

ANGLIA RUSKIN UNIVERSITY

**MIDLIFE TRANSFORMATION OF CHRISTIAN PROFESSIONALS IN HONG
KONG: EVOLVING A MODEL FOR SPIRITUAL PRACTICE**

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ANGLIA RUSKIN UNIVERSITY

ABSTRACT

FACULTY OF ARTS, LAW AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

PROFESSIONAL DOCTORATE

**MIDLIFE TRANSFORMATION OF CHRISTIAN PROFESSIONALS IN HONG KONG:
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CHRISTINE LAI TIN CHI

This research investigates the midlife transformation of Christian professionals in Hong Kong through a model of spiritual practice, and identifies the possibilities and usefulness for development of this model. By building on my personal experience and the needs of my Christian midlife professionals; and by learning from existing models used in Hong Kong, including Buford's Halftime model, the Ignatian spiritual exercises and the Inspired Spiritual Education programme, I designed and tested a model of spiritual practice for midlife Christian professionals in Hong Kong.

I adopted certain prominent contemporary theological perspectives from Ignatian spirituality, supported by Buddhist mindfulness. The design was simple, flexible, practical and suitable for the six participants in their local contexts. The structure was eight-weeks' mindful breathing, silent meditation and journaling with different meditative focus every two weeks. I carried out individual interviews for each participant in an open unstructured way every fortnight.

Using the method of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, empirical data was collected and analysed from 24 interviews. Three themes emerged: connectedness, discernment and transformation. These represented an interior spiritual journey during which the participants went through a movement of examen and discernment in connecting to their selves, their past, those significant to them, and to God. The feedback from the participants provided positive endorsement of the model with constructive suggestions for its further development.

As the first study focusing on the spiritual experience of midlife Christian professionals in Hong Kong, the themes revealed the vitality and dynamism of the spiritual experience when engaging with this model. The model was found to be simple, flexible, fruitful and practical in the interfaith intercultural context of Hong Kong. I have already started to apply this model in my other consultancy services to corporations.

Keywords: Midlife, Christian Professionals, Hong Kong, Halftime, Ignatian Spirituality, Buddhist Mindfulness, Connectedness, Discernment, Transformation, Interiority

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

ADHD – Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

AUA – Awareness, Understand, Action

EUJD – Experiencing, Understanding, Judging, Decision

HKCRM – Hong Kong Church Renewal Movement

IPA – Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

ISE – Inspired Spiritual Education

LTA – Leadership Training Association

MBA – Master of Business Administration

MOH – Management of Heart

WCCM – World Community of Christian Meditation

3C – Core Value, Capability, Context

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Chapter One: The Contextual Background and Structure of the Research

Focus of the Research

In 2007, I began to practise times of regular silent solitude at St John's Cathedral next to my office at lunch time and before work. As a successful Human Resources Director, working for various global investment banks for over twenty years in the competitive city of Hong Kong, the conflict between my Christian and secular values was mounting. An inner emptiness and yearning for my true self could not be fulfilled by external success or through the material world. The only comforting and calming moments were those of internal prayer and stillness at St. John's Cathedral. On many occasions, vigorous emotions were stirred and came out naturally, with tears, as I reflected upon my struggles and anguish. This experience of sacred union with God gradually nurtured my discipline of silent meditation and was the starting point for my desire to move from an exterior to an interior spiritual journey.

Very often, when bombarded by the tremendous pressure of working in a competitive investment bank, this contemplative practice that I developed was my savior in this contemporary world. During times of chaos and confusion, the inner peace I found with the sacred always strengthened and enlightened me. This inner search led me to question further the meaning of the next phase in life, and to wonder how busy professionals in Hong Kong might also find an answer. I have met many successful professionals in the business arena during my years in the field of human resources. I have noticed, in particular, that many professionals in midlife especially Christians, with all their accumulated knowledge and experience, are seeking a deeper meaning to life, in spite of their financial achievements. A similar phenomenon is also common

amongst my friends in Christian circles. The identification of this midlife struggle experienced by Christian professionals in Hong Kong prompted me to ask what the features of a midlife transformation might be, and how one might facilitate the change in this contemporary world. Since there is limited literature on spiritual practice, specifically relating to the midlife years, it was clear that empirical research was needed.

My Spiritual Journey to Interiority

Although I started my Professional Doctorate in Practical Theology in 2012, my midlife search began in 2007. As a passionate life-long learner, always integrating knowledge and practice, I have never stopped learning. My previous studies include an Executive MBA, a Doctorate in Business Administration, a Master in Christian Studies and now a Professional Doctorate in Practical Theology. This learning path has also mirrored the direction of my search from an exterior to interior journey. The midlife issue has driven me to seek answers from Christian studies and theology. This present research is a response to my midlife question about integrating theological knowledge with professional practice.

In the process of my introspective investigation, I read Bob Buford's book *Halftime: Moving from Success to Significance* (1994), which directly addresses the midlife transition of Christian professionals. This work inspired me to join the Halftime Summit and later help set up the Halftime Ministry in Hong Kong. The Halftime model did not satisfy my inner spiritual yearning, however.

I found that when practising Christian contemplation through the World Community of Christian Meditation (WCCM) in 2010, the imageless contemplation on a single word "Maranatha"

(Come, Lord) as advocated by Benedictine monk, John Main, could not help with my daily struggles and midlife questions. Then, on a retreat at the Centre of Ignatian Spirituality in 2013, I was deeply captivated by the words on a plaque on the gate: “Find God in All Things”. This was the direction I had been looking for. In order to explore this concept more deeply, I participated in a five-month Ignatian spirituality foundation programme in 2014, followed by an eight-day silent retreat led by Stephen Tong, who was the director of the Centre of Ignatian Spirituality in Hong Kong. Ignatian spirituality opened up my heart through a process of examination and discernment. This experience laid down an important foundation for my research. Another important encounter was my exposure to the interfaith practices of Christian meditation and Buddhist mindfulness advocated by Thomas Kwan, who had been promoting spirituality for secondary school teachers and students through the Institute of Spiritual Education (ISE) programme for more than ten years.

My Professional Practice and Practical Theology

When I realized that my research direction had been so deeply influenced by my spiritual practice and experience, I realized my background as a Christian professional, a midlife seeker, a Hong Kong Chinese, and a Christian meditator, had become fused and had set my research direction towards midlife and spiritual practice through practical theology. Parallel with this study of practical theology, and having experienced the impact of meditative practice, I decided in 2014 to leave the corporate world in order to focus on this research, while simultaneously cultivating the spirituality and effecting the transformation of professionals and organizations through my Management of Heart consultancy. The mission of my professional practice was to advocate holistic growth and inner transformation through spirituality and to encourage the

realization of gifts and experience. My professional practice in individual spiritual growth and organizational transformation is closely linked to the research of this professional doctorate in practical theology.

Research Question

The purpose of this research is to investigate the midlife transformation of Christian professionals in Hong Kong by evolving a model for spiritual practice. The research question is this: “What do midlife Christian professionals in Hong Kong experience when following my evolving model for spiritual practice, and in what way is this model suitable and practical for such professionals?”

Brief Explanation of the Research Process

I started my Professional Doctorate of Practical Theology in 2012. From 2012 to 2015, the research developed through encounters with the Halftime model, Ignatian spirituality and Buddhist mindfulness, together with the enlightenment from relevant literature. After finalizing the research question and methodology, the research fieldwork was conducted from August to November of 2016 followed by a comprehensive process of data analysis over six months. The briefing session of the research was conducted to the six participants on July 31, 2016 followed by four bi-weekly individual interviews with the six participants from August of 2016. From December 2016 to May 2017, the data analysis included a repeated review of the written and verbal recordings, transcription, translation and then the coding process. The continuous analysis and interpretative discussion of findings, writings and reflections continued through 2017 and 2018.

Gap in Knowledge

Hong Kong is a highly commercial and international society. The materialistic and results-oriented nature of this society is particularly evident in the financial sector where I have worked for thirty years. I have come across numerous cases of successful executives completely submerged in the fight for success, but with an accompanying strong sense of lost orientation in their lives. They feel empty, no matter how senior their positions. In particular, the issues of vocation and midlife meaning keep coming up for Christian executives. I have observed similar phenomena in the Christian social community over the last fifteen years. In response to this issue, some Protestant churches have formed small groups with specific ministries to take care of their members' workplace issues. The search for meaning in the second half of life is widespread in the business and Christian communities of this city, where competition for success and achievement is endlessly intense.

Intrigued by midlife phenomena, I have read relevant literature on the midlife period, on spirituality and on local spiritual practice, and have found that psychological perspectives dominate the discussion. Research into the contemporary issue of midlife transformation, with particular focus on midlife Christian professionals in Hong Kong, is limited.

Literature on Midlife Issues and Local Spiritual Practice

Psychological Aspects of Midlife Issues

Amongst the studies relating to the "middle stage" of life, one significant theme is the common stereotyping with the label "midlife crisis". It seems that in both the Western and the Chinese academic literature, this basic question is still being debated. Of the authors who had a solid

discussion on the concept of midlife crisis was Jaques (1965), who studies the crises artists experienced as they feared the approach of mortality and began estimating the time left to live.

Tamir (1989, p.161) regards the midlife transition as a period of deep-seated self-doubt or confusion. He has a condensed and yet fairly wide-ranging review of the question of whether or not middle-aged men experience a “crisis”. In an article on midlife crises, Capps (2008) looks closely at the question of the transition to middle age, which he defines as occurring between ages forty and forty-nine. His developmental theory assumes that this is a time of potential stress, as new beginnings are sought and old habits, behaviors, dreams and goals are carefully reconsidered. The conditions that shape these specific kinds of transitions range from biological, psychological and sociological aspects.

It is important to note that my research focuses on the spiritual transformation and interior journey of midlife rather than the midlife crisis. In his book *Soul and Self: Parallels between Spiritual and Psychological Growth*, Paul Fehrenbach (2006) writes that “the midlife period of development seems to provide special circumstances that stimulate the reflective attitude necessary for this process (of recognizing the presence of the soul) to begin” (2006, p.x). With reference to Carl Rogers’ theory of the seven stages of psychological development, Fehrenbach sets up a parallel spiritual evolution, i.e. a process of “psychological awareness in a series of stages that demonstrate how the soul lies at the center of this process....At midlife, we find ourselves at the intersection of these two development sequences” (Fehrenbach, 2006, p.88).

Local Studies of Midlife Crises

Daniel Shek carried out a local study investigating midlife transformation in Hong Kong from the perspective of the discipline of social psychology. In “Midlife Crisis in Chinese Men and Women” (1996, pp.109-119), he investigates the issue using a tool called Chinese Midlife Crisis Scale, which aims to find out whether a midlife crisis in Chinese people is normative. In a study of mature adults aged between thirty and sixty, Shek investigates the levels of concerns in six midlife age groups. The results show that, although some respondents are dissatisfied with their work and personal achievements, the majority do not indicate dissatisfaction at the crisis level, which means that the findings do not lend strong support to the existence of a normative midlife crisis. The research also reveals that although midlife crisis levels are different amongst various age groups, there is no clear risk or peak in any particular group. Shek therefore comes to the conclusion that at any given time, only a small percentage of men are in crisis and the crisis is not likely to cluster at any particular age (p.114).

Studies of Spiritual Direction in Midlife

While exploring psychological and spiritual perspectives on midlife, Raymond Studzinski, a Catholic spiritual director, encourages his colleagues to make more reference to psychological studies when helping midlife retreatants find spiritual direction. In his book *Spiritual Direction and Midlife Development* (1985), Studzinski conducts a dialogue between direction and other disciplines with reference to those experiencing midlife. “The goal of my bringing together the contributions of theologians, directors, psychologists and other professionals is to facilitate a more informed and effective response to midlife individuals in spiritual direction” (1985, pp.ix-x). The book looks directly at the spiritual direction of midlife Christians.

I make reference to Studzinski's book because he studies people in midlife who are seeking help from spiritual directors following the Catholic tradition of spiritual practice. Both his book and my research have Catholic affiliations and adopt Ignatian teaching in illustrating how spiritual direction works. His work is insightful, but it does not address my research question directly, which is to learn more about what Christian professionals actually experience in their search for midlife meaning, completely and directly.

Local Voices in Spiritual Practice

In the course of my research, I became familiar with the spiritual practice programmes run by some Protestant Christian seminaries in Hong Kong. One of the most distinguished advocates of an ecumenical approach to the study of spiritual direction and counseling is Ekman P.C. Tam, a registered counselling psychologist of the Hong Kong Psychological Society and a clinical member of the American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy. With an evangelical denominational background, he has undertaken formal theological and psychological training and study.

Tam has written on contemplative spiritual direction and counseling, targeting the general public. In one of his books, *Christian Contemplative Spirituality* (in Chinese, 2014), he produces a survey of the entire history of spirituality in the Christian tradition, starting with Jesus and the Gospels and finishing with twentieth-century thinkers. In the preface, he broadens his ecumenical horizon by urging the Protestant community to keep an open mind about contemplative and meditative spirituality and practices inherited from the Roman Catholic

tradition (2014, pp.1-3). In his book, *Recognizing Who is Journeying with us: The Practice of Spiritual Direction* (2007), he suggests extending the spiritual practice of discernment, which is basically derived from the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises. The revival of Catholic spiritual direction in the 1970s, which was later picked up by some Protestant denominations, is also covered in the book (pp.3-5).

Tam established the Christian Contemplative Spirituality Institute and offers spiritual direction, retreats and formation programmes to pastoral care-givers in Vancouver, Sydney, and Hong Kong. Given the present religious ecology of Protestants in Hong Kong, little attention is paid to the spiritual practice of meditation or contemplation, however. Tam believes that spirituality has to be “lived out” rather than “acted” out through external activities or actions (Tam, 2007, p.17). His citation of Thomas Kwan’s statement, “To put it simply, spirituality is to live with a clear head” is a solid proof of this core belief of his (Tam, 2007, p.19). In his book, the traditional Buddhist expression, “understand through searching, experiencing and meeting just like lightning” (*can wu*, 參悟, literary translated as Zen Enlightenment), is also used to describe living out the experience of knowing and meeting God in spiritual practice (pp.18-19).

To a lesser extent than Tam, Lee Yiu-Chuen, a senior theologian who served in the Alliance Bible Seminary and the Chung Chi Divinity School, advocates pastoral counselling with support from psychological resources. Under the influence of David Benner’s psycho-spirituality and soul-care teachings, he appeals to Protestant pastoral counsellors to embrace spiritual direction in a close partnership with psychology. In *Care and Cure of the Soul: Integrating Psychological Counselling and Spiritual Direction* (in Chinese, 2002), he unites psychological and pastoral

counselling, while at the same time suggesting that, in order to help Protestant ministers carry out their pastoral counselling, the Protestant faith community should look at spiritual direction. As is suggested by the title of his book, his perspective is also the care and cure of the souls of the faithful in times of trouble or crisis.

Apart from these western and local studies on midlife and spirituality, and the efforts to promote meditative practice in psychology or counselling, it is still difficult to find any research directly addressing the midlife spiritual issues of Christian professionals in Hong Kong. However, out of my interest, and my personal and professional context, research into the spiritual journey of midlife continues to develop.

Developing the Research – Exterior to Interior Spiritual Journey

My context and experience have placed me in a unique position and have facilitated an authentic midlife exploration that moves from an exterior and action-oriented world to an interior spiritual journey. The experiences of Halftime ministry, Ignatian spiritual practice and Buddhist mindfulness through the ISE programme have all influenced the development of the research.

Developing the Research: The Halftime Movement

About six years ago, when I started this study, I came across the book *Halftime: Moving from Success to Significance* (Buford, 1994). I was interested in Buford's notion of merging our talents and passions so as to channel them into transforming the "success" of the first half of our lives to that of "significance" in the second. Buford formed the Halftime Institute, which is a faith-based service organization that helps midlife Christians explore the meaning of life mission

through assessing their gifts and experience. These “halftimers” are able to combine their strength and mission to serve and to lead a life of significance. After participating in the Singapore “Halftime Summit” in 2012, I helped the organizer set up a new Halftime chapter in Hong Kong along with a group of Christian mid-life professionals. I was excited, as Halftime directly addressed the need for midlife Christian professionals to pause, reflect upon their past experience, and find meaning for the next phase of life.

The Halftime ministry aims at encouraging the successful midlife Christian professional to search for the meaning of life, as its founder, Bob Buford, is himself a successful Chief Executive Officer with a Dallas Presbyterian church background. Buford believes that successful top Christian executives could play an influential role in their life and society with significance. The Halftime ministry has attracted many successful Christian senior executives in Hong Kong. The model provides systematic tools when evaluating life goals, such as the Gallup strength-finder tool for identifying one’s strengths, and the 3Cs model for explaining the importance of one’s core beliefs, capacities and context. These tools have embedded management concepts such as evaluating strength and planning for action, since Buford was influenced by management guru, Peter Drucker. The Halftime concept is explained in more detail in the next chapter.

Developing the Research: Ignatian Spiritual Practice

Meanwhile, my view on the search for midlife direction changed through my continuing meditative practice after the encounter with the Ignatian spiritual tradition. Although I found the Halftime model effective for analyzing gifts and strengths, reviewing midlife direction, and planning for the future, it did not answer my deep interior spiritual questioning. I left the

Halftime movement in Hong Kong, which I helped start, though my search for new meaning in my second half of life continued. My participation in the Halftime movement nevertheless offered me valuable perspectives on midlife, and solid proof of the needs of midlife Christian professionals searching for meaning in the second half of life.

Through the Ignatian spirituality programme, with its core teachings, workshops, and retreats, I began to realize the importance of the prayer of examen and of discernment. During those five months, I also witnessed the different levels of transformation that took place among the participants, some of them Protestants and some Catholics. I noticed that many of the participants of this Catholic spiritual practice were Protestants and most were middle-aged. Later, Stephen Tong invited me to share my spiritual journey as a midlife professional in his Ignatian seminars. The attendees of these seminars were mostly middle-aged too. This further confirmed my belief that the search for spiritual meaning in the second half of life is an important topic for Christians in Hong Kong, be they Protestants or Catholics.

Developing the Research: Interfaith Practice of Inspired Spiritual Education (ISE)

Because of my enthusiasm and passion for deeper spiritual growth, in addition to the Ignatian practice, I attended classes organized by the Inspired Spiritual Education (ISE) Programme, which is primarily for secondary school teachers specializing in spiritual education. The classes are organized by Thomas Kwan, who started the programme in the Faculty of Education of the Chinese University of Hong Kong in the mid-2000s. He is regarded as a specialist Catholic priest who, having been deeply influenced by liberation theology and the visionary inspiration of Vatican Council II (1962-65), left his important administrative position as the Dean of the Holy

Spirit Seminary to become a semi-autonomous clergyman in the Diocese. With this special autonomy, he developed his own mission to provide pastoral counseling through programmes he designed outside the parishes and local churches. One of the most influential programmes that he designed is the ISE Programme, which is run by the Faculty of Education for Hong Kong schools.

After attending Kwan's classes, I began to look closely into the programme that he designed for school teachers, which was not only highly-recognized, but also well received by teachers and students. I also started to study the background of interfaith practice in ISE and advocated by Kwan. There was limited explanation or elaboration of the theoretical or theological foundation of the programme, however, because of Kwan's preference for focusing on the practice itself through a series of educational and teacher training programmes. Some of the basic elements that Kwan has adopted from important Catholic thinkers such as St. Benedict, St. Francis of Assisi and St. Ignatius of Loyola, have inspired me. A unique feature of his programme is his adoption of mindfulness from the famous Zen Buddhist master, Thich Nhat Hanh. Out of my growing interest in the spiritual experiences of midlife Christian professionals, Kwan and I worked together to expand the ISE programme to other social and business sectors and age groups, including those of middle age.

The Need for a New Model of Spiritual Practice

When I began my practical theological doctorate, what originally emerged as my personal search later evolved into a more systematic and academic attempt to investigate what midlife

transformations have taken place among Hong Kong Christian professionals and how they have taken place.

To sum up, a model of spiritual practice is needed for midlife Christian professionals in Hong Kong. Firstly, in a highly modern, international society with an intercultural and interfaith environment, it is not easy for Christian professionals seeking spiritual meaning in the second half of life to find answers, whether from churches or elsewhere. Because “face” is so important in Chinese culture, it is not easy for successful executives to talk about their midlife issues. For this reason, the Halftime movement, initiated by lay believers mostly from Protestant denominations, arose and continues to grow. However, I left when I found that Buford’s Halftime model also has its limitations.

