Since no connection was found between Bible reading and spiritual formation, further studies could be done to determine other factors responsible for AG leaders' spiritual maturity.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

This chapter is a synopsis of the study, which provides valuable information on spiritual leaders' spiritual development through Scripture. It makes inferences from data analysis. This dissertation's final chapter states the research purpose and questions and discusses the research conclusions, implications, applications, limitations, and future research suggestions.

Research Purpose

This quantitative correlational study aimed to determine if any relationship exists between spiritual Bible reading and the perceived spiritual formation of leaders who assist the head pastor in spiritual oversight of the Assemblies of God churches in New England affiliated with the SNEMN. The research's generalizability is limited to spiritual leaders within the population frame because the survey utilized convenience sampling. The following research questions directed the research.

Research Questions

RQ1: How do Assemblies of God deacons engage with the Bible as measured by the Bird (2021) Christian Life Survey (CLS)?

RQ2: How do spiritual leaders grow spiritually as measured by the Faith Maturity Scale (FMS) instrument?

RQ3: What relationships, if any, exist between kinds of Bible reading practices as measured by CLS and perceived spiritual formation as measured by the FMS?

Research Conclusions, Implications, and Applications

Much research has documented the significance of Scripture to spiritual formation. This study's literature review provided contributions of Harvey (2012), Westerfield (2014), and Harris (2020) on the roles of Christian education in spiritual maturity. However, how strategic

learning in biblical engagement facilitates the transformative process of growth is not empirically documented. The core of this study is how text engagement shapes leaders' spiritual lives for others' benefit. The study did not find a statistically significant correlation between Bible reading and spiritual maturity, and the null hypothesis was accepted.

Based on these findings, the study yielded the following conclusions: (a) Christian leaders read the Bible regularly and understand it from all the Scripture interpretation perspectives; (b) Christian leaders' high spiritual maturity and intimacy with God are not correspondingly reflected in pro-human services; (c) Bible engagement and cognitive reading alone are not enough to trigger change because spiritual maturity is non-linear, complex, and multifaceted.

Research Conclusions

The research results suggest that no statistically significant correlation exists between Bible reading and the perceived spiritual formation of Christian leaders ($r = 0.205$ with a significance level of $.084$), though a positive weak relationship exists. Therefore, the hypothesis was not rejected. AG Leaders read the Bible regularly; 78% read the Bible every day or several times a week. They also engage the ancient book from perspectives of doctrines of Scripture and all the scientific methods of interpretation. The high mean of Bible Use (CLS), 6.32, confirms the use of all the Bible interpretation approaches and high Bible engagement. However, the high Bible engagement mean value contrasts with a lower spiritual maturity mean of 5.44. Figure 8 illustrates this, where 92% of the 72 respondents scored higher mean in Bible Use than spiritual maturity. All 72 respondents scored higher values in FMS-V than in FMS-H, as Seen in Figure 9.

The internal subscale values of FMS (FMS-V, 6.07 and FMS-H, 4.82) indicate that the personal connection with God was not translated into an equivalent relationship with humans.

The internal coefficient values between the six Bible uses and the eight markers also show weak values between .358 and -.142. Flowing from this, the statistically high scores of CLS (6.32) and FMS (5.44) contradicting the no statistically significant correlation coefficient (.205) introduce practical complexities into the relationship between the two variables over the long-held perceived linear connection between them. Discussions of the study findings will revolve around these complex realities through the three research questions.

Bible Engagement Strategies of Leaders

Research Question One sought to find out how Christian leaders engage the Bible to rightly divide (interpret) the word of truth (2 Timothy 2:15). The Christian leaders who participated in the study read the Bible regularly as four out of five respondents engage the Bible every day or several times a week. The regular Bible reading by the leaders under study contrasts with literature—The American Bible Society (2020) and Klet (2020) document Christians' decline in Bible reading. The decline in Bible reading culture documented in literature may be on account of leaders not passing on that frequent Bible reading discipline to their followers. Details will be discussed in the next subsection.

Harvey (2012) agrees that spiritual reading must be a deep practice. However, the dissertation did not provide data on spiritual reading but instead explored how spiritual reading might be understood. Also, Harvey (2012) did not examine how Scripture must be engaged to elicit spiritual maturity but relies on assumptions. Harvey's study, unlike this study, did not deal with meaning-making approaches to text in spiritual reading.