Secondly, a vigorous and effective spiritual practice tradition like the Ignatian *Spiritual Exercises* is mainly known only in the Catholic community, even though more and more Protestants are beginning to notice its existence and value. The ISE programme is an attempt to promote spiritual practice, but its primary target is secondary school teachers and students. It is therefore important to explore ways of extracting the valuable elements from the Ignatian spiritual tradition and making them available for midlife Christian professionals in Hong Kong.

Thirdly, although spiritual directors and pastoral counselors from both the Catholic and Protestant communities are already available in Hong Kong, the demand for their service is great. In the meantime, Hong Kong society is ageing. According to a research report from the Hong Kong Church Renewal Movement of 2014 (HKCRM, 2015), the number of congregants

who are below forty-five years old is shrinking, whereas the number of congregants who are older than forty-five years is growing. Like their counterparts in most western countries, the churches in Hong Kong are ageing. As more and more people are reaching middle age, the spiritual searches of midlife Christian professionals in Hong Kong are inevitably on the increase also.

Evolving a New Model of Spiritual Practice

Having established my initial research question, and having along the way developed a model of spiritual practice for the research, I had the opportunity to have a real-life experience in applying the Ignatian spiritual practice for business executives and young adults in 2014 through setting up my own consultancy, called “Management of Heart” (MOH).

Through mutual interest and dialogue, Kwan and I collaborated to promote spirituality for business executives. My business background, coupled with his experience in spiritual practice, would prove effective in serving midlife Christian executives. With this in mind, we began to design workshops and modify the ISE programme so that executives could integrate work, life and faith through silent meditation, small group discussions and mindfulness practice. Two executive trainer friends were invited to provide advice that particularly addressed the needs of business professionals. Four full-day workshops were conducted for about ten participants, after which they were invited to provide feedback on the workshops’ means of practice, content and use of language for different denominations or churches. The participants aged from forty to fifty working at middle to senior level position and mostly Christians. The feedback turned out to be valuable input for my research model.

At the same time, I was approached by another group of young adult professionals to help with their leadership development. These professionals were volunteers for a Hong Kong non-profit organization called Leadership Training Association (LTA), for which I was an advisor. Because of the inherited and rigid design of LTA's programmes, after volunteering for LTA for more than ten years, these leaders were exhausted. They wanted new direction and meaning, not only for the organization, but for themselves as well. Seeing their needs, I formed a group called the "Magis" and applied the features of Ignatian spirituality to a tailor-made leadership programme for these eight professionals, who were aged between thirty-five and forty. Half of them were Christians. During a six-month programme, they had the opportunity to attend bi-weekly workshops and go on retreats practicing silent meditation, mindfulness and journaling. This was another attempt to apply Ignatian spirituality in the real world. Throughout the process, they were asked to reflect on their past and on people and incidents that were important in their lives. They had all experienced different levels of change when the workshops came to an end. The major feedback from the participants was that they found it easy to practice and the simple framework of the programme enabled them to slow down. They also enjoyed the silent meditation, which helped them with slowing down and enhanced their sensitivity towards themselves and others.

Making good use of these experiences, I started to develop a model that could teach me more about the experience of midlife Christian professionals. In order to target the characteristics of midlife Christian professionals, the model needed to include important features such as being Christian-based, simple and with a focus on interiority.

Methodology and Structure

An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) methodology was adopted for exploring the spiritual experience of midlife Christian professionals, so that the experiences and interpretations of the participants might be heard. One of the key aims of the research was to gather information about the spiritual experience of midlife Christian professionals in Hong Kong, which meant that the voices of the participants needed to be fully expressed and recorded. The IPA approach is the most suitable methodology for this research, since it allows participants to discover and interpret their own experiences in an open-interview format during an eight-week spiritual practice.

The Structure of the Thesis

Chapter Two discusses the three inter-linked theoretical perspectives in the first section which focuses on an interior spiritual journey from the conceptual framework: the Halftime concept, Ignatian spirituality and Buddhist mindfulness. The second section describes how the conceptual framework connects with the research design.

Chapter Three explains the selection of IPA methodology for the research design process, including the data analysis and the interpretation of data finding. The design for the model of spiritual practice is described: meditative tools are used over eight weeks in four phases, and the foci are self-examination, reflection on the past, reflection on God and an overall reflection.

In Chapter Four, through the IPA approach, the factual findings provide the first level of interpretation. Clear steps of data analysis take the recorded data through first and second levels

of coding into categorization of emerging themes. The emergence of three themes supported by the finding of data is illustrated at the end of the chapter.

In Chapter Five, an interpretive analysis of the factual findings is presented. Three levels of interpretive analysis are discussed: firstly, the commonalities and the individual uniqueness of the participant's experience; secondly, an analysis of interior movement through adopting Lonergan's perspective of four level of consciousness, Experiencing, Understanding, Judgement and Decision (EUJD) and thirdly, answering the research question concerning the midlife transformation of Christian professionals in Hong Kong through an interpretive discussion of findings.

In Chapter Six, an interior spiritual journey is discussed through a dialogue between the emerging themes and the theoretical perspectives that inform the Halftime movement, Ignatian spirituality, and Buddhist mindfulness. This Chapter paves the way for the discussion on contribution to knowledge.

In Chapter Seven, the second aspect of the research question, concerning the suitability and practicality of the model is addressed. By interpreting and analyzing the participants' feedback, the model is assessed and this evaluation will take into consideration the needs for future development. This Chapter sets the foundations for an ongoing contribution to practice.

Chapter Eight is the conclusion and addresses the original issue, answers the research question, fills the knowledge gap, and suggests the potential ongoing contribution to knowledge and practice. Lastly, it includes my own professional development and personal reflections.

Summary

This research grew from my personal experience and professional context as a midlife Christian professional in Hong Kong. My encounter with the Halftime ministry model, Christian meditative practice in the Ignatian spirituality tradition and the Buddhist mindfulness advocated in the ISE programme provide important context for my research. The needs of midlife Christian professionals in Hong Kong are pressing, but the literature review reveals there has been little research in this area. My professional practice with young adults and midlife executives reveals the possibility of facilitating an inner spiritual search. This research is therefore aimed at investigating the midlife transformation of Christian professionals in Hong Kong and evolving a model for spiritual practice. In order to learn more about the phenomena midlife Christian professionals may manifest during their spiritual practice, I need, and hence develop, a conceptual framework for the research, including a model of spiritual practice.

Chapter Two: The Conceptual Framework

Introduction

To build up the conceptual framework for my research, the first section of this chapter focuses on three theoretical perspectives and their interrelationships. The three perspectives are Buford's Halftime concept; Ignatian spirituality, including Sheldrake's active-practical and everyday life spirituality, concepts of the examen of consciousness and the discernment of spirits from Aschenbrenner, Gallagher and Lonergan; and Buddhist mindfulness from Thich Nhat Hanh.

These theoretical perspectives are linked together to build the conceptual framework for this research, which is aimed at discovering an interior spiritual journey for the participants. The Halftime model contributes an emphasis on midlife and the significance of the halftime moment in life. While the midlife orientation of the research came from the Halftime concept, the Halftime model does not emphasize the search for spirituality and interiority, and I did not experience this search during the Halftime summit and workshop. I thus continued my quest through Ignatian spirituality. Among the Ignatian theologians, Sheldrake's active-practical and everyday spirituality are very relevant to midlife Christians living in a contemporary urban world. The examen of consciousness and discernment of spirits advocated by Aschenbrenner, Lonergan and Gallagher, further explain the dynamic interior movement through the different levels of consciousness. Along with my experience of interfaith practice in the ISE programme and the interfaith context of Hong Kong, Ignatian spirituality and Zen Buddhism provide an appropriate source of spiritual practice for the research. From the Buddhist tradition, I adopt Buddhist mindfulness from Thich Nhat Hanh, which has proved effective in the ISE programme

and is also suitable for Hong Kong Chinese midlife Christians living in a fast-paced and stressful world. These three inter-linked theoretical perspectives of the Halftime model, Ignatian spirituality and Buddhist mindfulness provide the conceptual framework for the research and contribute to the research design. Following the establishment of the conceptual framework, the second section explains how this framework contributes to the overall research design, which includes a design for the model of spiritual practice.

Section One – The Conceptual Framework

First Theoretical Perspective: Buford’s Halftime Concept

Encountering the halftime concept through Buford’s *Half Time: Changing Your Game Plan from Success to Significance* (1994) inspired me to explore the meaning of halftime and my own midlife journey. Later, I read Buford’s second edition: *Half Time: Moving from Success to Significance* (2008) and participated in the Singapore Halftime Summit in 2012, which inspired me to use his halftime concept to begin an exploration of the significance of the midlife question, and to address the importance of this specific period of time and its issues. “Halftime is a pause in midlife to reflect on what we have accomplished, who we have become, and what will matter in the end. It is also a point to redirect our time and resources for the second half” (Buford, quoted at Singapore Halftime Summit, Day 1, October 2012).

Buford states that the first half of life is noisy, busy, and almost frenetic (2008, p.66). We never seem to have time to listen to that small inner voice. According to Buford, halftime should not be a noisy place. In this space, we are taking stock and asking, what is my passion? How am I wired? Where do I belong? What do I believe? What will I do about what I believe? Therefore,

Halftime is a time to be honest in answering questions about the direction of the second half. Buford follows the inspiration of his mentor, Peter Drucker, the management guru, whose advice is that we ask: what are my values, my aspirations, my direction, and what do I have to do, to learn, to change, in order to make myself capable of living up to my demands on myself and my expectation of life? (p.67). A successful halftime needs a structure, including time to pray, to read the Scriptures and to think (p.68).

Buford reminds readers of the famous quotation of Augustine: “*What do I wish to be remembered for?*” (p.25). He uses this question to pinpoint the direction his readers should go in order to “open the heart’s holiest chamber” (p.24). This is where I borrowed the idea that midlife Christian professionals should pause, review and consider a new Christian-based direction for the second half of their lives. Buford warns that “some people never get to the second half; a good many don’t even know it exists” (p.26). In his view, it is a critical moment of awakening and taking stock of the past honestly, asking questions about faith, and planning for the next phase of life.

Concerning time and discipline, Buford writes: “the biggest mistake most of us make in the first half of life is not taking enough time for the things that are really important. This requires a certain amount of discipline and time management” (p.67). Borrowing from Buford’s teaching, I engaged the midlife Christian professionals at the halfway point of their lives and designed a spiritual practice which required their time and discipline. The emphasis on taking time to pause and reflect on life and faith questions at halftime was borrowed from Buford’s Halftime concept.

Buford lays down in detail how his Halftime advocacy can help readers look for a significant second half to their lives. However, the actual ministry bearing the title of Halftime is an institution that provides different levels of practice, training and coaching to help practitioners of his Halftime model. One of the most important arenas for learning about this Halftime model is the Halftime Summit, which is sponsored centrally by the Halftime Institute and organized regionally by different centers. In October 11-13, 2012, I participated in the Summit held in Singapore. The three-day training program outlined clearly and succinctly the whole Halftime model in a practical and operational way. In this Summit, the coaching team was led by Lloyd Reeb, the Chief Speaker and Coach sent from the Halftime Institute, who publishes a book to elaborate Buford Halftime model, entitled *From Success to Significance: When the Pursuit of Success Isn't Enough* (2011). The model is structured around central concept of the 3Cs: Core, Capacity and Context.

3Cs Concept – Core, Capacity, Context

During the three day Singapore Halftime summit (October 2012), a set of worksheets guided the learning path for participants. At the start of the worksheets, a number of biblical quotations were presented as the theological foundation of the model. I identified two as being important: the first was from Ephesians 2:10: “For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which he prepared in advance for us to do”. The second was from Luke: “From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked” (Luke 12:48). To my mind, these two verses constitute the biblical foundation advocated by Buford, which is the belief that a person who is

successful in the first half of life should use his or her talents and competencies to make a more significant contribution in the second half.

In order to live a life of significance, the challenge is to discover where our unique abilities combine with what we are most passionate about, and then to join in what we can see God is already doing in that area. The worksheets at the Summit provided direction to the participants, starting with the three Cs. The first C represents “Core” beliefs and values. In Buford’s book, the core was also presented as the “centre”. He believes “getting back to the centre requires us to downshift, to slow down. And once we return to the core—once we know who we are and what’s in the box—we can accept the fact that some of the things on the perimeter will not receive as much attention as they once did” (Buford, 2008, p.125). In this sense, “Core” represents an important internal belief and inner compass for finding our true selves. I borrowed this “Core” concept for engaging midlife Christian professionals in exploring their true selves for a fruitful second half of life. As Buford mentioned: “It has to do with a mind-set, an inner compass that is fixed on those things that define the true self” (p.127).

Following the “Core”, the worksheet then introduced the second concept of “Capacity” that Buford describes as things that matter (p.126). “Capacity” is the resources, including the time, strength and financial resources we need in order to take off on another journey. Many stories shared in the summit were about how resources were used to continue in successful work during the next phase of life. I did not apply this “Capacity” concept in my research, as this involved quite a lot of “doing” with the “head” (mental activity). I considered it sufficient to focus simply on “being” and on relationship with God in the search for an interior midlife journey.

The third “C” stands for “Context” and this relates to a review of participants’ roles in the organizations where they work, and establishing whether to stay, or whether to join or start another venture. The context question emphasized the reality of deciding where to go (or where to stay) in order to do the mission. I found the element of context emphasized mainly planning for action, which was not my focus and interest. I therefore did not adopt this third “C” in my research. In summary, the 3Cs model provides a systematic way of reviewing midlife. The element of “Core” belief did enlighten my research, but the other two Cs were not so helpful in addressing the interior journey.

Linking Halftime with Ignatian Spirituality – an Interior Spiritual Journey

Because of my spiritual yearning for an interior journey of spiritual reflection, the Halftime model could not fully address my midlife spiritual issues, and inspired me to search further for an alternative journey of interiority.

Reviewing what Buford wrote, and from my own experience going through the Halftime Summit and workshops, I found there was no emphasis on interiority. Moreover, most of the stories used for illustrative purposes in Buford’s book focused on the continuation of successful external activities and careers from the first phase of life to the second. There was little discussion of deeper meaning and inner fulfilment, especially for Christian professionals. Buford’s Halftime ministry, which started and was supported by successful American businessmen, focuses mainly on successful western executives. From a cross-cultural perspective, the question to be asked is whether this American experience and model can realistically be transferred and applied to

somewhat less successful professionals in Hong Kong's "East-meets-West" context. Moreover, my fundamental concern is whether midlife Christian professionals should continue attending to "acting" or "doing", focusing on the "head" instead of making an interior journey of the "heart" in search of a closer relationship with God.

From my reflections on the Halftime model, I decided to change my approach to the question of the halftime journey. Following this direction, Ignatian spirituality offered another important theoretical perspective, from which I built the conceptual framework.

Second Theoretical Perspective: Ignatian Spirituality

Application of Ignatian Spirituality in Hong Kong

The encounter with Ignatian spirituality started with my five-month Ignatian spirituality foundation program at the Ignatian Spirituality Center in Hong Kong. This experience not only provided the context, but also showed how Ignatian Spiritual Exercises could be applied in Hong Kong. The Ignatian Spirituality Center at Xavier Retreat House has been promoting Ignatian spirituality for a long time. The annual five-month programme attracts many Christians and provides a grounding in spiritual formation. After this program, I went through an eight-day personal silent retreat guided by Fr. Stephen Tong, director of the Center. The whole Ignatian experience was transformational and gave me the direction for my midlife journey as well as the foundation for this research.

The Ignatian spirituality foundation program was designed for mature Christians, both Protestants and Catholics, and is structured through prayer, lectures, individual silent meditation,

small group reflection and large group sharing. The lectures covered knowledge of the life journey and experiences of Ignatius of Loyola; key concepts of the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises, including the twenty Annotations (SpEx Nr: 1-20), the Principle and Foundation (SpEx Nr: 23), the Daily Particular Examen with the Examine of Conscience as its core (SpEx Nr: 24-44), and Determining a Way of Life, with methods for making a healthy and good choice (SpEx Nr: 169-189). In addition to these key concepts, the lectures also introduced the teaching of prominent Ignatian theologians like Lonergan.

Reinterpretation of the Ignatian Spiritual Exercise from Four Ignatian Theologians

In constructing the theological/theoretical framework of the research, insights gained from the lectures on the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises were essential. The main element supporting the framework is based on the concept of self-examination as stated directly in the Annotations (SpEx Nr: 1-20). Other than this concept of self-examination, I did not specifically select the teachings and practices of the Spiritual Exercises, such as determining the Way of Life and methods for making healthy and good choices. Instead, I adopted important interpretations of the Spiritual Exercises by four Ignatian theologians. I demonstrate what I have borrowed from the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises and how this is then reinterpreted and adopted by engaging with four Ignatian theologians: Lonergan, Sheldrake, Aschenbrenner and Gallagher.

Lonergan's Four Level of Consciousness

The first encounter with Lonergan through the Ignatian spirituality foundation program enlightened me greatly. The integration of knowledge and practice through my own meditation

and reflection encouraged me to pursue Lonergan's theology further. One of the most important teachings and practices Lonergan introduces is the concept of four levels of consciousness—Experience, Understanding, Judgement and Decision (hereafter EUJD). During the foundation program, the history and concept of EUJD were introduced with examples and exercises. I was able to understand the operation of EUJD more deeply through personal meditation and small group sharing about our internal movement. After the workshop, my journaling and reflection deepened this understanding. Each participant shared how they experienced EUJD in different and unique ways. This dynamic experience laid the foundation for adopting Lonergan's EUJD in my work, both in terms of its conceptual framework and later the analysis of interior movement. Most of the retreatants at Xavier House had acquired the basic knowledge of EUJD through the Ignatian foundation program and other workshops in Hong Kong.

Lonergan's interpretation of the Ignatian *Spiritual Exercises* and his works on the topic include *Method in Theology* (1971) and *Insights: A Study of Human Understanding* (1983), along with several articles providing various rich perspectives. In *Method in Theology* (1971), Lonergan describes his conception of method “not as a set of rules, but as a prior, normative pattern of operations from which the rules may be derived” (p.6). In analysing a basic pattern of operations that is dynamic and transcendental, he identifies the four levels of consciousness. These are, firstly, the empirical level of sensing, perceiving, imagining, feeling, speaking, and moving; secondly, the intellectual level of inquiring, understanding, expressing and analysing; thirdly, the rational level of reflecting, marshalling of evidence, passing judgment on the truth, falsity, certainty or probability of a statement; and fourthly, the level of responsibility, which concerns oneself, one's own operations, goals, evaluations and decisions to take action. These four levels

of consciousness have become what Lonergan describes in his transcendental method as four types of operations, corresponding to the four levels of consciousness. In other words, “experience” corresponds to “empirical”; “understanding” corresponds to “intellectual”; “judging” corresponds to “rational”; and “deciding” corresponds to “responsibility” (pp.6-19). Together these form the complete process of Experience, Understanding, Judging and Decision.

The realms of EUJD are different levels of consciousness that are dynamically interrelated or evolving. They are not mechanically separated or rigidly divided. Applying Lonergan’s four levels of consciousness helped the participants develop an understanding of their spiritual experience and their awareness of a complex interior movement of experiencing, understanding, judgment and decision. Many Jesuits, including those in Hong Kong and Taiwan, have been greatly influenced by Lonergan. Father Stephen Tong and Father Simon Wong both use Lonergan’s EUJD approach to help retreatants and students, including myself, better understand ourselves and appreciate the process of spiritual movement.

As a concept, EUJD provides a solid foundation for the present theoretical framework because it is well-grounded in Ignatian spirituality, and includes a deep analysis of the interior movement. Since my research targeted the actual experience of the midlife Christian participants, EUJD became an important concept for setting up the framework for a journey of interiority, as well as for providing a potential tool for in-depth analysis of the way participants described their dynamic experiences.

Sheldrake's Concept of Appropriation

When it comes to issues in contemporary interpretation of texts and traditions, Sheldrake is concerned with the importance of appreciating what lies behind the surface of the texts we see and a wider understanding of what goes beyond their purely written forms (Sheldrake, 2010, p.47). According to Sheldrake, what lies behind the text is critical. He writes about the hidden text that is critical to interpretation. It is also important to have the flexibility to live out the experience in everyday life. Each practitioner therefore has a unique experience in adapting and living out the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises. The written text is not set in concrete, but needs to be performed. This is the basis for the justification of adaptation (p.48). I therefore adopted the concepts of flexibility and unique adaptation in order to design a daily life spiritual practice that met the needs and style of the participants, so that they might interpret their lived everyday experience in the dynamism that is Hong Kong. The imperative of adaptation to the needs of retreatants is built into the text itself and is reinforced in its earliest practical interpretations (pp.49-50).

Reinterpretation and Adoption of Secular Spirituality

The direct aim of the Spiritual Exercises is stated at the beginning of the Annotations (SpEx Nr:1): “As strolling, walking along a road, and running are physical exercises, so all of these—getting ready for and committing one’s self to ... seeking, and finding what God wishes in one’s life—are called Spiritual Exercises” (Tetlow, 1992, p.97). Sheldrake has reinterpreted this seeking and finding in the contemporary context of urban life. This is what he calls secular spirituality.

I adopted Sheldrake's definition of secular spirituality in the contemporary world in the development of the theoretical framework of my research. According to Sheldrake, "the concept of spirituality is increasingly used outside of religious contexts. Christian spirituality has something distinctive to contribute to these 'secular' or everyday preoccupations" (Sheldrake, 2013, p.210). It is in this context that Sheldrake speaks of the need for spirituality in business and in the economy, in order to strengthen the emergent development of spirituality in the marketplace and everyday life.

Secular spirituality is closely linked to the concept of the spirituality of everyday life, which is achieved through a disciplined lifestyle of active-practical prayer. It is a kind of marketplace spirituality that provides a theological perspective for this research into the spiritual experiences of midlife Christian professionals in Hong Kong. In the fast-paced competitive environment of Hong Kong, secular spirituality is a realistic and practical way for midlife Christian professionals to live out their everyday spirituality through active-practical prayer.

Reinterpretation and Adoption of Active-practical Everyday Life Spirituality

Sheldrake defines spirituality precisely as follows: it is a spiritual concern that is holistic, that is, a fully-integrated approach to life (Sheldrake, 2013, pp.17-18). For Sheldrake, a spiritual person is "simply someone within whom the spirit of God dwelt or who lived under the influence of the Spirit of God" (p.2). He believes we can find God through our ordinary life and experience. It is also important to note that Sheldrake developed his own interpretation of Ignatian spirituality. He

identifies four types of spirituality: ascetic-monastic, mystical, active-practical and prophetic-critical. I adopted the active-practical spirituality, which he describes “a process of continuous regular practice and active internal prayer. It promotes everyday life as the principal context for the spiritual path and quest for authenticity” (p.16).

In the fast-moving society of contemporary Hong Kong, we can find God in everyday life through an active and regular internal prayer life. This continuous spiritual discipline echoes the vision of Ignatian spirituality in finding God in all things through a disciplined practice of meditation and prayer. When studying the issue of the spirituality of busy professionals in the marketplace, Sheldrake’s advocacy of active-practical everyday life spirituality is very relevant to midlife Christian professionals who require regular spiritual practice in their daily lives.

Aschenbrenner’s Examen of Consciousness

Originally found in *Spiritual Exercise No. 23*, the examen is a prayer of confession to purify the self, in which the person reviews their relationship with God, and assesses whether their actions or thoughts are right or wrong. The method of making the general examen of conscience has five elements: gratitude, petition, review, forgiveness, and renewal, as mentioned in *Spiritual Exercise No. 43*. (Tetlow, 1992, p.104; pp.108-109)

In an extended statement on the examen, Aschenbrenner differentiates the conventional understanding of the concept of “examen of conscience”, which has “narrow moralistic overtones” to do with the “morality of good or bad actions”, from a concern “with the way God is affecting and moving us (often quite spontaneously) deep in our own affective consciousness”.

Aschenbrenner proposes that it is in our own existential consciousness that as human beings we have to decide between being tempted or remaining close to “intimacy with God in the subtle dispositions of our consciousness” (Aschenbrenner, 1972, pp.14-15).

The emphasis on feelings toward and relationship with God in Aschenbrenner’s examen of consciousness is particularly appropriate for this research into the exterior-to-interior journey of midlife Christians. In a fast-paced competitive life, midlife Christian professionals seldom have the luxury of sitting down quietly to face their own deeper feelings, or to understand the underlying meaning of those feelings from God’s perspective. Aschenbrenner notes that we discover ourselves and our real relationship with God at the level of our dearest and most lasting feelings (p.2).

This research aims to discover the interior movement of the heart. Aschenbrenner’s view of the examen as an affective process of consciousness, as spontaneity in our hearts when in touch with God, and as intimate relationship with God, provides a very direct element for the conceptual framework and design of the research.

Developing a Heart with a Discerning Vision

In his interpretation, Gallagher, who was Aschenbrenner’s mentee, goes deeper into the process of carrying out this prayer of examen. He describes it as “a way of praying that opens our eyes to God’s daily self-revelation and increasingly clarifies for us our own response to it” and “a path toward what our hearts most deeply desire: a growing relationship in love with God” (Gallagher, 2006, p.21).

Furthermore, Gallagher elaborates extensively on his own discovery of the examen during a thirty-year period as a Jesuit spiritual director and scholar. He concludes that the examen becomes “most profoundly possible” when a person accepts his or her helplessness and need to be led by God, because this is God’s gift and grace. The individual has to be open and available to this divine gift (pp.34-35). The exercise of the examen is ultimately aimed at developing a heart with a discerning vision to be continually active. It is essential to pray for this gift constantly and be receptive to its development within our hearts through a daily practice of the examen (Aschenbrenner, 1972, p.17). This emphasis on an interior experience within the heart is essential to the conceptual framework of this research, in that it is the foundation for a regular continuous spiritual practice to experience and receive the gift of God with an open heart.

Gallagher’s Reinterpretation of Ignatian Spiritual Exercises

Ignatian spirituality emphasizes discernment. As Gallagher explains in simple and straightforward language, for Ignatius, it is the identity of the spiritual realities or “those affective stirrings in the heart—joy, sadness, hope, fear, peace, anxiety, and similar feelings—with their related thoughts, that influence our life of faith and our progress toward God” (Gallagher, 2005, p. 3). These spiritual realities relate closely to relevant personal and deep experiences. The Spiritual Exercises establish “Rules for the Discernment of Spirits” from which the explanations for the first two sets of fourteen rules are derived. In the first week, the first set of rules are (SpEx Nr:313-327) “for understanding to some extent the different movements produced in the soul and for recognizing those that are good to admit them, and those that are bad, to reject them” (SpEx Nr:313). In the second week, the second set are applied

(SpEx Nr:328-336). As Gallagher also states, these rules are written out of the experiences of Ignatius and those he assisted. They are rules for those actually carrying out the spiritual retreats and also for practice in daily life (Gallagher, 2005, pp.4-5). I believe this is a very important key in helping midlife Christian professionals work actively with Christ in the busyness of everyday. Practising one's spiritual pilgrimage in daily life can be called contemplation in action.

The development of my spiritual practice model is borrowed from the teaching of the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises. The Daily Examen is a technique of prayerful reflection on the events of the day in order to detect God's presence and discern his direction for us. In the Spiritual Exercises, Ignatius states the "five points" in his Method of General Examination of Conscience (SpEx Nr: 43, Tetlow, pp.108-109) as follows:

The first point is to give thanks to God our Lord for the favours received. The second point is to ask for grace to know my sins and to rid myself of them. The third point is to demand an account of my soul from the time of rising up to the present examination. I should go over one hour after another, one period after another. The thoughts should be examined first, then the words, and finally, the deeds in the same order as was explained under the Particular Examination of Conscience. The fourth point will be to ask pardon of God our Lord for my faults. The fifth point will be to resolve to amend with the grace of God. Close with an Our Father.

As a whole, the Ignatian five points, or as Gallagher puts it, the five steps, form the two core elements of Ignatian spiritual practice: Examen and Discernment. Following these important

features of the Ignatian Examen, I developed the important journey of interiority that the participants might meditate on self, past history and God.

When connecting with daily life, the participant is to be aware and understand the meaning of these experiences from God in their individual personal context. Gallagher (2005) redefined the Ignatian Examen prayer and discernment as being aware, understanding and taking action and in so doing moved away from an emphasis on sin, and this is not my focus either. I adopted this approach and asked the participants about their most stirring feelings in relation to the relevant personal and past experiences that they owned.

Reinterpretation in Gallagher's Threefold Paradigm – Be Aware, Understand, Act

To aid in the process of the discernment of spirits, Gallagher (2005) suggests a threefold process. As he explains, for Ignatius it is the identity of spiritual realities, or those affective stirrings in the heart—joy, sadness, hope, fear, peace, anxiety, and similar feelings—with their related thoughts, that influence our life of faith and our progress toward God (p.3).

In his two books exploring the examen (2006) and the discernment of spirits (2005), Gallagher devises a simple formula to illustrate the process of discernment: It is “A Threefold Paradigm” involving 1) a process of awareness, i.e., *noticing* what is happening in our inner spiritual experience, or what is spiritually stirring in our hearts and thoughts; 2) understanding, i.e., reflecting on the stirrings we have noticed that lead us to recognizing God; and 3) acting, which is *accepting* and living according to what we have recognized as being of God, and *rejecting* and removing from our lives what we have recognized as not of God (2005, pp.16-26). In his other

book, entitled *Examen Prayer, Ignatian Wisdom for Our Lives Today* (2006), Gallagher states that it is “a practical book” that illustrates the different experiences in the daily prayer of examen (p.21). Since the main direction of the present research is to facilitate the search for interior experience of midlife Christian professionals, the examen prayer, together with the discernment of spirits, can serve as key elements in establishing an appropriate framework, as can the spiritual practice model, so that participants might experience a spiritual journey of interiority. Gallagher’s threefold paradigm thus becomes a relevant theoretical perspective for addressing the need for awareness, understanding and action.

Gallagher’s emphasis on interior movement through a dynamic shifting of awareness, understanding and action, further develops the levels of consciousness and the appreciation of spiritual experience by the participants in the research.

Linking Ignatian Spirituality with Buddhist Mindfulness

With Ignatian spirituality established as the main foundation of the research, Kwan’s ISE program contributes a third element to the conceptual framework in the form of Zen Buddhist mindfulness. The reasons for adopting Buddhist mindfulness, along with Ignatian spirituality, are based on the interfaith context of Hong Kong, the effective interfaith practice in the ISE programme, and the parallels between Ignatian spirituality and Buddhism.

The Interfaith Context in Hong Kong and Interfaith Practice

Hong Kong’s research participants live in an interfaith and intercultural environment. Different religious practices are common and there is interfaith dialogue through regular events and

activities. In Chinese families, worshipping ancestors is customary, and Buddhist or Daoist families all come from a traditional Chinese family culture. In this kind of interfaith context, participants are accustomed to the interfaith practices of Buddhist mindfulness and Ignatian spirituality.

The Chinese cultural tradition has been fully integrated with Euro-American and Asian cultural values and practices. Since the middle of the nineteenth century, Hong Kong city has experienced colonization by the British, and has become the window through which the Chinese can look at the world. Hong Kong has turned into an international, cosmopolitan city with its Chinese cultural tradition still intact without being impacted by communism. Social practices, including traditional Chinese ethics, are deeply embedded, affecting both individual and collective levels of the family, society and economics. In Hong Kong, students at all levels receive both Chinese and international education. The interfaith and intercultural context was the fundamental background when I first considered looking into how midlife Christian professionals in the city experience spiritual transformation. Their upbringing has surely been conditioned by this macro-social and cultural context, where wisdom from different traditions and religions, including Confucianism, Buddhism, Daoism, and the Christian traditions of Catholicism and Protestantism, co-exist.

The interfaith practices in the ISE programme have successfully brought together practices and wisdom from both the Catholic and Buddhist traditions, to help teachers and students develop spiritual habits of meditation in daily life. Hong Kong has a long history of cross-cultural interaction, including the mingling of different religions from China, India, Europe and America.

Since Buddhism is deeply rooted in Chinese society, the ISE programme, which is primarily based on Catholic teaching, finds it quite agreeable to adopt Buddhist practices that are familiar to local Chinese. The ISE programme is open to both religious and non-religious teachers and students.

Kwan's Inspired Spiritual Education (ISE)

When inquiring how busy midlife Christian professionals might adapt to traditional spiritual practice and how spirituality might provide them with direction in the inter-religious and east-meets-west city of Hong Kong, the encounter with Father Thomas Kwan's Inspired Spiritual Education (ISE) model, with its inter-religious characteristics, provided important enlightenment for this research.

Background of ISE

In 2008, Father Thomas Kwan started the spiritual education program under the Faculty of Education at the Chinese University of Hong Kong. He and his team designed courses for secondary school teachers and students from both Christian and non-religious backgrounds. His programs were well-received and he later established the "inSpirEd Learning Community". As noted by Ma and Kwong in "Learning and Teaching: Creating a Spiritual Culture at school" (Ma & Kwong, p.33-35), Kwan's program advocates education in mindfulness, life and love through inter-religious spiritual practice.

Education in mindfulness focuses on how to manage oneself and how to be alone with oneself and in community. It includes the art of silence, relaxation and a mindful life attitude (Ma & Kwong, p.33). Life education emphasizes the search for self and meaning. It includes nurturing self-reflection, searching for life direction and making choices (p.33). Love education emphasizes love of nature and connecting with all things and people (p.34).

The Spiritual Education program is delivered through three core components: self-management, life education (meaning and purpose) and love education (the human and beyond). In self-management, participants learn the art of silence, stillness, and relaxation, and of raising their self-awareness and consciousness. Life education, with its meaning and purpose component, includes the nurturing of a mindful life, which includes finding the meaning of life and ways to make choices. Love education, with its “human and beyond” component, focuses on the connection with nature, and on embracing the sharing spirit and harmony of all things. The ultimate concern of Spiritual Education is to support participants in finding their life-serving purpose through the affirmation and transformation of life.

ISE in Hong Kong: an Inter-religious Approach

One of the characteristics of the Spiritual Education program is its integration of the practices from major Catholic traditions, such as Ignatian spirituality, the Benedictines, and the Franciscans, together with the Zen Buddhism taught by Thich Nhat Hanh to suit the particular needs of Hong Kong. In a reference book for secondary school teachers, Kwan describes the three Catholic theological sources and one Buddhist source as “mentors” for his model. First,

Benedictine spirituality focuses on silence, solitude, stability and self-discipline. Benedictine spirituality teaches time management and how to keep a full agenda but not be too busy (Kwan, p.35). Second, Franciscan spirituality emphasizes the relationship between the human being and nature, chastity and poverty. When connecting with nature, St. Francis's spirituality nourishes our inner peace (p.63). Third, Ignatian spirituality focuses on life meaning, choices, discernment and betterment. It introduces self-examination (p.44), discernment of life direction and choices (p.46). The daily examination of consciousness nurtures awareness of emotions and experiences (p.53). Of the three sources, the Ignatian teaching of self-examination, discernment and betterment stands out as dominant. Even though he teaches an appreciation of nature through meditation, the main thrust is still how individuals look inward to the story of their past. Kwan does not cite any specific text from the Spiritual Exercises.

Over the years, the program has integrated various prominent spiritual practices from Zen Buddhism mindfulness as taught by Thich Nhat Hanh with Christianity, thereby integrating self (body, mind, soul and spirit) with others and nature. This "Inspired Spiritual Education" has become a very popular spiritual formation program and is welcomed by many professionals, Christians from various denominations, Christian executives, and even non-believers. The Centre has created its impact with practical implications as it evolves.

Interpretation of Ignatian Spiritual Exercise in ISE

In his general work for school teachers and practitioners of ISE, Kwan introduces the *Spiritual Exercises* briefly, calling it "a practical manual for modern people to search for life direction and life planning" (undated, p. 44). His introduction is divided into three parts: first, a brief outline of

the structure and contents of the Spiritual Exercises; second, a distillation of the religious and spiritual dimensions of Ignatian teaching into a platform suitable for everyday life and its challenges, so that non-Christians may also benefit. “This is the core among the three parts.” The third part is about learning how to “maintain the direction of life, rest peacefully in life’s calling, and map out one’s life” (p.44). When introducing the structure and contents of the Spiritual Exercises, he cites (SpEx Nr.21) the purpose is “to gain mastery over one’s self and to live a well-ordered life, not making life choices that take shape from disordered affects” (p.45). I adopted this pragmatic pull towards interiority, which shares features with Halftime, in terms of planning the direction of life. In part two of this introduction, Kwan discusses life direction, resting peacefully in one’s calling, and actualizing one’s life planning, with reference to SpEx Nr:21 and 63. He particularly emphasizes the need for everyday watchfulness of one’s inner movement through the examination of consciousness of the Spiritual Exercises (p.53). The encounter with the ISE program laid down an important platform for building the theological foundation of this research, through further adoption and reinterpretation of the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises and Buddhist mindfulness.

Third Theoretical Perspective: Buddhist Mindfulness of Thich Nhat Hanh

Buddhist Mindfulness Advocated by Thich Nhat Hanh

Kwan recognizes the significance of mindfulness as advocated by Thich Nhat Hanh, with whom he studied for three months in Plum Village. In his instructional book he has a systematic introduction to the teaching of the Vietnamese Zen master, who inherited the Mahayana Buddhist tradition of Yogācāra and Zen. Thich does not make much direct reference to Buddhist scriptures, and emphasizes instead the significance of the *Heart Sutra*, for which he proudly

produced a new translation, pointing out that earlier translations confused readers (Thich, 2014, *New Heart Sutra translated by Thich Nhat Hanh available at <https://plumvillage.org/news/thich-nhat-hanh-new-heart-sutra-translation/>*).

In his 2009 book, *Breathe, You are Alive: The Sutra on the Full Awareness of Breathing*, Thich quotes master Linji, Teaching 18: “As I see it, there isn’t so much to do. Just be ordinary—put on your robes, eat your food, and pass the time doing nothing” (p.8). This shows the attitude of letting go and ordinary spirituality as inspired by Master Linji. Master Linji had a solid knowledge of the Buddhist canon, but his teaching method was based on his confidence that human beings need only to wake up to their true nature and live as ordinary people (p.10).

Master Linji (full name Linji Yixuan), was a Zen Buddhist master born in the Tang Dynasty in China sometime between 810 and 815. Many students of Buddhism are the children of Master Linji, even if they don’t know his name. In the Zen tradition, the spirit of Master Linji is in everything we are taught and everything we do (p.9). In his 2007 book, *Nothing to Do, Nowhere to Go*, Thich reveals one of the major sources of his mindfulness training, Master Linji, who invented the term of the “businessless” (without any business on hand) person, “the person who has nothing to do and nowhere to go”. In Mahayana Buddhism, the ideal person was the *bodhisattva*, a compassionate being who, on the path of enlightenment, helped others (p.10). Master Linji believes the ideal example is as follows:

A businessless person is someone who doesn't run after enlightenment or grasp anything, even if that thing is Buddha. When we learn to stop and be truly alive in the present moment, we are in touch with what's going on within and around us (p.11).

Thich follows this teaching, focusing on the here and now present moment, which is also the main Zen Buddhist approach Thich Nhat Hanh explicitly recommends his followers to study.

In my adoption of Kwan's ISE model of Buddhist mindful practices, I selected the concept of mindful living for the six participants when they started their spiritual practice, especially the technique of deep, slow and mindful breathing. Through deep breathing, one is connecting with one's heart; one feels at ease and at peace in connecting one's feelings, mind and body in stillness and silence (Thich, 2008, p.24). According to Thich's teaching, mindfulness of the positions of one's body is not enough. We must be conscious of each breath, each movement, every thought and feeling, everything that has any relation to ourselves (Thich, 1987, p.7). According to Thich (2009), "breathing is a means of awakening and maintaining full attention in order to look carefully, long and deeply, see the nature of all things, and arrive at liberation". This is the Buddha's way in which Thich believes (<https://plumvillage.org/mindfulness-practice/breathing/>).

With its adoption of mindful breathing, my model helped the six participants become conscious of their bodies, feelings, reason and what is happening in the world. Following the teaching of Thich Nhat Hanh and Kwan, the practice helps participants to be attentive, and attentiveness provides the opportunity to create insight and inspiration. When one has right beliefs and

awareness, one can control all things and make choices. The practice of mindfulness prepares participants to stay focused on their present state of mind for continuous spiritual practice, as adopted from Ignatian spirituality.