Respondents in this study engage the Scripture from all traditional and scientific hermeneutical-exegetical perspectives. This result also conforms to the literature, which states that the Bible must be read from all hermeneutical perspectives (Schnieders, 2002; Muto, 2011,

2012; Van der Merwe, 2015b; Brandt, 2017; McMahon, 2021). However, there are still pieces of evidence of gaps in meaning-making approaches to the text (Klein et al., 2004). Personal theological perspective plays a significant role in how Christians make meaning of the gospel. A lot of Bible readers do not undertake the meaning process objectively. Meanwhile, understanding the text is crucial to forming a biblical worldview. Reading the Bible with presumptions, personal agendas, and biases colors and obstructs text interpretations and exegesis. These blur the growth path and resist spiritual development (Mulholland, 2006; Muto, 1976).

Behavior Markers and Discipleship of Christian Leaders

Research Question Two sought to know if regular Bible engagement translates to intimacy with God and the possibility of that intimacy reflected in their relationship with others. This is because “Christians feed on Scripture” for spiritual development (Peterson, 2006, p. 18). 92% of respondents scored lower in spiritual formation than Biblical engagement (Figure 8). Though these leaders self-reported an overall appreciable degree of maturity relative to Benson et al. (1993) maturity rating, the consistent Bible reading has not translated into corresponding levels of growth. Van der Merwe (2015b) explains that the reader's response is not only text interpretation but also embodying the text, applying or living the significance of the interpretation. Based on this explanation, this study's data (lower spiritual maturity mean of 5.44 than Bible reading mean of 6.23) does not fully support respondents' comprehensive text embodiment. Hence, the study results suggest that there is a deficiency in discipleship. This mirrors the caution in James 1:22, “Be doers of the word, and not hearers only.” This means that Bible reading should not remain a cognitive and intellectual activity but rather the implementation and performance of what is read.

Westerfield's (2014) study targeted the impact of the lectio divina experience, a specific and spiritual discipline of spiritual reading on spiritual formation. Westerfield measured and found a positive impact of this aspect of spiritual reading on the intimacy level of Christians. However, the study lacks the nuanced Biblical engagement data of this research study. Westerfield did not measure the influence of that divine intimacy on others (discipleship). Meanwhile, Peterson (2006) argues that the substance of our intimacy with God is found in our proper relationship with others, which was not measured by Westerfield.

The data from this study reveals a self-referenced notion of spirituality, elevating personal connection with God and downplaying service to others. However, this also presents an opportunity for growth and improvement. The observation from the two maturity subscales FMS-V mean (6.07) and FMS-H mean (4.82) reveal a lower discipleship drive in leaders. Further, the FMS Faith marker scored the highest mean of 6.11, and the Service marker scored the lowest mean of 4.56. The indication is that leaders are not transmitting the image of God to others in 'spiritual union with divinity that the image represents' (Kilner, 2015, p. 120). The internal coefficient matrix also reveals weak spiritual maturity toward man. Refer to Table 7. This is confirmed by the reviewed literature. First, research has shown no statistical character differences between Christians and non-Christians (Hawkins & Parkinson, 2011, pp. 88-91). Secondly, the sudden rise in the concept of spiritual formation is due to a lack of the fruits of the spirit among Christians (Willard, 2000). These findings, while highlighting areas for improvement, also inspire hope for a more balanced and fruitful spiritual formation among Christian leaders.

Discipleship Development Through Scripture by Christian Leaders

Research Question Three was to ascertain a connection between the biblical text engagement and the display of the fruits of the spirit by Christian leaders. However, this study did not find a statistically significant connection, although respondents scored high on both primary instruments, with lower values on the FMS. With no systematic relationship between Variables, the higher scores in CLS may be due to chance. The result also suggests that other factors or limitations in instrument measurement are at play.

However, because 92% of the 72 respondents scored higher in CLS than FMS (Figure 8), the higher CLS values were not by chance and therefore ruled out. Rather, observation pointed to other possible factors. These factors are (a) text misinterpretation, (b) the use of God as a tool to advance personal ventures, (c) overdependence on intimacy with God, and (d) overreliance on text cognition. Overreliance on the text cognitively impairs social skills, disregards experiential learning, and emphasizes rote text memorization. Table 13 shows the correlation coefficient data between CLS and the internal dynamics of FMS subscales (FMS-V and FMS-H).

Table 13

Matrix Table of Correlation Coefficient of CLS, FMS, FMS-V, & FMS-H

	FMS	FMS-V	FMS-H	CLS
FMS	1			
FMS-V	.890	1		
FMS-H	.881	.683	1	
CLS	.205	.372	.086	1

As shown in Table 13, the r-value of FMS-V/CLS is .372 while the r-value of FMS-H/CLS is .086. The results point to the fact that leaders are not fully converting equivalent rewards of their intimacy with God to the benefit of others (Willard, 2000). The reason is the presence of extra-biblical factors that are either resisting change or not reinforced for positive outcomes.