Section Two – From Conceptual Framework to Research Design

The conceptual framework built from the three theoretical perspectives of the Halftime model, Ignatian spirituality and Buddhist mindfulness contributes also to the design of the research and guides its implementation. Since the research is aimed at discovering the midlife transformation of Christian professionals in Hong Kong through an evolving model of spiritual practice, these concepts also help shape the model. The overall research design also includes the use of IPA to capture the spiritual experiences of the participants. The first level of interpretation comes from the primary voice of the participants, while the second level of interpretation by the researcher is crucial in finding out what is happening on the spiritual journey. The whole process of data collection and analysis is aimed at allowing the emergence of themes. When viewing the empirical findings under the magnifying glass of the three theoretical perspectives, I can explore the insights that come from a spiritual journey of interiority from both the findings themselves and from the theoretical perspectives. Further evaluation of the model of spiritual practice and of the feedback from participants answers the research question about the effective adoption of an evolving model of spiritual practice and also contributes to the practice. The overall research design is therefore grounded in the conceptual framework, through analysis and dialogue with the research finding, which not only addresses the research question, but also offers a contribution to knowledge and practice.

Conceptual Elements in the Design of the Model of Spiritual Practice

The focused approach of the Halftime model alerts midlife Christian professionals of their spiritual aspiration for new directions in the second half of life. For this reason it is the first step in the evolving model for this research, even though the fundamental direction of this research is different from Buford's.

Moving beyond the context and attention of Halftime, the model of spiritual practice is designed using core concepts of Ignatian spirituality, which include silence and solitude, active-practical and everyday life spiritual practice, and meditating about self, past and God. Alongside these Ignatian concepts is Buddhist mindful practice, which is also essential in guiding participants towards silence and solitude.

Silence is the first key element in spiritual practice. It is only through silence and solitude that the participants experience their interior journey and listen to their own voices and find God. In the *Spiritual Exercises* No. 20, it explicitly suggests the need for a union with God through solitude (Dulles, 2000, p.11). Buddhist mindful breathing provides a powerful tool for slowing down the pace of life in the busy city of Hong Kong. This persistent mindful practice acts as an important doorway into an interior journey of silence. With the preparatory work of silence and solitude, the model requires participants to practice daily and weekly meditation examining their life experiences. It draws on Sheldrake's concept of everyday life spirituality and Ignatius's concept of finding God in all things, and incorporates the belief that God is active, personal, and above all, present to all people. God is closely connected to our mundane daily lives.

Another element facilitating the interior movement comes from Aschenbrenner, Lonergan and Gallagher, and this is the examen of consciousness and the discernment of spirits. The model is designed with a spiritual practice that focuses on meditating about the self, on significant people and critical incidents from the past, and on God. It is aimed at drawing the participants' attention to a deeper interior emotion through experience, awareness and discernment. This internal journey requires participants to experience the interior movement in their hearts, or more directly, their souls.

Account of the Briefing and Guidelines for Meditation

What the Participants were told on the Briefing Day

At the beginning of the research, and before the fieldwork started, the six participants were invited to participate in a briefing workshop which lasted about three hours. At the workshop, participants were told about the objective of the research, what they were supposed to do during the eight week's spiritual practice, and they were also guided in a simple practice of mindful breathing.

I then gave them a simple one-page guide to the whole process of meditation, which begins with mindful breathing. I went through the practice of mindful breathing with them. The guidelines included three steps: firstly, on each day of the eight weeks' spiritual practice, they were asked to find a quiet space for fifteen minutes of morning and evening meditation. Secondly, they were told to sit comfortably, relax their body, empty their mind and concentrate on their breathing with eyes open or closed. Thirdly, they were instructed to start mindfully concentrating on their breathing for three minutes for the purpose of calming their minds and entering into total silence

before the next step of meditation (which I will explain later). After this briefing, I guided the participants in a real practice session of mindful breathing. They were asked to sit straight, and relax their bodies with eyes closed or half closed. I then asked them to put their concentration on their breathing. They were told to focus on slowly breathing in and breathing out. This practice lasted for about three minutes. After that, I asked them about their experience and explained mindful breathing was the beginning practice for entering into silence and preparing for meditation. I did not explain Zen Buddhist breathing practices as advocated by Thich Nhat Hanh, because I wanted to keep my spiritual practice model simple and open without expecting prior knowledge of any theology or religious practice.

Four Bi-weekly Focus in the Meditation

At the briefing, the participants were told about the four bi-weekly focal points of the meditation within the eight weeks' practice. For the first two weeks, they were asked to focus their meditation on the "self." Following the morning and evening meditation, begun with mindful breathing, they were told to meditate about their personal experience, especially the daily events and people that triggered their feeling and thoughts. For the second two weeks, participants were asked to focus their meditation on their "past", especially critical incidents and significant people in their life. They were told to concentrate on their most stirring feelings, such as joy, sadness, anger or fear relating to their experience in the past. For the third two weeks, the participants were told to focus on their strong feelings and emotions relating to their experience with "God" during their meditation. For the fourth two weeks, I asked participants to focus their meditation on their overall reflection and revisit what that happened during the previous six weeks, including any deep experience, discovery, surprise or any stirring feelings. After the meditation,

participants were asked to evaluate the overall model of spiritual practice. At the same time, they were told to jot down their experiences and reflections in a journal. Whatever moments they came across with any feeling or sense of discovery and surprise, they were to capture by journaling. They could have a short journaling time after the daily meditation, or spend longer journaling and reflecting over the weekend.

Four Bi-weekly Individual Interviews

During the eight weeks' research, I told the participants that I would conduct an individual interview with them for about one hour every two weeks. That meant we would have four bi-weekly individual meetings. The purpose of the interviews was to enable participants to share their lived experiences, insights, discoveries and reflections. The interview was not structured with specific questions. It was designed as an open free-flowing interview that allowed the participants to share what had happened and what they had discovered during the eight weeks' spiritual practice. They could share their reflection journal if they wished. The information shared in the interview would be recorded, kept in confidence, and used for research purposes only.

Meditation introduced

In defining meditation, the Collins Dictionary states, "Meditation is the act of remaining in a silent and calm state for a period of time, as part of a religious training, or so that you are more able to deal with the problems of everyday life".

(<https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/meditation>). The meditation I introduced was not part of a specific religious training, however, but was mainly aimed at participants engaging their everyday lives with their (Christian) faith more deeply. Moreover, I did not explain to them what kind of theological components structured my theological framework for the research. I just affirmed the framework was Christian.

The meditation I introduced to the participants was fairly general and simple, without any specific religious requirements. I asked them to meditate on their personal life and experience. Even though the theological framework of my research model was inspired by Ignatian spirituality, I did not mention any theological teaching, including the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises. I just asked them to reflect on their personal life experiences.

In my theological framework, I was inspired by the principle and foundation (SpEx Nr: 23) of the Spiritual Exercises, i.e., that humankind is created to praise, reverence and serve God our Lord, and by this means the soul is saved. The other things on the face of the earth are created for human beings to help them in attaining the end for which they are created. Human beings are to make use of these aids for the attainment of this end (Dulles, 2000, p.12). We therefore go through our individual salvation history reviewing our relationship with God. It is through God, in God and with God that we discern His will through an internal journey of connecting to our experience of critical life incidents and significant people. Since Ignatius teaches us that one finds God in everything, our salvation history has divine meaning and implications. I also borrowed from the third point of the regular Examen Prayer of the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises

(SpEx Nr:43), which demands an account of myself from the time I wake up to the Examen, either hour by hour, or through successive blocks of time. I examine thoughts first, then words, then deeds, following the order given in the Particular Examen (p.109, Tetlow). This process was supported by Father Kwan's ISE model advocating the daily examination of consciousness, which can nurture awareness of our emotions and experiences (Kwan, p.53).

However, in order to adhere to a simple and open model of spiritual practice, I did not explain the contents of Fr. Thomas Kwan's Inspired Spiritual Education (ISE) model, nor the complex theology of Ignatian spirituality. One of the fundamental aims of the research was to learn about the experience of spiritual transformation of the participants. The theological foundation of the meditative practices of the research was closely related to Ignatian spirituality, but participants were not informed of this.

The whole process was simple and direct. It offered plenty of room for the participants to explore their interior journey. It was easy to fit in with their own lifestyles and work habits. Most importantly, they had the full authority to decide on a comfortable way to record, journal and express their experiences. The whole spiritual practice is based on natural voluntary spiritual practice and not on intellectual teaching. The experience of spiritual freedom and the discerning of the heart and movement are personal encounters with God.

Characteristics of the Model

The conceptual design and structure of the model reveal certain characteristics which correspond closely to the local context of the participants. Firstly, the model is based on the Christian

meditative tradition, especially the features of Ignatian spirituality. In order to relate to the local Hong Kong context, the practice of Buddhist mindfulness is recommended. With five Protestants and one Catholic, the language used is Christian, but without any ecclesial leanings.

Secondly, the model is designed to be simple and direct, so that it can easily be applied on a daily and regular basis, allowing the busy multi-tasking midlife participants to develop different patterns according to their lifestyles. In terms of time and space, they can practice it according to those lifestyles. The model therefore should have room for flexibility and dynamism, given the various backgrounds and situations of the participants.

Thirdly, the main direction for this practice is for participants to follow an interior spiritual journey, instead of having to pay attention to external actions or steps that need to be taken during the process. To put it more directly, the requirements of the practice are simple and do not demand attention to rituals or formalities. To use a professional trainer's term, the practice is user-friendly. The main advice for the participants is to focus mostly on the stirring of their internal feelings and experience.

Summary

The research started as part of my midlife experience of awakening and search. The conceptual framework provides the three important theoretical perspectives of the Halftime model, Ignatian spirituality and Buddhist mindfulness used in building the research design. At the same time, the conceptual framework provides a rich theological foundation for the design of the spiritual practice model and for an interpretive dialogue with the empirical findings. The overall research

is therefore closely linked: it moves from research issues to conceptual framework to the overall research design, in order that I might investigate the phenomena associated with the midlife transformation of Christian professionals in Hong Kong.

From this conceptual framework, I constructed a model of spiritual practice aimed particularly at a group of midlife Christian professionals in Hong Kong. An interpretative phenomenological analysis method is adopted to allow participants to experience their spiritual journeys. The entire research design is aimed at allowing participants to experience their interior journey and listen to their own voice and find God. The methodology for the research is discussed in detail in the next chapter.

Chapter Three: Methodology

Introduction

Following the conceptual framework and the design of the model, this chapter focuses on how the research methodology addresses the research question. An inductive research approach is adopted using the methodology of IPA. The reasons for this choice are explained; the data analysis method is presented; the levels of data interpretation is discussed ; and the role of the researcher and the practical theologian is elucidated.

My research approach is inductive because I am investigating midlife phenomena inductively through a small sample group of participants from whom I collected experience-based data. My research is a small-scale study that seeks to reach an understanding of spiritual practice as experienced by midlife Christian professionals in Hong Kong. The inductive qualitative research method is used to discover how the theoretical perspectives embedded in the model of spiritual practice operate.

From an awareness of the significance of using a methodology largely developed in psychology and then transferred to theology, I will reflect upon and discuss the tensions and benefits in such a methodological transfer, and explain how I addressed this issue in my research towards the end of this chapter.

Why Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis?

The inductive approach and IPA methodology adopted in this research are closely linked to the conceptual framework. This framework allows midlife Christian professionals to pause at halftime, experience their past, and encounter God through a model of spiritual practice based in the theoretical perspectives of Ignatian spirituality and Buddhist mindfulness. The characteristics of IPA support the purpose and design of the research, which is informed by these theoretical perspectives.

I adopted the IPA methodology because it gives voice to midlife Christian professionals as they express their experiences. These lived experiences are where the participants find meaning. Focusing on lived experience and allowing things to appear as they are is the philosophical foundation of a phenomenological approach (Langdridge, 2007, pp.11-13). The IPA approach is about describing the essence or nature of lived experience (Smith & Osborn, 2003) and of how participants make sense of that experience (Smith, 2004, pp.39-54).

The IPA approach fits this study of a spiritual practice model employed in the midlife search of Christian professionals, because IPA studies usually deal with life-altering events and decisions or existential questions. The model of spiritual practice is based on Aschenbrenner's examen of consciousness, which involves experiencing and understanding lived experience (a concept taught by Lonergan). The process of making sense of life therefore evolves through interpreting the things that appear from the lived experience.

In this research, the participants explored the meaning of their personal and social worlds during eight weeks of spiritual practice. The process then involved understanding and interpreting the participants' experiences as they faced themselves, their past and God. When going through a spiritual journey, participants recall critical incidents and people, and find the meaning of those experiences. IPA is a suitable choice for this process as its principle aim is "to explore in detail how participants are making sense of their personal and social world, and the main currency for an IPA study is the meaning of particular experiences, events, states hold for participants" (Smith & Osborn, 2003, p.53).

The phenomenological approach can be utilized in practical theological research to find the concepts of God as experienced and expressed in real life (Heimbrock, 2005, p.291). This experience with God in real life echoes an important Ignatian concept of "finding God in all things". The research has revealed the phenomena through which the participants discovered and understood their life's meaning through encounter with God.

Features of the IPA

According to Smith and Osborn (2003), the IPA has some key features. First, it is a dynamic process in which the researcher plays an active role. I certainly had an active role in designing the model, in introducing participants to the simple framework of the model, and in facilitating the interviews. Second, the researcher's job is to get close to the participants' personal worlds indirectly. The bi-weekly interviews gave me the opportunity to hear of their personal worlds in an open and free manner. Third, the researcher has his or her own conceptions, which "are required in order to make sense of other person's world through a process of interpretive

activity” (Smith & Osborn, 2003, p.51). Thus a two-stage interpretation process, or a double-hermeneutic, is employed. In my research, these IPA features were manifest when the six midlife Christian professional participants were experiencing their lives through the model and trying to make sense of their worlds. As the researcher, I conducted the second level of interpretation of their experiences and efforts.

The IPA helps in accessing the subjective experiences of individuals, but also acknowledges that the researcher plays an important role as a listener who makes sense of the verbal accounts through the lens of his or her culture, prior experience and conceptions (Smith, 2004, p.45). The IPA facilitates a rich co-construction of the participants’ experiences by the researcher, who is also engaged in experiencing the process, through an interpretation of the participants’ interpretations of their worlds (Smith & Osborn, 2003). This point is particularly relevant to the present research as I am also experiencing the process of being a midlife Christian professional.

The Role of the Researcher and the Practical Theologian

As the researcher, I certainly have an empathetic understanding of the world of midlife Christian professionals. My interpretation thus offers insights that are both practical and meaningful. Besides interpreting the participants’ experiences, my role as the practical theologian and the researcher is also critical in this research. In an article about practical theology as a hermeneutics of lived religion, Ganzevoort (2009) asks to what degree the theologian is expected to be a participant in the field she or he is investigating. He suggests there are different roles the practical theologian or researcher adopts in a research study.

As a fellow practitioner and the designer of the model, I am definitely engaged with the participants in their spiritual reflections and experiences both as leader and researcher. I am also a coach who supports and empowers participants in exploring an encounter with God. This companionship raised participants' awareness and helped them find meaning from their experiences. In this sense, practical theology is a transformative discipline, as the role of practical theologians is described as "enabling the faithful performance of the gospel and...exploring and taking seriously the complex dynamics of the human encounter with God" (Ganzevoort, 2009). Another role I play is that of referee, because practical theology is a critical discipline. My own midlife experience provides insight into the interpretation of the participants' experiences. However, as the researcher, I have to be very critical in order to avoid any personal bias or judgement. I was extremely careful not to impose any views on the participants during the interviews. My role as an active researcher in listening to the participants' exploration and discovery in the process was clearly upheld. My task was to listen and to be open to receive anything I found new and unusual.

In addition to the participants, there is also an important partner, that is, "I myself". This research is driven by my midlife spiritual reflection. Through the whole process, I am a partner who has a critical dialogue with the participants. The perspective that I bring to this research will be that of a researching professional rather than a professional researcher (Bennett and Graham, 2008, p.33).

Data Collection and Analysis

Sampling

The IPA is regarded as idiographic, committed to the in-depth study of small groups of participants; groups that are fairly homogeneous, and typically made up of between five and ten participants (Smith, 2004, p.56). For this research, I selected six participants. Sampling in IPA is purposive, and relatively homogeneous (Smith et al., 1999). The sample is purposive because the researcher purposely sets out to recruit only those people who share the experience being investigated (Langdrige, 2007, p.57).

“The samples are chosen because they have particular features or characteristics which will enable detailed exploration and understanding of the central themes and puzzles which the researcher wishes to study” (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003, p.78). These six targeted samples were selected because as midlife Christian professionals in Hong Kong they fulfilled the specific criteria for the purpose of the research. The purposive sample participants shared the following characteristics: 1) They were all committed Christians worshipping at either Protestant or Catholic churches. 2) They were midlife Christian professionals over forty-five years old, with professional achievements, working in senior positions. 3) They represented a variety of professions with a minimum of twenty years’ experience. 4) All were dissatisfied and unfulfilled for a variety of reasons. 5) All were yearning for, and seeking deeper meaning at this specific midlife stage. 6) All were interested in spirituality and willing to commit to the spiritual practice in the research.

Data Collection

I adopted the semi-structured interview, which is the most common interview structure in phenomenological research. According to Smith and Osborn, the advantages of a semi-structured interview are that “it facilitates rapport/empathy, allows a greater flexibility of coverage and allows the interview to go into novel areas, and it tends to produce richer data” (Smith & Osborn, 2003, p.59).

Following the IPA approach, and to allow the phenomena to emerge, the researcher is likely to have very little to do in guiding the interview. In this research, I did not have any guiding questions, as the research aims at discovering what happened during their spiritual practice. During the interview, a few open questions freed and warmed the discussion so as to allow the participants to share their experiences freely. The open questions included: What happened in last two weeks? What experience or moment did you find most touching? What was the specific feeling or discovery that you want to share?

The dialogue and conversation with the participants in the interview followed the natural flow of the reflection and sharing from the participants, but without any structured questions. I focused my attention on their sharing and let their experiences unfold. I kept an open mind with active listening, following their verbal and non-verbal promptings. The conversational style of the interviews made it possible for the participants to engage in the conversation very naturally and a rapport could then be built to ensure an open and honest response (Langdridge, 2007, p.66).

The research was designed with bi-weekly themes of connecting to oneself, to others (for example, to critical incidents and people), and to God, through daily and weekly spiritual practice. Four bi-weekly individual semi-structured interviews were conducted; each lasted around one hour. All interviews were conducted in a convenient private place near the participants' office, church or home. Questions were framed in an open, neutral manner which allowed the participants a lot of space and the opportunity to express their own views before we probed specific areas or asked prompting questions. The non-verbal communication, including tone of voice and facial expression, was captured in notes.

After each interview, I made a brief entry in my reflective journal. This entry documented my general impressions of each participant, the circumstances of each interview, as well as any personal bias that emerged during the interview and other factors that were relevant to future data interpretations. The data was collected in the interviews, which were recorded and later transcribed. As the participants were Chinese, the interviews were conducted in Chinese. I then translated the transcriptions into English. The transcriptions were also checked against the audio recording for accuracy.

Data Analysis

There are different methods for carrying out data analysis. Analysis is a process of breaking down the data and discovering the themes in ways that draw out the meaning hidden within the text (Swinton & Mowat, 2006, p.52). Willig proposes a four-stage process, with the first stage requiring one-to-one interviews be audio recorded and transcribed verbatim, with the researcher reading and re-reading while making notes of their thoughts and observations. This is the

researcher's initial engagement with the text (Willig, 2001). The transcripts are read several times and line numbered. The second stage of theme identification captures the essential emergent themes or concepts. Thematic analysis is used to search for themes that emerge as important to the research. Then follows coding. "Coding the data involves working through the text...in order to identify meaning units, and labeling these with a code that captures the meaning identified. In an inductive thematic analysis, the coding frame itself emerges from the data" (Willig, 2013, p.61). Finally, a summary table is created as an inclusive list of master themes (Willig, 2001). The researcher thus captures the importance of the experience through the integrated themes.

In their article on IPA, Smith and Osborn (2003), introduce another version of data analysis. They emphasize the importance of the investigator engaging in an interpretative relationship with the transcript. The investigator reads and re-reads the transcript and comments on the similarities and differences in what a person is saying. After this process, "the initial notes are transformed into concise phrases which aim to capture the essential quality of what was found in the text. The themes move the responses to a slightly higher level of abstraction, and may invoke psychological terminology" (pp.67-68). "The transformation of initial notes into themes is continued through the whole manuscript.... This is a two stage process...in which transformation into themes work" (p.69).

As a third approach, Saldana discusses in great detail the technique of coding for quality research. He explains clearly the steps that go from pre-coding to coding, to categorizing, and from the categories to themes/concepts, and finally from the themes/concepts to

assertions/theories (Saldana, 2016, pp.10-16). I primarily follow Saldana's approach in this research. The detailed coding process allowed the themes to emerge and the dynamic experience to be interpreted and understood. At the same time, I adopted Smith and Osborn's suggestion of reading, re-reading and engaging closely with the transcripts, which enabled me to hear the participants' voices clearly.

In this research, both reflections and interpretations are very important. There are various levels of reflections. Participants' reflections were captured during the interviews. My (i.e. the researcher's) reflections, including my immediate reflection on each interview, and then a deeper level of reflection when I was interpreting the data, also had an important role to play. As the researcher, I had to be analytical and careful with the message and concept that the participants wanted to convey. As the researcher, "I became the primary tool that is being used to access the meanings of the situation being explored" (Swinton & Mowat, 2006, p.60). The researcher becomes the one who gives meaning to the whole transformation process by studying the themes emerging from the data provided by the participants.

Three Levels of Data Interpretation Process

Following the IPA approach, the first level of interpretation is the primary voice of the participants and allow their lived experience to appear as they are. The recording of the interviews were the interpretive quotes of what the participants said in the interviews in Chinese and translated to English. These records had been listened and verified repeatedly. Before the second level of interpretation by the researcher, I adopt Lonergan's theoretical perspective, the four levels of consciousness: Experience, Understanding, Judgment and Decision (EUJD) as

another level of analysis and interpretation. The purpose of applying the EUJD approach to analyse the finding is to enrich a deeper understanding of the interior movement. A more extensive explanation for this three levels of interpretation will be discussed in the interpretive discussion of finding in chapter five.

Reflection on Methodological Issues with IPA

There has always been a tense relationship between theology and the social sciences. One view is that social science methods are simply pragmatic tools for gathering information and help in examining the world. Another view is that they are deeply formative (Bennett et al., pp.147-148). Swinton and Mowat (2006) believe the method of Practical Theology works within an interpretative paradigm, as it starts with living human experience, which requires human interpretation. The fieldwork research is done in a theological context, along with theological reflection (pp.74-75). Therefore, “integrating qualitative research in this way (that is faithful and illuminating) is not an easy task. It involves complex process of conversion and sanctification” (pp.vi-vii). A conversation employing insights from the Christian tradition and perspectives from the social sciences may help the integration. All of these views pose challenges in terms of tensions and benefits in the relationship between theology and social science. In reflecting on different perspectives, I engage with Swinton’s idea of making theology a logical priority, and my research shows how I resolve the issue by applying Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), a social science methodology of practical theology.

Tensions between Theology and Social Science

In one of the “text boxes” of Bennett et al.’s *Invitation to Research in Practical Theology* (2018), where researchers are invited to give an example of, and discuss their research perspective, Swinton writes directly about his methodology and how it relates to his theological world view. He believes fieldwork research is done within a theological context and therefore methods are basically pragmatic tools to gather the information we want to look at. However, this is problematic in light of the tension between theology and the social sciences, as methods are deeply formative in providing us with a lens to examine the world. Methods are theoretical guides that have a tendency to determine what we see. It therefore helps us to see some things very clearly, but we then see other things less clearly (pp.147-148).

Moreover, qualitative research, while a useful tool, contains tensions and contradictions in relation to epistemology and the nature of truth and knowledge (Swinton and Mowat 2006 p.73). The social sciences belongs to nomothetic knowledge, i.e., the view that knowledge is gained through the use of scientific method and that scientific truth must be falsifiable, replicable and generalizable (p.40-41). Truth is understood as hypothetical, deducible and evidence-based (p.38). However, theology belongs to a different order of idiographic knowledge, i.e., the view that meaningful knowledge can be discovered in unique, non-replicable experiences. Idiographic truth and knowledge are critical for Practical Theology, which emphasizes the discovery of God’s revelation through Scripture, tradition and reflection on experience (p.43).

Benefits of Using Social Science Methodologies within Practical Theology

Benefits surface from working with social science methods in Practical Theology. First, Swinton and Mowat believe that the social sciences offer Practical Theology useful tools that uncover important data for theological reflection (p.vi). The method of mutual critical correlation provides a model of integration for the social sciences and Practical Theology: “This method seeks to bring together an interpretation of religious experience and the contemporary situation in a way that enables both to engage in critical and potentially transformative dialogue...in a way that is both mutually enabling and faithful” (pp.73-74). This mutual dialogue is critical in the process of the transformation of practice.

Second, in the process of mutual critical correlation, the characteristics of Practical Theology are maintained. Practical Theological methods are embedded within a theological hermeneutical/interpretative paradigm. Various hermeneutical perspectives are employed in order to understand God and human experiences (p.74-75). Practical Theology is bound to be interpretive, as it starts with living human experience. This living experience has to be interpreted, for “the notion that human practices are the basis upon which worlds of meaning and social relations are constructed has proved influential across many academic disciplines” (p.67, Bennett et al.). The construction of meaning in human practices is hermeneutical and interpretive.

Third, the method of mutual critical correlation holds together four tasks of Practical Theology, which include critical thinking, theological reflection, and interpretative and missiological tasks. In particular, within the interpretative paradigm, as human beings, we are constantly interpreting

experience and finding meaning and purpose in the world. This quest to explore meaning through interpretation is a fundamental dimension of Practical Theology (Swinton, pp.37-38). Critical theological reflection brings out insights from the Christian tradition and perspectives from the social sciences. In fact, I am using the IPA method as a tool to give me my data. I then interpret the dynamic experience from the Christian tradition. Moreover, the method also helps in bringing out insight through theological reflection with the Christian tradition of Ignatian spirituality. Throughout the process of the research, I have applied these insights and the key features of my spiritual practice model in a real-life company as part of the development of managers, both Christians and non-Christians. The positive results of gaining enlightenment about life direction and understanding of self and others lead to different actions and transformation, and this represents the important missiological task of Practical Theology.

Theology and Social Science: Unequal Voices

Swinton and Mowat do not agree theology and the social sciences should have equal voices, so they suggest “within the critical conversation which is Practical Theology, we recognize and accept fully that theology has logical priority; qualitative research tells us nothing about the meaning of life, the nature of God, cross, resurrection or the purpose of the universe” (p.89-90). Swinton and Mowat therefore embrace a Christological perspective and draw on Deussen Hunsinger, who describes “the Chalcedonian pattern” of relationship between theology and psychology, and states that the two disciplines:

Should be viewed as similar to the relationship between the divine and human nature of Christ, in that there should be: Indissoluble differentiation; Inseparable unity;

Indestructable order; Logical priority of theology” (p.84-85). The Indissoluble differentiation identifies two specific roles and forms of knowledge not be confused; different understanding and implications. The Inseparable unity refers to the claim that “the social sciences offer complementary knowledge which will enhance and sharpen our theological understandings” (p.85). The Indestructable order refers to the claim that the “voice of theology has logical precedence within the critical conversation. It means theology talks of the ultimate issues, of life, death and God cannot be dealt by social sciences (p.86).

In his contribution to *Invitation to Research in Practical Theology* by Bennet et al., Swinton describes how theology takes precedence over the social sciences in his practice through an example of the meaning of health. There are problems applying a psychological method to certain religious behaviours if one then draws conclusions about the meaning of health using a psychological lens. Psychological health is very different from theological health, which involves the presence of God, irrespective of a person’s psychological state. Swinton claims that “psychological methods can be useful of course, but only when they are carried out and interpreted within a theological context” (Bennett et al., p.148). Thus, in his work, social science methodology is not an equal partner with theology.

Addressing the Issues in my Practical Theology Research

In my research, I have adopted Swinton’s view that theology has logical priority, while adopting the methodology of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) as one means of achieving

the tasks of Practical Theology, which are to be critical, interpretative, and theologically reflective, with the goal of effecting transformation of midlife Christian professionals in Hong Kong.

Because of the benefits mentioned above, I applied IPA as a pragmatic empirical tool that positioned questions about the lived experience of midlife Christian professionals within a spiritual practice model. This method allowed the participants to voice their stories, and at the same time, research their own theological reflections. The collected data then formed the base for dialogue with Ignatian theologians and for an assessment of the conceptual framework.

As an example of this, I was fully aware in my research that the selection of IPA was not only for a pragmatic purpose, but that it also helped me explore the knowledge I valued and sought. IPA helped me look at the lived experience of the participants as this appeared during their eight weeks meditation and reflection. However, I realized that this method would not help me to see other things, and that things were excluded from the perspective I chose. The method is therefore not entirely neutral and has the tendency to determine what we see. In my research, the open interview, and applying IPA, helped me see a wide perspective of lived experience, but not everything. An example would be the choice not to focus on “sin” in my qualitative research, which meant that this aspect was much less visible than others. I chose the method to deliver what I was looking for, that is, the phenomenon of transformation of midlife Christian professionals in Hong Kong when experiencing the evolving model of spiritual practice. Using this approach, I recognized and reconciled the built-in tensions.

In my Practical Theology research, I am interested in investigating the religious behaviour and lived experience of the midlife Christian participants, and IPA is a suitable tool fit for purpose. I believe that the findings of connectedness, discernment and transformation are important phenomena and I have interpreted them through an understanding of Ignatian spirituality and theology. I discovered human understanding of a lived experience but have not changed my theological belief. Therefore, in my work, I followed Swinton's view that theology takes priority and precedence over social science.

Summary

To conclude, this research adopts an inductive approach to the midlife phenomena of Christian professionals through adopting a model of spiritual practice. Supported by the conceptual framework and the purpose of the research, an IPA methodology was selected to allow the primary voice of the participants to be heard and for the researcher to then interpret their experience at the second level. Saldana's detailed data coding process was used as a tool in understanding the themes that emerged from the spiritual practice of these midlife Christian professionals. Finally, the tensions and benefits of the methodological transfer from psychology to theology were discussed, along with the way this issue was addressed in this research. The next chapter describes the factual findings from twenty-four interviews and a detailed data analysis process.

Chapter Four: Factual Findings

Introduction

Having outlined the interpretative phenomenological analysis approach that will be taken to explore the phenomenon of midlife spiritual transformation, this chapter applies the method and presents the modified spiritual practice model as it was experienced by the six midlife Christian professionals. The chapter is divided into four sections: Section one provides a simple profile of the six participants. Section two explains the process of data analysis through a few examples, along with a detailed mapping of how the data produced the codes, how the codes were grouped together to create the categories, and how the categories were clustered to form the themes. Section three is a general description of the themes that emerged. Section four demonstrates how the three themes emerged from the consolidated data following the four bi-weekly spiritual journeying.

As a whole, the aim of the four sections is to present the empirical findings and trace the emergence of themes through a detailed analysis of solid data gleaned from the spiritual experiences of the participants.

Section One: The Key Participants

In order to facilitate easy reading, the disguised alphabetic symbols of A, B, C, D, E and F will be used to represent the six participants. The demographics of the participants will be explained, including their gender, age, religion, occupation, family background, marital status and their main reason for participating in this research.

Participant A is a fifty-year-old male professional trainer, married with two sons. He was baptized in the United States twenty years ago and now worships at a mega Protestant church in Hong Kong. He came from a broken family with divorced parents. His father abandoned the family during his childhood and he was raised by a grandmother who gave him unconditional love. A is interested in finding his true inner self from the past. He is a devoted Christian and has believed in Christ for over twenty years. He has lived in the United States and worked as regional sales manager until encountering Peter Drucker's philosophy whereupon he became a Drucker Academy certified trainer. He is a dedicated father and husband. He does not like teams, so works alone, and he does not like building close relationships with people. He has been struggling with his traumatic childhood shadows and searching for identity and meaning of the next stage of life.

Participant B is a male aged forty-eight, an investment banker; married, but separated from his wife. He is a Catholic, and while not very committed to his religion, is practicing meditation with calligraphy and undertaking Chinese Confucian studies. His father has passed away and influenced him greatly by passing on to him the legacy of Chinese culture. He is interested in knowing more about himself and the direction for a meaningful life as he has been struggling in a stressful banking environment and an unresolved relationship with his wife. He wonders whether his vocation is in a banking career or in other choices contributing to Chinese culture.

Participant C is a full-time mother, aged forty-five with a three-year-old daughter. She was a successful and dedicated nurse who worked for terminal care services for many years before she married. Her role changed after marriage when she became a full-time wife and mother. She is a

dedicated Christian who worships at a Protestant church. In her midlife transition she is seeking a solution to and clarity about her identity and way of life. She is confused, lost and anxious about her direction in life and is also in chronic physical pain. She is looking for healing and God's will in her life.

Participant D is a married female, aged forty-seven, and without children. She works at the correctional services department in government. She has been a dedicated Protestant for many years. Because of her frustration and suffering at her workplace, she has been asking God for direction and searching for the answer through studying spirituality. She started meditation and journaling a few years ago during her study. The call to serve others through spirituality is her discernment issue. Besides the core concern of calling, she has been accompanying her sick dying mother. D is searching for confirmation of her vocation with God's timing.

Participant E is a female aged fifty. She is a senior translator who has been working for the government for many years. She is single and a devoted Christian, and has served as a deacon helping to build the Protestant church for almost thirty years. She came from a broken family with a womanizing father. Her mother and sister were the main breadwinners and they worked very hard. They were living in a very poor small rented room without proper light or facility to study. She now has a very stable life and practices daily devotions and journaling. She had been longing for a loving Christian partner, but has failed many times in her love relationships. She is also longing for a direction for the next phase of her life. After years of church service, work and study, E believes God will prepare her for a colorful life in her second phase.

Participant F is a fifty-one year old senior executive of a media company and a mother of two children with learning issues. She has had a tense relationship with her husband for a long time. She has ADHD and difficulty praying and connecting with people emotionally. She has a strong sense of abandonment by her mother, as she was sent to study abroad at twelve years of age. F is a dedicated Christian, who has been worshipping at a Protestant church for twenty years. F wants to reconcile her past, release past wounds and find new direction in life. She has been praying for her midlife direction, for escape from all the suffering, and for discovery of her true self. She is very committed to this research as she recognizes this research is God's answer to her prayers.

Section Two: The Data Analysis Process

My research is aimed at knowing and understanding the phenomenon of spiritual transformation in midlife Christian professionals in Hong Kong. The research mainly revolved around an eight-week spiritual practice divided into four phases, each lasting for two weeks. During these four phases, the six participants were committed to silent daily meditation, mindful breathing and journal reflection with the following foci:

- (1) First fortnight examining self;
- (2) Second fortnight reviewing the past for critical incidents and significant people;
- (3) Third fortnight meditating about God;
- (4) Fourth fortnight reflecting on the eight-week spiritual practice experience overall and assessing the modified spiritual practice model. This reflection also covers the impact of the eight-week experience on their view of the future and second half of life. The findings related to

the participants' comments on and assessment of the modified spiritual practice model will be presented in chapter seven.

At the end of each phase, open-ended and free-flow interviews were carried out with each of the six participants individually. It is important to point out that this research is based on an open-ended interview that follows the flow of ideas, insight from the described experience, and reflection on critical incidents or people. There were no specific leading or planned questions. I tried not to interfere or intervene in the flow of speech, thoughts or emotions of the participants during their presentations. From the data collected during the four phases of bi-weekly interviews, words and phrases or descriptions of experiences given by the participants were used to derive a number of categories from which themes emerged and were identified. The themes were thus directly derived from the words, phrases, codes, and categories the participants used to describe their experiences, or from ideas that emerged during the eight weeks of spiritual practice.

Since there were no specific research questions designed to lead the interviews, repetitive words and phrases with similar or related meanings and with relative significance to the research question were pulled out and placed together into categories, before being abstracted and collated into themes. This rudimentary and fundamental approach to identifying the phenomena emerging from the conversations of the participants was aimed at ensuring there would be few levels of interpretative analysis. That is, the participants would freely interpret their experiences on the first level, followed by an analysis through the lens of Lonergan's EUJD perspective and then an interpretive discussion of the finding by the researcher.

Following this basic approach and structure, the factual findings from the twenty-four interviews of six participants during the eight weeks of spiritual practice were scanned in a straightforward way, so that the key words, phrases and categories each participant expressed were selected, with simple comments, coding and categories directly derived from the interview records. The categorization of coding in the research followed the process of clustering the coded data into categories. After the consolidation of the data into categories, themes were identified. For the coding process, I used detailed line-by-line coding to ensure a trustworthy analysis. The codes helped me capture the essential elements of the research story. When clustered together according to similarity and regularity, they formed a pattern and facilitated the development of categories and hence analysis of their connections.

From Verbatim Data, Codes, and Categories to Emergence of Themes

In the last chapter on methodology, I listed three approaches to IPA analysis in the matter of coding and creating categories and themes. The approaches advocated by Smith and Osborn, as well as Willig, are more directly create themes out of codes. For Smith and Osborn, “The transformation of initial notes into themes is continued through the whole manuscript.... This is a two stages process....in which transformation into themes work” (2003, p.69).

The third approach, which Saldana discusses in great detail, involves the technique of coding for quality research. He explains clearly the steps to take from pre-coding to coding, then to categorizing, and finally from categories to themes (2016, pp. 10-16). I have adopted Saldana’s approach by first pre-coding, then coding, before categorizing and finally identifying the emergent themes. The effort, though more demanding in terms of scanning and filtering, helped

create a solid and detailed process through which the voices of the participants could be well preserved and presented in these emergent themes. This was particularly useful for the non-structured and free-flowing interview style that was employed, with data freely expressed. Saldana's detailed approach thus ensures that the participants' voices will be preserved and solidly processed.

Saldana defines codes as “summative, salient, and essence-capturing....The portion of data to be coded during First Cycle processes can range in magnitude from a single word to a full paragraph to an entire page of text”. Second Cycle coding “further manages, filters, highlights, and focuses the salient features of qualitative data record for generalizing categories, themes, and concepts...” (p.9).

To prepare for the detailed analysis of the data through coding, categorizing and theme formation, I prepared for the whole process by first building up the foundation of analysis through the first cycle of coding. The codes were extracted from the original data as recorded in Excel format. This first cycle of codes was commented upon and given a more general description or identification of codes (see Appendix 1). With this groundwork solidly laid, I could start the process of coding, categorizing and theme formation as a three-step procedure:

Step 1: From the first cycle of codes in the foundation work, I presented the second-level codes. These codes were numbered (see Appendix 2).

Step 2: From the second cycle, I grouped codes into clusters forming categories. Each category contains a list of numbered codes under the specific named category. The summary of the three steps from codes to categories and themes is shown in Table 1. In this step, when a list of categories was mapped out, I took an extra step to divide them into major sets of categories with similar patterns or qualities. This was a transitional move to prepare for Step 3.

Step 3: With the categories being traced and formed, and also the transitional step taken to divide the categories into similar patterns and/or properties, the emergent themes were identified. The summary of integrated categories from the six participants in the emergent themes is shown in Table 2.

The Process of Coding, Categorizing and Theme Formation

I have chosen the cases of three participants as examples to demonstrate the three-step procedure of coding, categorizing and theme formation. The full set of documents recording the analysis of all six participants is attached as Appendix 2. The following illustration shows the second level of codes that was created. The codes were then placed into groups in terms of the similarities of their properties and the dimensions of their relevance to the experience of the participants. The groups of codes formed categories. Different categories with similar properties and dimensions of relevancy were then placed together to form themes. The themes were created when different categories were put together to find the most distinguishable features which best represented the nature of the phenomena that emerged.

Example 1: Participant A

The following are selected data numbered and typed in italics. The codes are placed in brackets. The order follows the actual sequence that appeared in the original raw data recorded line-by-line in Excel format.

Step One: From Raw Data to Codes

1st Interview

1.1 facing self through incidents, people and feeling.

(In touch with self and others)

1.2 especially listening to God. This process was very special.

(Listening to God as a process)

1.3 with strong feeling when I meditated.... not acting as a Christian. I could not face myself.

(Feeling and facing self with strong feeling)

1.4 interacted with people easily but hiding myself in my loneliness.