When spirituality is defined in the context of knowledge acquisition for discipleship (Piercy, 2013), understanding what is read controls and impacts the leader. Mezirow also explains that culture and situation are controlling factors in learning. Clarity of Scripture, an act of intentionality, and Holy Spirit intervention reinforces understanding. In this case, text interpretation, which goes through extra-scriptural processes, is basic to spiritual formation. Mulholland (2006) discusses other resisting elements that create gaps. These gaps develop because of differences in the ancient and modern meanings of biblical images observed through different cultural lenses (Klein et al., 2004). Also, content and contextual interpretation difficulties genuinely arise. For example, in recent trend analysis of the theological synthesis of biblical interpretations and spiritual formation, a gap was recognized in symbolic and imagery interpretation (McMahon, 2021). Since the Christian faith heavily relies on imagination, mysteries, and beauty in creation, aesthetic interpretation was recommended to fill this gap. This is a confirmation of this researcher's proposal in the literature review that a multi-dimensional approach to text interpretation will resolve text interpretation inadequacies.

Thirdly, measurement limitations could be responsible for the non-existence of correlation between the variables—the instrument design may not have accurately captured all change elements responsible for transformation or false self-reporting. False self-reporting is rejected because of the consistency in data. The study's results suggest that human controlling factors exist as an agency responsible for spiritual development (Piercy, 2013). This is because

human nature operates at different dimensions. Also, inadequate text understanding, though participants were regular readers of the Bible, could precipitate growth inhibitions (Mulholland, 2006; Muto, 1976).

Contrary to this study's results, Harris (2020) found a significant relationship between Sunday school participation, though just a fraction of the entirety of Christian education, and spiritual formation. However, a lack of Christian instruction for discipleship was detected. This is a similarity shared by both studies. Also, Harris' study was confined to Sunday school Bible study and was silent on the whole gamut of Bible engagement.

The literature review documents that Richard Foster and Dallas Willard established the Renovare Institute dedicated to spiritual formation (Howard, 2018). It was to bridge the gap between personal and community formation. Within an organizational culture like the church community, Renovare emphasizes the transformation of the inner spirit of man through Christ for the benefit of others. Here, learning is along a tradition that transcends the individual. Pettit (2008) acknowledges this process of character transformation and ties in the community of the Triune God and the church community. The author contextualizes the process as an integrated whole, the love of God and others through relational habits and behaviors. The literature documents the Renovare Institute transitioning spiritual formation from a personal process to a community-based concept.

The literature review records that Christian leaders are pursuing new, effective, practical, and powerful ways of being Christlike. They are doing so by restoring tried-and-tested practices (spiritual reading and *lectio divina*) and finding diverse, workable spiritual formation practices that result in different concepts and constructs (Teo, 2017). *Sola Scriptura*, which places more burden on the text for spiritual formation than other factors, does not align with this study's

results. It is, however, confirmed that biblical text remains the authoritative source of spiritual growth. The research study notes that this conclusion is advanced by the complex processes of growing through Scripture, revealed by data analysis. This study's findings lend themselves to implications and applications.

Theoretical Implications

The most significant implication of this study is the concept of change. It has implications for Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory. This concept of transformative learning is analogous to the Pauline transformation for sanctification. TLT is a home for spiritual formation and Scripture text (Beard, 2017; Backfish, 2021), linked to discipleship (Illeris, 2003), and integrated with leadership in the church and workplace (Dirks, 1998). Just as the theory has evolved through phases and the addition of significant elements, this researcher believes there is still a need for a holistic contextual framework to transform experiential adult learning for behavior change. This study's result partly addresses the criticism that "the confusion between learning and development is still not clearly resolved" (Mezirow & Associates, 2000, p. 343), by bringing theory and practice into unity. This study's results provide a backdrop of data for further studies in comprehensive learning and Christian Education.

Change is fundamentally an experiential learning that transforms human behavior. This change experience springs from text interpretation and a transformative learning experience, which triggers a paradigm shift in the reader's thought process. The apostle Paul's transformation concept for spiritual growth in Romans 12:2 also points to understanding the Word as a change process. The correct interpretation of Scripture draws out meaning, an outcome of a complex discourse between the reader and the text (Klien et al., 2004). It is noteworthy that incorrect interpretation spawns meaning distortions alongside experiential

mediating factors. Removal of obstructive mediating factors that could negatively impact interpretation lends a reinforced reader's response to the transformation process.

In 2 Corinthians 10:3-5, the apostle Paul contextualizes transformation as the internalization of the Word clothed with change authority. He explains that the gospel displaces destructive knowledge, thoughts, and arguments. Therefore, Christlikeness takes occupancy only when the Word deposes false doctrines and disobedience. This is achieved through all the prescribed spiritual practices listed in Ephesians 6:13-18.

Secondly, the study's implications put a theoretical burden on understanding the dynamics of the controlling factors of spiritual development. The study results challenge the assumption that Bible reading alone is enough to trigger spiritual formation. It is a realization that transformation is a non-linear practice of a progressive change of life through mind renewal. The spiritual journey that shapes a text reader is a complex and nuanced multifaceted process (Van der Merwe, 2015; Schneiders, 2016). This is revealed and confirmed by this study's results. It brings the complex context of learning with the brain, emotion, and experience situated within the community because the mind does not operate autonomously. For example, Job with solid Scripture knowledge and love for God never appreciated his disorienting dilemma until a social interaction with friends in a community triggered divine revelation in him.

Finally, the study has implications for a theoretical framework that revisits the need to expand and accommodate other extra-biblical complex relationships. The sufficiency of Scripture filters extra-biblical elements to gain transformative potency (Vanhoozer, 2021). Some of these determinants reinforce maturity while others obstruct (Muto, 1976; Mulholland, 2006; Millar, 2021). Mulholland states that obstacles to formative reading are generated in Bible readers in whom the text falls short of theological specificity and depth. Theological perspectives

also inhibit formative reading (The Baker Illustrated Bible Dictionary, 2013). Obstacles are also formed in the reader's environments when readers get lost in the role of Scripture and use text as a tool to perform the reader's ideas or personal desires. For example, imprecatory prayer with the Psalms blocks transformation. Culturally specific images that could block rightful interpretation can advance formation when understood as timeless images with inherent messages. This blockade was revealed by this study in the moderate 53% of respondents who rely on the metaphorical interpretation approach. This is reversible through the clarity and sufficiency of Scripture (Vanhoozer, 2010; Hathaway, 2021), with conscious reliance on aesthetic interpretation (Klein et al., 2004; Mulholland, 2006; Medvedev, 2012; Schnieders, 2016).

Empirical Implications

The significance of this study is that it provides data as a foundation for further research to bridge the gap in the interrelatedness of Bible reading and spiritual formation. There is little literature and no data on this (Ovwigbo et al., 2016). Most of the observations are steeped in the spiritual formation process without a correspondent focus on how that change is processed by Bible reading. The assumption is that Scripture alone has the authority to bring change. Waggoner's (2008) data-rich research on spiritual formation leads to discipleship. The research was rooted in the authority of Scripture (pp. 17-18) and concludes that the development of spiritual maturity is uncomplicated and strengthened through frequent Bible reading. However, the work is bereft of data on how Bible reading transforms. Hawkins and Parkinson (2011) also documented spiritual growth, heavily centered on biblical authority. Like this study, Hawkins' study result pointed out the usefulness of catalysts like spiritual disciplines, community, and accountability to leverage change. Therefore, this study calls for further research to explore the extent to which extra-biblical factors influence spiritual maturity.

This study adds knowledge to the literature, advocating the reassessment of assumptions relative to the impact of Bible reading on leaders' discipleship development. Because maturity is measured by the degree of discipleship drive, exploration of additional spiritual practices will enrich the collection of elements that shape spirituality. Pettit (2008) closely links spiritual maturity to leadership. Other studies evaluate the impact of spiritual practices and values on leadership effectiveness in the workplace (Ali & Zaky, 2018) but without the complementary contributions from all other controlling factors. This study emphasizes applying a varied and nuanced understanding of multifaceted spiritual growth, leadership development, and the complex factors that aid the phenomenon.

Application

The findings of this study imply that seminaries, religious organizations, and churches will consider making a paradigm shift from traditional cognitive and theoretical Christian instruction to a thick concentration of practices. This research has ramifications for Christian education, benefiting biblical literacy toward sanctification. This study was intended to find today's Christian leaders' discipleship patterns and solve tomorrow's problem of how to shape their spiritual maturity through Christian education. Results confirm that instruction is not by information transfer; instead, mentorship and apprenticeship shape formative disciplines (Wilhoit, 1996; Smith, 2006). This requires contextualization of spiritual extra-biblical knowledge that transforms and conveys the meaning of the text for performance through modeling (Maddix & Thompson, 2012). In this regard, a multi-dimensional interpretation approach to meaning-making in the biblical text is advocated, as confirmed by literature.