(Interacting with others but hiding self)

1.5 I took the initiative and slowed down to greet the security guard.

(Take action to meet others)

1.6 stirred up my feelings. I went to an island alone and enjoyed the process and experienced something different. I tasted and felt that life is controlled by God. (Experience self and tasting

God in process)

1.7 I felt mindful breathing helped me to stop thinking. Breathing gave me full attention.....

Every time finish breathing, I was awake and alive – Mindful breathing. (Mindful breathing)

1.8 When connecting with nature, it was grace, energy, spirit, thanks and happiness with small things.

(Connecting with nature with energy)

1.9 Realized all happy and rich life indeed surrounding me. All things are blessings.

(All things are blessings; find God in all things)

1.10 Everyday mindful breathing, looking back, reflect feeling....listening to God. This process was very special.

(Mindful breathing; finding God in process)

1.11 Being alone praying in an island connected my internal flow of emotions. (Connecting self with emotions)

1.12 I faced my own weakness when being alone.

(Facing self)

1.13 I preferred only short or shallow relationships with people as I had a lot of fear of being too close

(Facing self and shadows)

1.14 I discovered my six shadows. These six shadows had hindered my joy and freedom. I could acknowledge it and start to understand its impact. I need to embrace my shadow, face and dialogue with little inner child. I was like a crying child in my mother's arm and seeking for deep love.

(Struggling with shadows)

1.15 tidy up the shadows.... The best way to deal with the shadows was to love fully. Love fully meant to love myself, love all those people surrounding me.

(Tidying up shadows and others through love)

1.16 I seldom experienced it but feeling just came out when connecting to self in silence. The past traumatic childhood appeared in the spiritual practice.

(Connecting self and shadow of childhood)

2nd Interview

2.1 It is a clear message for discernment. God had turned me to forgive.

(Discernment to forgive)

2.1 I got enlightenment and it is clearly from the Holy Spirit. It helped me to understand.

(Enlightenment from Holy Spirit)

2.3 the biggest hurting experience was the separation after co-habiting. My broken family made me no confidence in marriage.

(Hurting shadows)

2.4 When meditating, I got the strong and vigorous feeling when remembering my grandmother. I cried seriously when remembering my grandmother during meditation..... I felt a touch of deep love like God. These memories had stirred up a strong feeling of being loved and protected in my suffering.

(Relating to significant others with emotion and then connecting God)

3rd Interview

3.1 I observed how a Christian integrated his faith with business.....I witnessed God's power in the world through my boss integrating business and faith. It is discernment. I discern a clear message that God always turns impossible to possible.

(Integration of profession and faith in discernment)

3.2 I was puzzled and sought discernment of God. In silence, I listened to a voice: “Do it for me.” God turned impossible to possible if under His will.

(Discernment as a small voice)

3.3 I observed God’s will with more clarity when I looked back. Then I discerned the priority of my life.

(Discernment of priority of life)

3.4 God opened the way through training and teaching and serving the church, seminary school and workplace through teamwork, management and leadership.... Then I meditated my long-term vision “Management Thought Leader” in Asia, China, HK. (God helping through business and profession)

4th Interview

4.1 I know the here and now time to relate to people is important. I pray for God at anytime anywhere and want to connect with God.

(Connecting God here and now)

4.2 In reflecting last eight weeks, this journey provided a map for reviewing my first half of life connecting to shadows of confusion, despair to family, death experience.

Now, I believed that life is not belonging to me. Renewal of life is to letting go to God. (Review and find insights; connecting self, shadows and death)

4.3 I found the change from despair to hope, confusion to joy, death to new life. This ability to transform came from hope and it is key and critical.

(Change to new life and transformation from hope)

4.4 *Over 8 weeks, I had deep feeling and discovery. The importance of attentiveness and focus like attentive to walk, eat, teach, train.....and enjoying in all things.... Discovered the integration of my passion, strength and opportunities.*

(Discovery of integration of self and opportunities)

4.5 *My deepest urge inside me was moving to ask ultimate goal. In the process, I am eager to dialogue with God.*

(Process of dialogue with God)

4.6 *How to find “Shanghai Tang” (a Cantonese pop song) from passivity..... I interpret it as my Calling – Free Men and Shanghai Tang integration.Shanghai Tang is coming from composer, actor, lyrics, director..... I also need a team to breakthrough (Insights through Cantonese pop song seeing need for team work)*

Step 2: Forming of Categories

In Step 2, the codes, having been identified and numbered, were divided into clusters with similar properties and dimensions of relevancy to the experience of the participant. Each category was given a descriptive phrase or word as headings. Under each heading, the numbered codes were placed together to form a cluster. Some of the categories had only one code and would be kept as they were. After the categories were identified, I divided them up into larger groups with similar patterns and/or properties. These larger groups were set up to prepare for Step 3, when they would turn into emergent themes. The summary of the three steps from codes to categories and themes is shown in Table 1.

I. Categories of Relationship

1. Related to Self :

Code: 1.1; Code: 1.2; Code: 1.4; Code: 1.6 ; Code: 1.11; Code: 1.12; ; Code: 1.13; Code: 1.16;
Code: 4.2.

2. Related to Shadows:

Code: 1.5; Code: 1.13; Code: 1.14; Code: 1.15; Code: 1.16; Code: 2.3; Code: 4.2

3. Related to Significant Others

Code: 1.5; Code: 2.4; Code: 3.1;

4. Related to Nature:

Code: 1.8

5. Related to God:

Code: 1.2; Code: 1.6 ; Code: 1.9; Code: 1.10; Code: 1.11; Code: 4.1 ; Code: 4.5

II. Categories of Discernment, Enlightenment and Insights

1. Message of Discernment

Code: 2.1; Code: 3.1; Code: 3.3; Code: 4.2

2. Enlightenment and Insights

Code: 2.2; Code: 3.4; Code: 4.3; Code: 4.6

3. Voice from Inside as Discernment

Code: 3.2

4. Calling

Code: 4.6

5. Discovery: Something New

Code: 3.4; Code: 4.3; Code: 4.4; Code: 4.5

III. Categories of Transformation

1. *Decision to Take Action*

Code: 4.1

2. *Understanding of Transformation*

Code: 4.3

3. *Change and Renewal*

Code: 4.2

Step 3: From Categories to Themes

By clustering and pooling together the categories into larger groups with similar patterns and/or properties, the features of each large group were studied, and the characteristics extracted to find suitable concepts for identifying them, which then formed the emerging themes. The summary of integrated categories from the six participants in the emergent themes is shown in Table 2.

Group A:

1. *Related to Self*
2. *Related to Shadows*
3. *Related to Significant Others*
4. *Related to Nature*
5. *Related to God*

These five categories joined together to produce the theme of **Connectedness**, because these five categories contained the experience of Participant A when he reflected on his connection with himself, his shadows, those with whom he had significant relationships, with nature and with God. These five categories represented the phenomenon of connectedness in Participant A.

Group B

1. *Message of Discernment*
2. *Enlightenment and Insights*
3. *Voice from Inside as Discernment*
4. *Calling*
5. *Discovery: Something New*

These five categories together shared a common feature of discernment, representing the spiritual insights Participant A gained during the process. The theme that emerged is therefore **Discernment**.

Group C

1. *Decision to Take Action*
2. *Understanding of Transformation*
3. *Change and Renewal*

In this group of three categories, the common feature was the desire and action to change, renewal and transformation. Therefore, the appropriate theme which emerged was **Transformation.**

Example 2: Participant C

Once again, the verbatim data were typed in italics and the codes were bracketed.

From Verbatim to Codes

1st Interview

1.1.. Facing with self, ignoring others – if let go of my standard, more comfortable

(Examined inner self and realized need to let go)

1.2 .. Real awakening – God answers me – reminds me not to use my own eyes to see but God's perspective to see.

(Seeking “real awakening” from God)

1.3 The pain of knee disappeared – I thanked God but still very rational.....

(Sought healing from God yet stayed rational)

*1.4 What do you recognize shadows? It made me so unhappy. Connecting to past, reflection –
..... Depression not yet treated.*

(Connecting to past shadow; awareness of earlier depression and not cured)

*1.5 I visualized a circle and felt strongly something was boiling.... It was like some bubbles
boiling in a calm lake, wanting to burst out.....Discerning choices and directions of life –*

(Vivid images to bring out discernment of life choices)

2nd Interview

2.1 *Facing the Wall ...there is a sign HOME and a phone on the wall.I just return to the home of loving God. Transcendence. ...meditation at any time - we can see beauty of all things - transcendence*

(Image emerged wall image, and sign of “HOME” and phone home on the wall. Images of God as transcendence)

2.2 *I trusted more will be coming. It is a real awakening. God answered me through Gospels and hymns.....It is a journey of mystery revealed by God. When connecting with unforgettable people, it is a touch of love and transforming us.*

(Awakening, connection with unforgettable people and with God’s love brought transformation)

3rd Interview

3.1 *Last job in terminal patients’ service – I found more maturity and understanding of people; God's message - sensitivity, maturity, people as my strength*

(Getting messages from God)

3.2 *My personality – know more about myself like a mirror; e.g. when interacting with patients or youth – I experienced my life again. I did think about my future, my ageing. Will I be like that?*

(From examining and reflecting on self, interacting with others in her profession)

3.3 *Thinking of my father – what is my life direction – my heart’s deep gladness meets with the world’s greatest needs. Calling: Connecting with Father Kwan's calling message*

(Connecting late father, calling insights from Fr. Kwan)

4th Interview

4.1 *Started to stay silent watching the trees. I watched over the trees and suddenly thinking about God's words. I am the vine and you are the branch.*

(Meditating on nature and then linking up with God)

4.2 *God did answer my prayers and different from the past. In the past – before the research, easily frustrated and lack of energy, not feeling peaceful and seems God knows my prayers. Now is changed. More peaceful with God.*

(Changes in life after spiritual practice: identified as God answering her prayers)

4.3 *In this journey – real heart journey – willing, accepting, because of my experiencing Him..... reconstruct life change and renewal*

(Clear differentiation of new life, experiencing God and making life change and renewal)

4.4 *Now feeling more peaceful and it seems God knows my prayers. He reminds me to connect to Him –In this spiritual (research) journey – very special when getting close to God – like phoning Him –*

(Connecting to God bringing peace; close to Him like phoning Him. Change and transformation)

4.5 *Reconstruct life –. Heart renews and refresh – life needs transformation and mindset changeslisten to God's calling and waiting. Transformation as heart renews and knows more about God's will*

(Clear understanding of transformation as heart renewed and refreshed. God's calling)

4.6 *Thinking 3 images: a song in concert called "Awakening"...
rose flower blossom. I was amazed that there is BLOSSOM in second phase of life.Third picture: From worm to something as cocoon and explode to become a butterfly – it is transformation....Just waiting, dwelling in His love, silence....*

(Vivid images. Transformation with waiting, dwelling in God's love)

Step 2: Forming of Categories

I. Categories of Relationship

1. Related to Self:

Code: 1.1; Code: 3.2

2. Related to Shadows:

Code: 1.4

3. Related to Significant Others:

Code: 1.1; Code: 2.2; Code: 3.3

4. Related to Nature:

Code: 4.1

5. Related to God:

Code: 1.2; Code: 1.3 ; Code: 3.1; Code: 4.2; Code: 4.4

II. Categories of Discernment, Awakening, Awareness and Calling

1. Sense of Awakening:

Code: 1.2; Code: 2.2

2. Awareness

Code: 1.4

3. Discernment and Images

Code: 1.5; Code: 2.1; Code: 4.6

4. Calling

Code: 3.3; Code: 4.5

5. *Insights and Messages from God*

Code: 3.1; Code: 4.2; Code: 4.4

III. Categories of Transcendence and Transformation

1. *Feeling of Spiritual Space and Transcendence*

Code: 2.1

2. *Feeling of Transformation*

Code: 2.2; Code: 4.5; Code: 4.6

3. *Change and Renewal*

Code: 4.2; Code: 4.5

Step 3: From Categories to Themes

Following the process of analysing Participant A, the categories with similar patterns or properties were put together to form large groups. References were made to the information found in the other five participants. Consequently, three groups emerged.

Group A: Categories of Relationship

Related to Self

Related to Shadows

Related to Significant Others

Related to Nature

Related to God

The five categories were formed from data of Participant C reflecting on her internal contact with herself, connecting with her past shadows, those people important to her life, to nature, and her connection with God. The terms connection and connecting were also used. The theme that emerged, therefore, was Connectedness.

Group B: Categories of Discernment, Awakening, Awareness and Calling

Sense of Awakening

Awareness

Discernment and Images

In this group, Participant C used three different concepts to describe her experience, i.e., awakening, awareness and discernment. When put together with the experience of the other five participants, the concept of discernment became more prevalent. Therefore, the emergent theme for this group was **Discernment**.

Group C: Categories of Transcendence and Transformation

Feeling of Spiritual Space and Transcendence

Feeling of Transformation

Change and Renewal

For this group, three similar phenomena appeared, of a feeling of transcendence, transformation and change. When matched and compared with the other five participants, the concept of transformation was more prevalent and was therefore selected here. The emergent theme for this group was **Transformation**.

Example 3: Participant F

Step 1: From Codes to Categories

Once again, the verbatim data were typed in italics. The Codes were in brackets.

1st Interview

1.1 I felt the shadow. One night – raining and I got very weak and tired when driving home – energy level low and life very low – life will be going – how long do I have. Sometimes, I got grey message and negative about life

(Shadow; Weak self and negative life)

1.2 Third Shadow – 2-3 years ago – relationship issue – facing lost in life.

Big step – Looking for transformation. Looking back I made a mistake. Headless chicken mother, helpless, lukewarm relationship with husband. Thinking of UK's happy life.

(Shadows, helpless and unhappy; looking for transformation)

1.3 Feeling peaceful – when in peace, feeling connected and looking at inner self. Shadows came up – come to terms with no. of shadows in my life (Silent.....emotional)..... This is a real shadow and guilty....

(Connecting to self and past shadows; sense of guilt)

1.4 6:45 a.m. woke up meditated. Different in the past – no to-do-list. Count His grace in the morning.....More sensitive to body. When tired, sleep more and closed eyes.....In the process, heart became more quiet and still. Not so much disturbed by others and more focused.....Swimming with children

(Meditation bringing new experience)

1.5 Family has a lot of needs. Not enough time to complete work and paperwork. Connecting to children – parenting – less temper and slowing down.

Calmness in chaotic confused world; change - from confusion to calmness.

(Connected to significant others; changes from confusion to calmness)

1.6 Internal movement – First 2 weeks – very good chance to make tidy of myself. Realize my condition, my emotions, likes and dislikes.....Important finding – Discovered and connected to my empathy to others very shallow. Felt I did not know in the past emotional connection.

(Internal movement; discovered and connected to empathy to others and emotion)

1.7 Why emotional disconnect with others?.. I thought about my childhood – mum worked. Father alcoholic. No family life. Went to UK to school. Lack of emotions. Lack of opportunities to open up.

(Disconnected from others; childhood shadow)

1.8 In summer – realized first time in life. In the past, results.....changed to be a mom, house wife, cooking. This is self-initiated. I felt good and lack of pressure.

This is a transcendence. I am willing to take one more step for the love one. E.g. driving my husband, taking care of children, growing a hamster...

(Realization for the first time, change to new roles in family; transcendence at early stage)

1.9 Letting go – I do not insist my way of doing or thinking on the others.

I have to observe what other people likes and try to join them. Connect and enjoy other likings.

(To let go; connected and enjoyed other likings)

1.10 My mom life style enjoying TV – opens my eyes. I want to connect more with children.

There is a voice inside me asking me to change – for a while. Since I forgave myself.

(Connected to significant others and children; inner voice telling her to change and forgive self)

1.11 At the moment – no worry, peaceful, presence with God and God in me. Feeling of Peace – inner heart – thy will be done.... not thinking of future. Transformation: Find myself and learn to be more patient – e.g. waiting for green light, make appointment, waiting for weeks and not immediate.

(God in me. Transformation. Change of behaviour)

1.12 More grace and less struggles. Nurturing my patience and discernment.

I have ability to make free decision but limit myself. Faith and confidence to wait for Holy Spirit.

Let the Spirit leads me. It is one of the process.

Nurturing of patience and discernment. Led by Holy Spirit as a process)

1.13 Life cannot be busy. Allow space and time. Prepare the heart and not so busy. Best time – not driving and walking to MTR in 10 mins through the park

Meditate – in MTR – write my journal. Leaving work – in MTR – scanning the daily incidents in solitude. In my world – can manage it. Or in car driving – meditating music. Before leaving the car – find sacred space and journaling. I am in the mode of solitude, do not want to talk. What made me tick and joy?

(Meditative and spiritual practice in busy daily life. Clear changes in daily spiritual practice. Meditation and journaling)

2nd Interview

2.1 I am a workaholic mom for long time and I felt guilty as I did not spend enough time with the kids especially when they are on holiday. When they go to school, I felt better. Otherwise, felt very guilty.

(Felt guilty not spending enough time with children)

2.2 *I then had a lot of unhappy experience in my past 20 years and many feelings*

I do not have many outlets. I do not want to think and want to escape as I am afraid to break the current relationship. I can count a lot of negativity. I know I escaped to un-affle the relationship with my husband. I got my Discernment –I was so torn last 2 weeks. My emotions and feeling were bad. I was torn very much in last 2 weeks

Cannot be peaceful last 2 weeks.

(Unhappy relationship and negative feelings involved; discernment of torn emotions)

2.3 *At that time, I held up myself – Holy Spirit was helping me (Pause as ADHD).*

I withheld myself. I paused at that moment. I did not say anything to hurt anyone. I was processing and kept quiet. I was processing myself – I may not speak up and not intentional to hurt anyone. I need to change.

(Behavioural change to pause and process emotion. Process self change)

2.4 *A discernment, discovery that his wounds and he had not deal with it*

I found I was workaholic and other relationship. I need attention and love.

I should not be so hard on him.....I was meditating and connecting him – he is almost 60s and made the adoption decision at 50s. I was more understanding and feeling more about him and thinking of him on his behalf..... When I understood more about him, I felt more at ease.....New eyes to see my relationship with husband.

(Discernment; meditating and connecting to husband; new eyes to see relationship; changed behaviour)

3rd Interview

3.1 *Thinking – we all got distracted and interrupted.....always thinking of meditation.....at sleep and praying.....God always surrounded me. Seems like it is at pier.....I feel like there is rope linking the safety buoy and the ship.*

I know I am safe as I am connected to the boat. I know I will be safe and he is always there. I felt peaceful even in crisis.

(Spiritual practice; meditation and linking up with God; Image of being connected to the boat and the safety buoy)

3.2 *Connecting to God – through self-understanding, relationship with husband and anger – Got new perspectives through these incidents – discernment about her husband's own hurts and burden – his past not yet dealt with. I have sympathy and empathy with him. I felt Holy Spirit and discernment.I can see my husband pain and weakness – it is from Jesus's compassion and love for the pain.*

(Connecting to God through self-reflection; to discern husband's burden; touched by Holy Spirit for discernment)

3.3 *Changed my mindset – my full-time job becomes my part time job*

I got freedom and flexibility. I can take care of home affairs and I do not need to work at office..... I have adjusted this is part-time job and I can explore other things. In future – I like to do voluntary work and now can be time to groom up myself and contribute myself..... Mindset change – it is transformation. I reduce the anxiety.

(Mindset change as transformation; change of perspective and behaviour)

3.4 *Husband wants to retire and almost 60. I started and willing to understand him... I got new eyes to see him and understand him. More compassionate on him. I felt he may be insecure...*

When looking at it deeper – I felt he is insecure or maybe he has history of regret...I can see this angle – this is discernment....

Discernment and vocation to be. When I was listening – what I called to do – at this moment, to be the mom to 2 kids... Calling – trying to be a better mom

Get a new perspective to see old things – transformation.

(New understanding of husband; seeing new angle as discernment; discernment and vocation; calling to be better; New perspective to see old things as transformation)

3.5 Found the spiritual practice – lay down the foundation – and I can deal with all the crisis as got foundation... I do see this change – when I am close to God

I know what is stillness in all the event.

(Spiritual practice as foundation; change of feeling God in crisis)

4th Interview

4.1 I come to the turning point of the journey after meeting dark shadow of my life

Thankful to speak up when open up the dark shadow. When opening to dark shadow, I can see notably difference of me and Richard, upbringing, experience of life, his woundedness and insecurity. That is why misalignment in raising kids and marriage.... Hope it is beginning of healing process.