Christian leaders must intentionally convert the full outcome of their intimacy with God to find expression in community interaction. The issue of discipleship inadequacy suggested by

the study result is not due to the lack of Bible engagement. Instead, it references the inability to utilize that engagement to reinforce personal character integrity to influence others. In the renewal process, cognizance of veiled factors that hinder or reinforce spiritual formation would build an impactful spiritual leader (Mulholland, 2006). Following this, control and manipulation of distilling learning elements in the faith believers' community maximize leadership performance (Habermas, 1984). They are pertinent to the call of the Great Commission in Matthew 28:20.

The study reveals that leadership discipleship should be the standard measure for spiritual maturity. Christian leaders benefit from this study's empirical result through knowledge and the disclosure of diverse determining factors of discipleship. Before the apostle Paul's transformation concept in Romans 12:2, setting oneself apart for God's use was understood as sanctification in the Old Testament (Dunson, 2019). This is expressed in services to others, which means intimacy with Christ, which He alluded to in Matthew 25:40. The study results bring the church's attention to the intentionality of advancing flourishing approaches to Christian instruction. For example, leaders take the FMS survey and similar activities occasionally to assess their discipleship in proportion to their intimacy with God and bring attention to subtle factors that drive fellowship. The research results further bring to sharp focus a recognition of community as the contagion of holiness and the crucible of reciprocal spiritual regeneration where learners and mentors interact (Pettit, 2008). This knowledge is consequential for the church, particularly the Assembly of God church, which believes that a transformed life is the best a faith believer brings to leadership (Carter, 2021; www.snemn.com).

Finally, the study has practical implications for spiritual leadership development through discipleship. Pettit (2008) links spiritual maturity directly to leadership—discipleship is the

measure of maturity. Scripture authority does not solely generate spiritual formation. It takes the art and science of human intentionality to develop applicable disciplines and the Holy Spirit corporation to bring change. Therefore, as Christ exemplified service by washing his disciples' feet in John 13:15, leadership development is through service, as empirically demonstrated by this study's results. Literature lists leadership in governance as a possible catalyst or inhibitor to spiritual regeneration in the church community.

Research Limitations

The foremost limitation of this study was the smaller sample size than anticipated. Some head pastors declined their leaders' participation or showed unwillingness. Language barriers, changes in contact and email addresses, and the impossibility of contacting some churches were limiting factors. Some pastors did not feel obligated to respond to the emails. Leedy and Ormrod (2016) cautioned that people receiving email questionnaires would not respond, creating a low return rate.

The second limitation was the sampling technique—convenience sampling, which is improbable in producing a representative sample, which is a major inferential deficiency about the population interest that limits the scope of generalizability. However, this convenience sampling mimics purposive sampling, when a group represents a diverse perspective on an issue or a population. (Kabir, 2016; Leedy & Ormrod, 2019, p. 178). In this instance, this group of leaders can represent the entire church leadership as well as extrapolate on the larger deacon board or elder population in the SNEMN population frame.

The third research limitation of concern is self-rating. Data from self-reported responses rely on memory, recalls, and inaccuracies. They are also subject to social desirability biases and exaggerations because respondents may choose the usual socially acceptable answers instead of

being honest. Survey results from self-reporting are sometimes modest or presumptuous (Bradley et al., 2006).

The fourth research limitation is the structure of the instrument. This research carried data on a combination of two instruments, the FMS and CLS into one questionnaire. Competent academics designed the instruments with proven reliability and validity. However, the large number of questions that constituted a single instrument on the Qualtrics platform limited the response completion rate to 79%. The FMS has negatively worded questions. It was possible that some responders did not consider the negatively worded nature of these questions in their ratings. After recording the rating values, their intended score might not have been captured. Also, the research is limited by items represented on the instruments. Other subtle spiritual practices and disciplines that measure spirituality may not have been included in the questionnaire.

Further Research

The first recommendation is to conduct an identical quantitative survey design with different instruments measuring Bible reading and spiritual maturity. The Bible engagement and spiritual maturity questionnaires could be crafted with this study's results in mind. This will empirically reveal other factors that influence spiritual growth. A similar survey with built-in components is recommended to compare the impacts of Bible reading and extra-biblical elements on spiritual maturity.