(Gained new understanding of dark shadows; seeing difference between herself and husband)

4.2 My mind has been unfilling in the inner motivation to get rid of unnecessary – window browsing, web browsing, day dreaming...more focus in what is essential in life. This is daily life awakening – asking myself what is my time and priority.

(Feeling inner motivation; Daily life awakening)

4.3 Discover I have new attitude to preserve my peace_of mind – I heard a small voice reminding me through silence... many changes in small things

When I empty my basket, I pour out the unnecessary things and I remember the important things – like books I need to read, owing someone, enough clothes and no need to buy....I find myself I enjoy the peace of the journey and discernment coming out – that I have experienced this discernment – I know it needs conditions to be silence and empty... When emptying, I can be more peaceful in dealing with crisis and calm.

(Discovering peace of mind in spiritual journey in silence; emptying basket and discernment pouring out)

4.4 I realized what not whether God wants me to do. I walked in the journey that Holy Spirit walks with me.

(Realized what God wants; guided by Holy Spirit God's wish for her)

4.5 In busy life – I know how to get rid of things. I know some directions I enjoy.

(Know some directions as how to deal with busy life)

4.6 Important progress - doing to being - it is a turning point of spiritual growth by passing through the wall.

(Clear reflection from doing to being; image of passing through the wall)

Step 2: Creating Categories

The categories being created in this step were based on the codes selected and placed together according to the similarities and properties they had. Titles or headings were created to identify their features. As a preparation for Step 3, these categories were further placed together into

larger groups for the next step of studying the emergence of themes in these larger groups of categories.

I. Categories of Relationship

1. *Related to Self :*

Code: 1.1; Code: 1.2 ; Code: 1.3; Code: 1.6 ; Code: 1.10; Code: 2.1; Code: 2.2; Code: 2.3; Code: 3.2; Code: 4.2

Code: 4.3

2. *Related to Shadows:*

Code: 1.1; Code: 1.2; Code: 1.3; Code: 1.7; Code: 1.10; Code: 4.1;

3. *Linking up Daily Life*

Code: 1.3; Code: 2.1; Code: 4.3; Code: 4.5

4. *Related to Significant Others*

Code: 1.5; Code: 1.6 ; Code: 1.7 ; Code: 1.8; Code: 1.9; Code: 1.10; Code: 2.1; Code: 3.2 ; Code: 3.4; Code: 4.1

5. *Related to God:*

Code: 1.11; Code: 3.1 ; Code: 3.2; Code: 4.4

2. Categories of Awakening, Discernment, Calling and Discovery

1. *Sense of Awakening:*

Code: 4.2

2. *Discernment and Image*

Code: 1.12; Code: 2.2; Code: 2.4; Code: 3.1; Code: 3.2; Code: 4.3; Code: 4.6

3. *Calling*

Code: 3.4

4. *Little Voice and Messages from God*

Code: 1.10; Code: 1.11; Code: 4.3; Code: 4.4

5. *Discovery: Something New*

Code: 1.4; Code: 1.5; Code: 1.6; Code: 1.8; Code: 1.10

Code: 2.4; Code: 3.4; Code: 4.3

3. Categories of Transcendence and Transformation

1. *Looking for Transformation:*

Code: 1.2

2. *Feeling of Spiritual Space and Transcendence*

Code: 1.8; Code: 1.13

3. *Decision to Take Action*

Code: 1.8; Code: 1.9; Code: 1.10; Code: 1.11; Code: 1.13; Code: 3.3

4. *Feeling of Transformation*

Code: 1.11; Code: 3.3; Code: 3.4

5. *Change and Renewal*

Code: 1.11; Code: 1.13; Code: 2.3; Code: 2.4; Code: 3.3; Code: 3.4; Code: 3.5

Step 3: Formation of Themes

Group A: Categories of Relationship

Related to Self

Related to Shadows

Linking up Daily Life

Related to Significant Others

Related to God

The group with similar categories involved the participant's reflection on her connection with herself, her past shadows, those important to her, nature and God, and came very close to the other five participants. The theme of **Connectedness** emerged.

Group B: Categories of Awakening, Discernment, Calling and Discovery

Sense of Awakening

Discernment and Image

Calling

Little Voice and Messages from God

Discovery: Something New

The five categories found in this group carried different titles, but they had similarities with the categories of the other five participants using similar titles. Therefore, the theme that emerged could also be named **Discernment**.

Group C: Categories of Transcendence and Transformation

Looking for Transformation

Feeling of Spiritual Space and Transcendence

Decision to Take Action

Feeling of Transformation

Change and Renewal

The five titles of categories in this group could also be found in the other five participants. The similarities were strong evidence that the emergent theme of Transformation could also apply to this group.

Section Three – Emergence of Themes from Empirical Findings

Having presented the three participants as cases to illustrate the three-step procedure of coding, categorizing and theme formation, the following Table 1 gives an overall view of how the six participants experienced Steps 2 and 3, with the three emergent themes coming together from their experience.

Table 1 - The Three Steps from Code to Categories

And from Categories to Themes

Step One	Step Two	Step Three
Codes	Categories	Themes
From Appendix Two	Participant A	
	I. Categories of Relationship 1. <u>Related to Self</u> Code: 1.1; Code: 1.2; Code: 1.4; Code: 1.6 ; Code: 1.11; Code:	

Step One	Step Two	Step Three
Codes	Categories	Themes
	<p>1.12; Code: 1.13; Code: 1.16; Code: 4.2</p> <p>2. <u>Related to Shadows</u> Code: 1.5; Code: 1.13; Code: 1.14; Code: 1.15; Code: 1.16; Code: 2.3; Code: 4.2</p> <p>3. <u>Related to Nature</u> Code: 1.8</p> <p>4. <u>Related to God</u> Code: 1.2; Code: 1.6; Code: 1.9; Code: 1.10; Code: 1.11; Code: 4.1; Code: 4.5</p>	Connectedness
	<p>II. Categories of Discernment, Enlightenment and Insights</p> <p>1. <u>Message of Discernment</u> Code: 2.1; Code: 3.1; Code: 3.3; Code: 4.2</p> <p>2. <u>Enlightenment and Insights</u> Code: 2.2; Code: 3.4; Code: 4.3; Code: 4.6</p> <p>3. <u>Voice from Inside as Discernment</u> Code: 3.2</p> <p>4. <u>Calling</u> Code: 4.6</p> <p>5. <u>Discovery: Something New</u> Code: 3.4; Code: 4.3; Code: 4.4; Code: 4.5</p> <p>III. Categories of Transformation</p> <p>1. <u>Decision to Take Action</u> Code: 4.1</p> <p>2. <u>Understanding of Transformation</u> Code: 4.3</p> <p>3. <u>Change and Renewal</u> Code: 4.2</p>	<p>Discernment</p> <p>Transformation</p>

Step One	Step Two	Step Three
Codes	Categories	Themes
See Appendix Two	Participant B	
	I. Categories of Relationship	
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <u>Related to Self</u> Code: 1.1; Code: 1.6; Code: 1.7; Code: 2.1; Code: 2.4; Code: 3.2; Code: 3.3; Code: 4.2 <u>Related to Shadows</u> Code: 1.7; Code: 3.4; <u>Linking up Daily Life</u> Code: 1.1; Code: 1.5 <u>Related to Significant Others</u> Code: 1.3; Code: 1.4; Code: 1.7; Code: 2.3; Code: 2.4 Code: 2.5; Code: 4.2; <u>Related to Nature</u> Code: 1.2; Code: 4.2 <u>Related to God</u> Code: 1.9; Code: 4.1; Code: 4.3 <u>Cultural Concerns</u> Code: 1.8; Code: 1.9; Code: 2.1; Code: 2.2; Code: 4.1 Code: 4.3 <u>Intercultural and Interfaith Practice</u> Code: 1.11; Code: 1.12; Code: 3.1; Code: 3.2 	Connectedness
	II. Categories of Awakening and Calling <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <u>Sense of Awakening</u> Code: 1.10; Code: 2.5 <u>Calling</u> Code: 3.3; Code: 3.4 <u>Insights</u> Code: 4.3 <u>Discovery of New Meanings</u> Code: 1.10; Code: 4.2 	Discernment
	III. Categories of Transcendence <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <u>Feeling of Spiritual Space and Transcendence</u> Code: 1.8; Code: 2.5 	

Step One	Step Two	Step Three
Codes	Categories	Themes
	2. <u>Decision to Take Action</u> Code: 2.3; Code: 2.4 3. <u>Transcendence in Workplace</u> Code: 4.4	Transformation
	Participant C	
	I. Categories of Relationship 1. <u>Related to Self</u> Code: 1.1; Code: 3.2 2. <u>Related to Shadows</u> Code: 1.4 3. <u>Related to Significant Others</u> Code: 1.1; Code: 2.2; Code: 3.3 4. <u>Related to Nature</u> Code: 4.1	
	5. <u>Related to God</u> Code: 1.2; Code: 1.3 ; Code: 3.1; Code: 4.2; Code: 4.4 II. Categories of Discernment, Awakening, Awareness and Calling 1. <u>Sense of Awakening</u> Code: 1.2; Code: 2.2 2. <u>Awareness</u> Code: 1.4 3. <u>Discernment and Images</u> Code: 1.5; Code: 2.1; Code: 4.6 4. <u>Calling</u> Code: 3.3; Code: 4.5 5. <u>Insights and Messages from God</u> Code: 3.1; Code: 4.2; Code: 4.4	Connectedness
	III. Categories of Transcendence and Transformation 1. <u>Feeling of Spiritual Space and Transcendence</u> Code: 2.1	Discernment

Step One	Step Two	Step Three
Codes	Categories	Themes
	Code: 2.1	
	Participant E	
	I. Categories of Relationship 1. <u>Related to Self</u> Code: 1.1; Code: 1.9; Code: 2.2 2. <u>Related to Shadows</u> Code: 1.5; Code: 1.6 ; Code: 2.1 3. <u>Linking up Daily Life</u> Code: 1.2; Code: 2.3; Code: 4.6 4. <u>Related to Significant Others</u> Code: 1.3; Code: 2.1 ; Code: 2.2; Code: 2.3 5. <u>Related to God</u> Code: 1.2; Code: 1.5 ; Code: 1.6; Code: 1.7; Code: 2.1 Code: 2.3; Code: 3.1; Code: 3.3; Code: 4.1	Transformation
	II. Categories of Discernment, Calling and Discovery 1. <u>Discernment and Images</u> Code: 1.3; Code: 3.1; Code: 3.3; Code: 4.1; Code: 4.4 2. <u>Calling</u> Code: 1.7 3. <u>Messages from God</u> Code: 1.2; Code: 1.6; Code: 4.1; Code: 4.4 4. <u>Discovery: Something New</u> Code: 4.6 III. Categories of Transformation 1. <u>Understanding of Transformation</u> Code: 4.2; Code: 4.5 2. <u>Change and Renewal</u> Code: 4.2; Code: 4.5	Discernment

Step One	Step Two	Step Three
Codes	Categories	Themes
	Participant F	
	<p>I. Categories of Relationship</p> <p>1. <u>Related to Self</u> Code: 1.1; Code: 1.2; Code: 1.3; Code: 1.6 ; Code: 1.10 Code: 2.1; Code: 2.2; Code: 2.3; Code: 3.2; Code: 4.2 Code: 4.3</p> <p>2. <u>Related to Shadows</u> Code: 1.1; Code: 1.2; Code: 1.3; Code: 1.7; Code: 1.10; Code: 4.1;</p> <p>3. <u>Linking up Daily Life</u> Code: 1.3; Code: 2.1; Code: 4.3; Code: 4.5</p> <p>4. <u>Related to Significant Others</u> Code: 1.5; Code: 1.6; Code: 1.7; Code: 1.8; Code: 1.9 Code: 1.10; Code: 2.1; Code: 3.2; Code: 3.4; Code: 4.1</p> <p>5. <u>Related to God</u> Code: 1.11; Code: 3.1; Code: 3.2; Code: 4.4</p> <p>II. Categories of Awakening, Discernment, Calling and Discovery</p> <p>1. <u>Sense of Awakening</u> Code: 4.2</p> <p>2. <u>Discernment and Image</u> Code: 1.12; Code: 2.2; Code: 2.4; Code: 3.1; Code: 3.2 Code: 4.3; Code: 4.6</p> <p>3. <u>Calling</u> Code: 3.4</p> <p>4. <u>Little Voice and Messages from God</u> Code: 1.10; Code: 1.11; Code:</p>	<p>Transformation</p> <p>Connectedness</p>

Step One	Step Two	Step Three
Codes	Categories	Themes
	<p>4.3; Code: 4.4</p> <p>5. <u>Discovery: Something New</u> Code: 1.4; Code: 1.5; Code: 1.6; Code: 1.8; Code: 1.10 Code: 2.4; Code: 3.4; Code: 4.3</p> <p>III. Categories of Transcendence and Transformation</p> <p>1. <u>Looking for Transformation</u> Code: 1.2</p> <p>2. <u>Feeling of Spiritual Space and Transcendence</u> Code: 1.8; Code: 1.13</p> <p>3. <u>Decision to Take Action</u> Code: 1.8; Code: 1.9; Code: 1.10; Code: 1.11; Code: 1.13 Code: 3.3</p> <p>4. <u>Feeling of Transformation</u> Code: 1.11; Code: 3.3; Code: 3.4</p> <p>5. <u>Change and Renewal</u> Code: 1.11; Code: 1.13; Code: 2.3; Code: 2.4; Code: 3.3 Code: 3.4; Code: 3.5</p>	<p>Discernment</p> <p>Transformation</p>

The above table shows the procedure of Step 2 and Step 3, tracing how the categories were formed from the codes, and how the themes emerged from the categories.

The lists of categories derived from the codes from the six participants' spiritual practice helped form the emergence of the three themes. Table 2 below shows the summary of the integrated categories from the six participants under each emergent theme.

Table 2: Integrated Categories Under Each Emergent Theme

Themes	Integrated Categories from Six Participants
Connectedness	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Related to Self 2. Related to Shadows 3. Related to Significant Others 4. Related to Nature 5. Related to God 6. Cultural Concern 7. Intercultural and Interfaith Practice
Discernment	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Message of Discernment 2. Enlightenment and Insights 3. Voice from Inside as Discernment 4. Calling 5. Discovery: Something New 6. Sense of Awakening 7. Insights 8. Discovery of New Meanings 9. Awareness 10. Discernment and Images 11. Insights and Messages from God 12. Sense of Discovery: Something New
Transformation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Decision to Take Action 2. Understanding of Transformation 3. Change and Renewal 4. Feeling of Spiritual Space and Transcendence 5. Decision to Take Action 6. Transcendence in Workplace 7. Feeling of Transformation 8. Feeling of Enlightenment

Returning to the structure of the spiritual practices, the six participants were asked to focus on one major issue for each of the two weeks. They examined themselves, reviewed the past in terms of critical incidents and significant people, and meditated on God. At the end of the eighth week, they meditated on the entire eight-week experience. In their interviews they spoke freely

of their experiences. The first cycle of codes, and later the second cycle of codes, provided information for analysing their actual experiences. Based on these codes, categories were developed. The above table shows the range of categories expressed. The three themes of Connectedness, Discernment and Transformation were useful and important for further analysis of what they had experienced.

Looking at the categories forming these themes, there are similar words used by the six participants. For the first theme, the group of words includes “connect”, “connecting”, “connected” and “connection”. Connecting with self mainly self-image, and the physical and emotional feelings and midlife issues faced in their personal or professional context. Connecting with the hidden shadows of the past includes critical events and significant persons, which brought out memories of hurts, wounds, anger, and hatred. Connecting to God through meditation brought peace, joy, forgiveness, more understanding, renewal of life, new meanings in life and direction in life.

The second theme of Discernment was understood by the six participants a little bit differently among themselves. During the spiritual practice of meditation and examining of self and the past, new insights and perspectives for looking at and assessing these experiences emerged gradually and changed the perspectives of the participants. Some of them addressed these changes directly as “discernment” or “to discern”. Others called them “enlightenment”. This showed that basically discernment was a broadly understood concept, and should also be a good vehicle for future interpretation.

Lastly, the third theme, though with less categories than discernment, revealed the six participants did experience some form of change. They would either call such experiences “transformation” or “transcendence”, even though the two concepts were not exactly identical, depending on how the participants used them in different contexts. Of course, the term “Transformation” is directly linked to the research question. Almost all the participants experienced some form of change, renewal, transcendence or transformation. Their descriptions of such experiences certainly provided valuable insight and knowledge for answering the research question about the spiritual transformation of these midlife Christian professionals in Hong Kong.

Section Four – The Emergence of Three Themes

After the analysis of the rich data and the discovery of the emergent themes, this section provides a consolidated summary of the vivid experiences that produced the themes of connectedness, discernment and transformation. The core framework for the eight weeks was as follows: the first fortnight was self-examination; the second fortnight connected with the past through critical incidents and significant people; the third fortnight was meditation about God; and the fourth fortnight was reflection on the overall journey and an evaluation of the spiritual practice model. The findings of the fourth fortnight cover only the feedback and reflection on the model, as the model is evaluated in chapter seven.

From the data collected during the four sets of bi-weekly interviews, words and phrases were used by the participants from which were derived categories and emergent themes. The three

themes consolidated the primary voices and lived experiences of the participants during their eight-week spiritual journey.

Emergent Themes from First 2-weeks of Examining Self

The six participants were interviewed at the end of the first stage of two weeks of spiritual practice under the framework “examining self”. Their experiences were very rich and revealing, hence from the data collected, 113 codes and 24 sub-categories were useful for phenomenological analysis. Out of all these phenomena, at least five could be identified as informative and worthy of study. These were connectedness, discernment, transcendence, transformation, and cultural tradition. However, transcendence and transformation shared close and sometimes interlinked phenomena and could be placed together as a single phenomenon of transcendence/transformation. Lastly, all the participants were committed to following the modified ISE spiritual practice model. Therefore, there are data bearing witness to the participants’ views of the spiritual practice used. These views came up over the rest of the eight-week journey and could be better employed in the overall evaluation of the modified ISE model presented later by this research.

Theme One – Connectedness

The first emergent theme, “connectedness”, was derived from the categories of connection with self, God, shadows, significant people and critical incidents. Each category contained a rich content of sub-categories discovered in the first interview.

Connecting with Self

The concept of connecting with self was found and grouped from the sub-category data of negative feelings, negative self-image and self-discovery.

Negative feelings

All six participants A, B, C, D, E, F, shared their general negative feelings from their spiritual practice of the first two weeks. These negative feelings included mixed emotions to include worries, anger, confusion, insecurity, struggle, lack of self-control and fear.

In particular, participant C shared many negative feelings:

“In my first week of spiritual practice, I was in a state of confusion, darkness and easily got angry. In meditation, I was facing myself, my emotions and anger. I wondered why I had so many worries in recent years after being a full-time mother and wife. I was happier and more positive in the past.....I was also fearful of things which cannot be controlled by me”.

Negative self-image

A negative self-image was revealed by all the participants, which they referred to in terms of weaknesses, self-critique and dislike of self. They described their negative self-image through words like inadequate self, self-doubt, cold non-Christian, feeling of ageing, impulsive decision maker and self-centeredness.

Participant F shared a number of self-critical comments and revealed dislike of herself. She described her ageing issues, her physical fatigue and past mistakes. F disliked herself so much she noted:

“I do not like myself. I get dizziness, heart burnt and menopause. My health seemed deteriorating and sometimes I wondered if I had any terminal illness. I was like a crazy busy mom and having lukewarm relationship with husband. I was tired and felt my energy and life going downhill.....During meditation, I discovered I had no empathy. I did not know about feeling and found myself so cold. I realized I do not know how to connect and express myself emotionally”.

Participant A criticized himself as cold when meditating on an incident with a colleague:

“I was facing myself and feeling. It was a special two weeks of facing self and connecting with an incident interacting with people. In a silent evening meditation, a scene came up about how I treated my colleague in a class. As I was rushing to another meeting, I did not greet them and just fulfilled my job to give my comment. I found myself so cold and disrespectful to people. I was so self-centred and unloving. How could I claim myself as Christian”.

Self-discovery

Self-discovery happens when connecting with self. Participant A admitted that he found clearer priorities when he had a moment of pause. He also shared that he had started not taking things and people for granted and was thankful for different experiences. He discovered the joy of disciplined living and his inner child:

“I enjoyed so much joy in regular discipline living. It was just different and simplicity in life. I also discovered my inner child and the needs of love. I was meditating myself as a

crying child in mom's arm and needed so much of her touch and love. I found I had been giving myself a lot of self-imposed pressure”.