Secondly, an identical study with a pastor population frame is recommended. This will provide data on this group of leaders regarding the relationship between Bible reading and spiritual maturity. With this quantitative survey design, a study can be conducted on AG leaders in a different geographical area or with a distinct Christian denomination population.

It is recommended that with a quantitative survey design and a larger sample size with probability sampling, a study should be conducted to observe the connection between Bible engagement and spiritual maturity. It is recommended that an identical quantitative survey design with a different population frame in different geographical areas be conducted to measure the leadership impact of Christians.

Finally, another identical research is recommended but with a different methodology. A mixed method is proposed so that the qualitative component digs deeper into identifying other controlling factors that influence spiritual maturity. Along this line, a qualitative study is recommended where the researcher would examine the impact and relationship between Bible reading and the spiritual maturity of Christian leaders. The qualitative study would reveal the reach contexts of the data.

Summary

This research intends to find out how AG spiritual leaders grow spiritually through Biblical engagement and whether they are connected. No statistically significant connection between the variables was found, suggesting that spiritual maturity is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon without a guaranteed simple formula. These leaders often read the Bible, relying on all interpretative approaches to understanding God's Word.

The Christian leaders under study are growing spiritually. However, the exhibition of the fruit of the spirit which is the product and evidence of their true divine connection is deficient, consistent with the assumption that prompted the research. Ratification of disparities between life towards God and life towards man lies in a conscious and intentional formative reading. It also lies in experiential, contextual, and extra-biblical factors that may play significant roles in growth. This is captured by Piercy (2013), that "a biblical anthropology embraces human nature

as physical, emotional, cognitive, and spiritual with the recognition that adults are capable of learning within each of those realms” (para. 1). In this case, believers must consciously perform in all these realms to fully grow into Christlikeness.

Finally, the results demonstrate that impactful leadership is discipleship-dependent. Christ contextualizes discipleship as personal service to man which flows out as an act of worship in Matthew 25:40. As significant as the authority of Scripture is in the change process, it remains printed text without human conscious embodiment. Hence, human involvement is key to animating the text. The research design delimited the effectiveness of leadership on followers in Chapter One. Nonetheless, the study results looped back pointing to a strong measure of leadership influence as a standard for effective discipleship. This forms the core of the Christlike journey without which there is no spiritual maturity.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A - Permission Request Letter

Leader Name
Church Name
Church Address

Dear Head Pastor,

As a graduate student in the John W. Rawlings School of Divinity at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Doctor of Education (EdD) degree. The title of my research project is, A Correlational Study Between Spiritual Bible Reading and Spiritual Formation of Leaders in Pentecostal Churches and the purpose of my research is to determine if a relationship exists between spiritual Bible reading and the perceived spiritual formation of deacons of the Assemblies of God churches in the New England area.

I am writing to request your permission to contact deacons or elders or officers, who are elected or appointed to assist the pastor in spiritual oversight of your church and to invite them to participate in my research study. If permission is granted, I am requesting that you make the survey link available to your deacons/elders/like office holders on my behalf. They will take the survey by clicking this hyperlink (). You may also respond by email to [REDACTED] and choose any of the options in the attached permission response letter template (attachment 1) for your convenience.

Participants will be asked to complete the attached survey. Participants will be presented with an information sheet prior to participating. Taking part in this study is completely voluntary, and participants are welcome to discontinue participation at any time before submitting the survey.

Thank you for considering my request. If you choose to grant permission, please respond by email to [REDACTED]. An SNEMN permission letter document is attached (attachment 2) for your convenience. Also attached is the Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved consent form (attachment 3) to confirm that this research has been approved.

Respectively yours,
Mark K. Buku
Doctor of Education

Appendix B - Recruitment Email

Dear deacon/elder,

As a doctoral candidate in the John W. Rawlings School of Divinity at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Doctor of Education (EdD) degree. The purpose of my research is to determine if a relationship exists between spiritual Bible reading and the perceived spiritual formation of deacons of the Assemblies of God churches in the New England Area affiliated with the Southern New England Ministry Network, and I am writing to invite you to join my study.

Participants must be elected or appointed deacons, elders, or officers to assist the head pastor in spiritual oversight. Participants will be asked to take an anonymous, online survey. It should take approximately 20 minutes to complete the procedure listed. Participation will be completely anonymous, and no personal, identifying information will be collected.

To participate, please click here ([hyperlink](#)) to complete the study survey. An information sheet is provided as the first page of the survey. The information sheet contains additional information about my research. Because participation is anonymous, you do not need to sign and return the consent document. After you have read the consent form, please click the button to proceed to the survey. Doing so will indicate that you have read the consent information and would like to take part in the study.

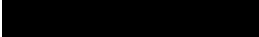
Thank you. I am excited to learn what America's Pentecostal Christian leaders have to say concerning this subject.

Sincerely,

Mark K. Buku

Doctoral Candidate

Rawlings School of Divinity, Liberty University



Appendix C - Reminder Letter to Participants

Dear Deacon/Elder,

As a graduate student in the John W. Rawlings School of Divinity at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Doctor of Education (EdD) degree. Last week/two weeks ago an email was sent to you inviting you to participate in a research study. This follow-up email is being sent to remind you to complete the survey. If you would like to participate and have not already done so, the deadline for participation is [Date].

If you choose to participate, you will be asked to click on the link to Qualtrics and complete the short, multiple-question survey. It should take approximately 20 minutes for you to complete the procedure listed. Your participation will be completely anonymous, and no personal, identifying information will be required.

To participate, please click here ([hyperlink](#)) to complete the study survey. As a reminder, the information sheet is provided as the first page of the survey. The information sheet contains additional information about my research, please click on the survey link at the end of the informed consent document to indicate that you have read it and would like to take part in the survey.

Thank you. I am excited to learn what America's Pentecostal Christian leaders have to say concerning this subject!

Sincerely,

Mark K. Buku
Doctoral Candidate
Rawlings School of Divinity, Liberty University


Appendix D - Information Sheet

Title of the Project: A Correlational Study Between Spiritual Bible Reading and Spiritual Formation of Leaders in Pentecostal Churches

Principal Investigator: Mark K. Buku, John W. Rawlings School of Divinity, Liberty University

Invitation to be part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be a deacon, an elder, or an officer elected or appointed to assist the head pastor in spiritual oversight in the Assemblies of God church in CT, MA, or RI. 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.

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

The purpose of the study is to determine if a relationship exists between spiritual Bible reading and the perceived spiritual formation of deacons of the Assemblies of God churches in the New England Area affiliated with the Southern New England Ministry Network (SNEMN).

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: Complete a survey of 62 multiple-choice questionnaires via Qualtrics that will take about 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. Participants would partake in a study of learning that will inform Bible instruction. Participant's contributions will influence interventions for learning outcomes that will be beneficial to academia and society.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The expected risks from participating 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. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

- Participant responses will be anonymous.
- The data will be stored in a password-locked computer. Data files will be permanently deleted from the hard drive after five years.

Is study participation voluntary?

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

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

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please exit the survey and close your internet browser. Your responses will not be recorded or included in the study.

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

The researcher conducting this study is Mark K. Buku. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact him at [REDACTED]. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Timothy Chochrell at [REDACTED].

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 IRB. Our physical address is Institutional Review Board, [REDACTED], [REDACTED] our phone number is [REDACTED] and our email address is [REDACTED].

Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.

Appendix E - Christian Life Survey Instrument

Bible Uses

[Redacted]

- Never,
- A few times per year,
- Monthly,
- A few times per month,
- Weekly,
- A few times per week,
- Daily.

[Redacted]

*For each question below you will have to give a score on a scale from 1 to 7, with 1 meaning that you strongly disagree with the statement and 7 meaning that you strongly agree with the statement.

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Slightly disagree	Neutral	Slightly agree	Agree	Strongly agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

When you hear or read the Bible, which of these are true for you?

		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
7	[Redacted]							
8	[Redacted]							
9	[Redacted]							
10	[Redacted]							
11	[Redacted]							

12	[REDACTED]								
13	[REDACTED]								
14	[REDACTED]								
15	[REDACTED]								
16	[REDACTED]								
17	[REDACTED]								
18	[REDACTED] [REDACTED]								
19	[REDACTED] [REDACTED]								
20	[REDACTED]								
21	[REDACTED]								
22	[REDACTED]								
23	[REDACTED]								
24	[REDACTED]								

How would you rate the following statements?

Strongly disagree	Disagree Slightly	Disagree	Neutral	Slightly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
25	[REDACTED]							
26	[REDACTED]							
27	[REDACTED]							
28	[REDACTED]							

Appendix F - Permission to Use Faith Maturity Scale

Justin Roskopf

From: [REDACTED]

To: [REDACTED]

Date: Thursday, December 7, 2023, at 10:45 AM EST

Hi Mark,

Thank you for reaching out for permission to use the Faith Maturity Scale. Permission is granted for use in your dissertation through 12/31/2024. If possible, please share a copy of your dissertation when you can do so. We love to see how these measures are being used and what you're learning!

Have a great day, and please don't hesitate to reach out with any questions.

Best,

Justin

----- Forwarded message -----

From: [REDACTED]

Date: Thur, Dec 7, 2023, at 1:37 AM

Subject: Submission number 6362 from Permission Request

To: [REDACTED]

Appendix G - Faith Maturity Scale Instrument

Authors: Peter L. Benson, Michael J. Donahue, and Joseph A. Erikson, 1993.

Instructions: Mark one answer for each. Be as honest as possible, describing how true it really is and not how true you would like it to be.

Choose from these responses:

Never true	Rarely true	True once in a While	Sometimes true	Often true	Almost always true	Always true
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

1	I am concerned that our country is not doing enough to help the poor	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
2	I know that Jesus Christ is the Son of God who died on a cross and rose again	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
3	My faith shapes how I think and act each and every day	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
4	I help others with their religious questions and struggles	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
5	<i>I tend to be critical of other people</i>	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
6	In my free time, I help people who have problems or needs	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
7	My faith helps me know right from wrong	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
8	I do things to help protect the environment	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
9	I devote time to reading and studying the Bible	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
10	<i>I have a hard time accepting myself</i>	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
11	Every day, I see evidence that God is active in the world	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
12	I take excellent care of my physical health	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
13	I am active in efforts to promote social justice	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
14	I seek out opportunities to help me grow spiritually	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
15	I take time for periods of prayer or meditation	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
16	I am active in efforts to promote world peace	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
17	I accept people whose religious beliefs are different from mine	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
18	I feel a deep sense of responsibility for reducing pain and suffering in the world	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
19	As I grow older, my understanding of God changes	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
20	<i>I feel overwhelmed by all the responsibilities and obligations I have</i>	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
21	I give significant portions of my time and money to help other people	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
22	I speak out for equality for women and minorities	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
23	I feel God's presence in my relationships with other people	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
24	My life is filled with meaning and purpose	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
25	<i>I do not understand how a loving God can allow so much pain and suffering in the world</i>	1 2 3 4 5 6 7

26	<i>I believe that I must obey God's rules and commandments in order to be saved</i>	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
27	I am confident that I can overcome any problem or crisis, no matter how serious	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
28	I care a great deal about reducing poverty in the United States and throughout the world	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
29	I try to apply my faith to political and social issues	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
30	My life is committed to Jesus Christ	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
31	I talk with other people about my faith	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
32	My life is filled with stress and anxiety	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
33	I go out of my way to show love to people I meet	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
34	I have a real sense that God is guiding me	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
35	<i>I do not want the churches of this nation getting involved in political issues</i>	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
36	I like to worship and pray with others	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
37	I think Christians must be about the business of creating international understanding and harmony	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
38	I am spiritually moved by the beauty of God's creation enough to help the poor	1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Note: Items in italics are reverse-scored.

Appendix H - IRB Approval Letter

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

January 30, 2024

Mark Buku

Timothy Cochrell

Re: IRB Exemption - IRB-FY23-24-1060 A Correlational Study Between Spiritual Bible Reading and Spiritual Formation of Leaders in Pentecostal Churches

Dear Mark Buku, Timothy Cochrell,

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 46:104(d):

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

The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects cannot readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects;

For a PDF of your exemption letter, click on your study number in the My Studies card on your Cayuse dashboard. Next, click the Submissions bar beside the Study Details bar on the Study details page. Finally, click Initial under Submission Type and choose the Letters

tab toward the bottom of the Submission Details page. Your information sheet and final versions of your study documents can also be found on the same page under the Attachments tab.

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

██████████

Sincerely,

██████████

PhD, CIP

Administrative Chair

Research Ethics Office

Appendix I - Correlation Coefficient Interpretation Guide

Correlational Coefficient	Interpretation	Related Variable and/or Scatterplot Description
1	Perfect positive Correlation	Both variables increase together forming a straight line
.99 to .61	Strong Positive Correlation	Dots lie close to an ascending straight line
.60 to .41	Moderate Positive Correlation	
.40 to .01	Low Positive Correlation	
0	No Correlation	Dots follow no order
-.01 to -.40	Low Negative Correlation	
-.41 to -.60	Moderate Negative Correlation	
-.61 to -.99	Strong Negative Correlation	Dots lie close to a descending straight line
-1	Perfect Negative Correlation	When one variable increases, the other decreases; all dots are below zero and land on a descending straight line.

Based on Bennett et. al., 2009