Participant E discovered her dilemma and paradox. She said she was like a curious dog exploring life and adventure under the safe protection from God. She discovered she was in a dilemma as she loved risk taking but also loved stable work/church life. Participant F discovered she had a lot of unsettled past hurts, but was unable to surrender and let go. She found she started to discover her emotions, but shallow emotions only.

Connecting with God

The second category of connectedness was connecting with God. Connecting with God was derived from the sub-categories of relationship with God and sacredness, means of connecting with God, and different contexts for connecting with God.

Perception/Relationship with God and Sacredness

The connecting with God category was derived from the relationship with God and discovering sacredness. Three participants A, C and E shared their relationship and perception of God, including their doubt about God, their perception of God as healing, and trusting their God and experiencing His love.

Doubting and Healing God

Participant C shared her doubt about God in the past, and of experiencing his physical and spiritual healing. She thought God only healed perfect Christians and that she was not good enough to ask for His healing:

“I had doubt in God’s healing as I thought I was not good enough to be healed. I dared not pray for total healing as I had sins”.

When participant C encountered God’s healing of her knee pain, she felt the strong presence of God and believed the healing God. She also discovered her relationship with God and shared:

“I discovered I was lacking confidence in God in the past and fearful to ask for His healing. Now, I believed if we are willing, God is willing too”.

Participant F also connected with the healing God through her discovery of her ADHD illness. She was surprised and amazed by God’s grace in her life, as she was not affected by this illness and could prosper in her career and study. She shared the discovery of a healing God in darkness and how she had a new start in seeing her life.

Trustworthy God

In the midst of confusion and experience of past suffering, participants A and E shared their relationship with a trustworthy God. Both A and E experienced similar mistrust of people. A shared how having divorced parents and an irresponsible father made it difficult to trust any relationship with people. E expressed that it was difficult to have lasting relationships and that people cannot be trusted.

Participant A had his traumatic childhood wounded by his irresponsible father. The deep hurts made him mistrust people and relationships. Participant E's experience from her hurtful relationship in the past, together with the lack of a father's love, meant she trusted nobody. She reflected that she experienced a trusting God in the midst of suffering. Both A and E expressed similar comments that only God could be trusted, as human beings and human love were untrustworthy and unreliable.

Sacredness

Under the emerging theme of connecting with self, a unique experience of sacredness when connecting with God was shared only by participants B and D.

During meditation, participant B had an image of connecting with his father when peeling an orange. B recalled:

"I was so touched and connected with my father through the orange. It seemed a special sacred moment with my most loved father. God had let me to experience once again the togetherness with my father again".

Participant D shared her unique sacred moment with God:

"I experienced sacredness when meditating on Jesus walking with my pain-filled sick mother and felt His love for mother. This companionship with my dying mother was very sacred as if Jesus was walking with me together. I had been praying for my mother and asking God to be with her. This experience was God's response to my prayers and I felt supported in this sacred moment with God".

Means and Context of Connection

In connecting with God, many participants shared different means of connection, including worship, gospel, hymn, books and morning devotion. Five participants A, B, C, D, E shared connecting with God and the Holy Spirit through gospels, hymns, songs, and worship, but not participant F.

Among the five participants, only participant B shared her use of Henri Nouwen's spiritual books to connect with God. She also had a unique experience participating in a gospel scene with Jesus:

"I had dialogue with Jesus in the scene of his cleaning Judas' feet. He was pain-filled for all of our sins. Jesus then washed my feet and I was touched deeply with tears. Jesus knelt down and I was sitting. He strengthened me in my decision to pursue my vocation. I echoed Jesus's pain when he cleaned the feet of all sinners".

Most of the participants experienced different contexts when connecting with God. Participant A connected with God in promises and presence of confirmation, B connected with God in love and hope, C connected with God in worship, D connected with God through Jesus's struggles, surrender, pain and tiredness, E encountered God in the pressure and promises in her life while F connected with God in discovery of illness.

Connecting with Shadows

The third category of connectedness was connecting with shadows. All the participants shared their connection with shadows as derived from the following three main sub-categories,

including past suffering and childhood hurts, hidden negative self and acknowledging and overcoming the shadows.

Past suffering and childhood hurts

During silent meditation, various kinds of feelings and emotions were stirred up connecting with the brokenness of family or childhood, as participant A shared:

“This is a special week connecting and facing my feeling and myself. I seldom experience it, but feelings just came out when interacting with people and incidents of childhood. My father basically abandoned us and hurt us deeply. The shame was so deep when my mother came to my school and exposed father’s love affairs to all people. Since then, I could not walk with my heads up as I was so ashamed to see people eye to eye”.

Participant A reflected his finding of six shadows during spiritual practice:

“During my spiritual practice meditation, I was connecting with my shadows. There were six shadows. My first shadow was my role as father and husband. I was affected by the experience of my negative father figure. Second, my cold attitude and lack of love to others. I found it was time consuming and exhausting to love people. I felt emotionally drained when dealing with close relationships. I therefore preferred providing e-coaching (communicating through email and phone) to my clients instead of face-to-face coaching. Third, I pretended I was ok and did not need any help from others. I rather worked alone and hated collaboration. Fourth, I was too proud of myself. I thought I was smart for being spontaneous. Fifth, my lack of confidence. I will avoid things which are

not my area of expertise due to limited knowledge and ability to contribute. Sixth, I felt fatigue and my health was deteriorating. I knew I had to face myself and my limitations”.

Participant E also shared that she was fully aware of the existence of her shadows. She shared she knew her inner child from her parent’s broken marriage. She also added:

“There was no love and warmth in my family and childhood. My father always went out womanizing and gave no financial support to the family. Mother and sister had to find jobs to support the family. We rented a small place with a cruel landlord and there was no space for me to study. Marriage and relationship were painful from my past experience and also seeing friends’ failure in marriage, I lacked the sense of security in it. The breakthrough of insecurity was not easy due to family legacy”.

Participant F also shared her traumatic childhood with the sudden death of her father. She was lost in childhood and with no joy. The lack of love and family life in childhood gave her no connection to any emotions. She shared:

“I was not touched by anything and had no empathy. I feel so sad I have this barrier with people. I do not know how to play with my children and feel insufficient in caring and love. I had shut off myself in a dark hole and had no feeling of the pain of others. I did not know how to express my feelings. I was twelve years old when father suddenly died. I was then sent to a UK boarding school by my rich aunt. This was a deep unforgiven wound as I felt strong abandonment by my mother. This pain and abandonment was not settled since twelve years old”.

Hidden Negative Self

The hidden negative self was another sub-category of connection with shadows. Participant A found himself very cold, prideful, self-centred, with lack of confidence and fatigue. Participant B connected with his hidden negative self of laziness and procrastination in making decision. C found her shadows in struggling, anger, fear and anxiety about identity and future. D found her negative anger, bias and judgement from her past wounded working experience. E reconnected with her dying mother, family legacy and her painful loving relationships. F reflected her deficiency in connecting with people emotionally.

Acknowledging and Overcoming shadows

When connecting with his shadows, participant A was fully aware of and acknowledged the shadows hindering his joy. He claimed that he was forced to face and dialogue with his childhood self during silent meditation. Participant A shared:

“I was like a crying child seeking for deep love. I know my shadows will not go away. These shadows had been hindering my joy and freedom. I could acknowledge the shadows bit by bit now and started to understand their impact on my life. In my silent practice, I was meditating that I was lighting up a candle in a dark room. I was prepared to tidy up the shadows even in a chaotic and confused environment. In my despair, three words came out: ‘to love fully’. The best way to deal with the shadows was to love fully. Love fully meant to love myself, love all those people surrounding me”.

Participant E also shared she was fully aware of the shadows coming from the legacy of her broken family. She acknowledged it, embraced it and did not think she could change it as it was part of her life.

Connecting with Significant People and Critical Incidents

The theme of connectedness emerged from all the participants' connections with loving and hurting significant people, as well as from positive and negative critical incidents from the past.

In particular, participant B reflected on his connection with the love of his father and small things and moments in life. Participant D shared her experience with her ageing sick mother as well as the hurts from her humiliating boss at work. Participant E shared a number of these connectedness experiences. She shared her connection of love and joy with significant people, like her dying mother and sister. At the same time, she also shared the connection with people who hurt her, like the unfair boss and lovers from past wounded relationships. She admitted these relationships did leave her good memories. Participant F reflected on her connection with the love of her father and admitted her lack of love and deep relationships from her past.

Theme Two - Discernment

The second theme of discernment emerged through the discovery of four categories: discernment of suffering, God's will, self and calling, and life/work direction.

Participant A discerned the meaning of life in terms of God's blessings in his surroundings. Participant C had a specific experience of discernment of meaning in his suffering, while E

discerned her life direction and gained confirmation of her calling to build the church. Participant F understood her priority in life and calling from God was to be a mother nurturing her children. She also found her knowledge and passion in education. The only exception was participant B, who did not experience any kind of discernment. Participant D was particularly immersed in a rich experience of discernment about her vocation. She had been seeking this discernment for a number of years:

“I had been discerning about my vocation and the time to leave the current job. Through these few weeks of regular spiritual practice with deep connection with God, the discernment was clear for my calling in spiritual education and confirmation about my work decision”.

Theme Three - Transformation

The third theme of transformation emerged through the experience of four participants’ awakening and Ah-ha moments, the leap of faith and a sense of something higher beyond oneself. Transcendence experiences came from those “Ah-ha” moments. These were moments where participants were lifted up and out of their own selves to be really touched by the Holy Spirit. These were also moments of transformation, were used to designate a wider range of meanings of the process, as well as the results of change.

Participant A experienced a sense of awakening in discovering that he should start to love more. For their “Ah-ha” moments, both Participant B and D experienced the sudden urge to change and take action. Participant B experienced transcendence when felt he was connected to God and

consequently went beyond himself. Participant D suddenly felt called to a leap of faith during spiritual practice and decided to resign from her current job to pursue her vocation.

The emergent theme was transformation, derived from the categories of redeeming the past, positive change and the discovery of new life/direction. Only two participants had such experiences of transformation. Participant A only had one experience of transformation, believing that miracles may happen every day. Participant F was unique in that she had all kinds of experiences of transformation in terms of positive changes and finding new life direction. She discovered changes in herself, especially the ability to slow down connecting to others and getting over noise and busyness. She found a clearer self-identity, and felt more relaxed. She expressed her feelings:

“I discovered my change including feeling the strength to resolve past wounds and the will to change from bitterness to controlling my complaints. From connecting with God’s love, I gained the ability to control my emotions, reduce my self-critique, discern life direction and feel joy”.

At the same time, transformation also meant her willingness to take action to love and let go of self:

“When I could forgive myself and others through God’s grace in discovering and healing through ADHD, I sensed the need to be here and now only. There was a strong loving feeling and the need to be humble, patient and self-controlled. I also started appreciating transformation was a process and a Spirit-guided process”.

Emergent Themes from Second 2-weeks of Reviewing the Past

The second fortnight focused on reviewing the past through significant people and critical incidents. The overall amount of data provided during these interviews was still rich, yet less than the first stage. Out of the themes that emerged in the first stage, connectedness and transformation came out clearly. The theme of discernment was less dominant. The other phenomena which did not come out, but that were significant, are still noted. These included transcendence, desire and compassion and will be placed together and reviewed later as a group.

Theme One - Connectedness

“Connectedness” remained an obvious theme, and was derived from the categories of connection with significant people and critical incidents in the past, with self, God and shadows. The connection with the past through significant people and critical incidents dominated the largest number of sub-categories (32), followed by connecting with self (25), connecting with God (22), and then connecting with shadows (15). Connecting with the past emerged with sub-categories of connecting with the most loving, and most hurtful people/incidents, with love and with God. Each category had a rich content of sub-categories, which were discovered in the second interview.

Connecting with Significant People and Critical Incidents

When reviewing the past at the second interview, the theme of connectedness was dominated by all six participants, who were talking about connecting with loving and hurting significant people, with critical incidents, and with God. Major exceptions were participants D and E, who had the dilemma of connecting with loving and hurtful relationships with the same person.

The theme of connectedness continued in relation to significant people and critical incidents. However, in the second interview, participants showed more positive feelings of joy and experiences of love after connecting mainly with negative feelings in the first interview.

Participant A's positive feeling came from love of his grandma. He shared he was connecting with his mom through remembering her holding his hands tightly when crossing the road. He discovered being loved so deeply. When experiencing loving memories of being with his grandmother in childhood, participant A had positive feelings of joy, respect, protection, love and safety. From this close loving relationship, A referred to grandma as God gazing and watching over him.

A new and deep observation had to do with connecting with the most hurtful people or incidents. The insight emerged that the most hurtful relationship was with the most intimate person. Participant A connected with his controlling wife who hurt him most. He found her control came from her family wounds. Participant B claimed that his wife hurt him badly. Participant F also connected with her most hurting significant other, who was her husband. She shared the pain:

"I have been trying to earn his love over twenty years of marriage. I did not know why he did not admire me and love me".

Another observation was about the accumulated hurts and unresolved past relationships. Participant E had mixed feelings over her unresolved past of hurts and memories. She remembered all the loving scenes with lovers that had produced no results. Participant F connected with incidents of accumulated hurts from the disrespect of her husband. Participants A

and C discovered unresolved past relationships had an impact on their marriage. Participant A shared:

“I realized I felt hurts from past relationships and these unsettled hurts and wounds did affect my marriage”.

One exception was Participant E, who had the situation of connecting with simultaneously loving and hurting people, one with her sister and the other with her romantic lovers. When thinking of her sister, she laughed and shared:

“It seems my sister is the one I love but also hurts me most. I had a loving and hurting relationship with my sister. She always treated mom badly and I always had arguments with her. She has jealousy. Later, when mom died, God helped me to accept her, forgive her and be compassionate about her difficult situation”.

When talking about connecting with her loving, but hurtful lovers, she shared her love and hurt as follows:

“I had this romance. The memories are of sweet romantic lovers but failure with love and hurtful relationship. It is a mixed feeling of an unresolved past with hurts and good memories”.

Connecting with Self

The concept of connecting with self was continued in the second interview. The common sub-categories appearing in the first and second interviews were negative feelings, negative self-image and self-discovery. Five participants had these discoveries except participant D.

Negative feelings, Self-image and Self-discovery

Five participants, A, B, C, E, and F shared their similar negative feelings as in the first interview, including feelings of abandonment, hatred, anger and confusion when connecting with the past. The comments on the undeserving self were similar to those about negative self-image in the first interview. In particular, participant C stated she was neither a good wife nor a deserving daughter of God, while participant B shared his limitations in expressing emotions and connecting emotionally.

In connecting with past incidents and people, participants shared many self-discoveries. New elements were discovered by participant B, including the need for self-love and reminders to take care of himself. He also shared his discovery of his hidden self, which was full of a dilemma of love and hatred:

“I had a lot of dilemmas. I do not want to see her, my mother. But as a Christian, I have to love her”.

Another participant, E, also shared her dilemma from connecting with the past. It was an important discovery: not only did she discover rich inner emotions even though on the outside she was rational, but the dilemma she faced was that of being God’s witness or allowing her emotions to come first. She was fearful of not glorifying God if she followed her emotions, and thus not being a Christian role model. Participant E expressed it this way:

“I find myself having a lot of rich inner feelings, but always rational outside. If emotions come first, they cause confusion in relationships. I need to keep whole and peaceful and

perfect, as God looks at me. I will lose my witness in Christ if I am too emotional. It is most important how God looks at me”.

For participant F, a new element of self-discovery emerged. Besides F discovering her hurt from her husband’s long unfulfilled love, during meditating on her past, she discovered her expectation of love from a father-figure husband. She found she was lacking a father figure and expected an authoritative relationship from her husband.

Meditating About God

In the second interview, when discussing meditating about God, new sub-categories emerged besides relationship with God (but without sacredness) and the means and context of connecting with God. The new elements were suffering with love, redemption and forgiveness.

Relationship with God and Means/Context of Connecting with God

The connecting with God category was derived from the relationship with God and a different context for discovering God. Three participants, A, C and E, spoke of their relationship and perception of God, including their doubt about God, their perception of God as a healing and trusting God, and of experiencing His love.

Participant E had her interpretation and understanding of God influenced by the teaching from her church. She believed it was very important to glorify God. E also repeatedly mentioned that her interpretation of God was affected by the teaching of the church about God. Participant F experienced God in a different context, that is, chaos and confusion, which she believed was the

reality in which she experiences God. She experienced God in different scenes, crises and episodes. She connected closely with God in all of her real life and in meditation.

Finding God in Suffering, Redemption and Forgiveness

The finding of God in suffering and love was shared mainly by Participant A. Through connecting with his deep childhood suffering and unconditional love from his grandmother, he found God's love and intervention through suffering and this helped his forgiveness:

"This is grace and gratitude when I know there is someone loving me totally without any condition. This love I felt was so deep although grandmother did not know how to express it. This feeling was so strong and vigorous. The Holy Spirit had helped me to connect with the merciful God in suffering and the deep love of God through my grandmother".

The concept of redemption and forgiveness was also a new category that emerged in the second interview. Participant E discovered God's redemption when she could forgive her father and become aware of his own insufficiency of love in life. She connected God and her father in her sharing:

"I had a new paradigm as I could forgive my father. It was grace from God. When meditating on memories with my father, I had a new paradigm to see my father through grace and faith".

Participant D also encountered the resurrected God and eternity with her father. She shared her father passed away much like Jesus's resurrection. Her father was going home and they will be united again. This resolved and released her past wounds as she was alive and her father was in

her. She also encountered God through the imagery of a healing God in her humiliating workplace. A scene came up during meditation where God appeared:

“On that day in a meeting with same group of colleagues many years ago, I imagined God was sitting next to me in that meeting when I was being humiliated and hurt deeply by my boss and colleagues. At that moment, I saw God appeared and came and sat next to me, watching me. Then, God stood up and held my hand and led me from the meeting room. I did not return any more and this chapter was closed. The past wound was released since then.”

Connecting with Shadows

Similar to the first interview, all six participants shared the connection with shadows that was the third category of connectedness. The three main sub-categories found in the first interview were the same, and included past suffering and childhood hurts, the hidden negative self and acknowledging and overcoming the shadows. However, in acknowledging and overcoming the shadows, an additional emerging phenomenon of an unresolved or unsettled past emerged. In particular, Participant F was undergoing a paradigm shift with new perspectives in overcoming her shadows.

The discoveries of childhood hurts and the hidden negative self were similar to the findings of the first interview. However, the sub-category of acknowledging and overcoming shadows was explored at a deeper level, especially for participant F. Participant A acknowledged his unhappy marriage experience and unsettled relationship without outlet. Participant F was the only one with a unique experience, not only in acknowledging her shadows, but also in overcoming them

with a paradigm shift. She shared her awareness of inner hurt at the disrespect from her husband in silent meditation. She had a lot of past hurts from her husband and dreamed a lot about it (as repeatedly shared). There was no outlet for her twenty-year unhappy marriage. However, she had a significant discovery during spiritual practice and started to understand him. She shared:

“I acknowledged my shadows but started to appreciate the faith of my husband especially the Bible teaching and faith to the children. In silence, I had various feelings stirred up, but also started to discover more about him and his past wounds. I began to shift and to forgive”.

Theme Two - Discernment

Discernment was mentioned in terms of suffering, God’s will, calling and life/work direction. This was similar to the first interview. However, three participants, A, D and F, had unique experiences of discernment. Participant A shared discerning God’s will in suffering and hurt from the past. When forming a closer relationship with God, the discernment from past hurts was clearer. The most discerning moment was the time when he meditated on the love of his grandmother. He discerned his new life was to transfer his grandmother’s love to his sons and others.

When meditating on past incidents at workplace, Participant D realized their meaning from God. She saw the sign of God through her promotion failure and her unjust work environment. This helped her to release the feelings of anger and hate. Through meditation, she shared that she found blessings from suffering and the direction of her vocation in spirituality.

“Due to suffering, I experienced meditation and the search for vocation. Spirituality and practice helped me to understand my mission and values. If not for this suffering, I would never have searched so deeply and encountered spirituality and meditation. I felt the freedom to choose my vocation and not drag on. The discernment of direction and timing to leave my current job for a new life was clear”.

Theme Three - Transformation

In the process of transformation, all participants, except participant E, experienced transcendence. The sub-categories were similar to the first interview, with two additional elements, the Ah-ha moment and the love of God.

Participant A experienced the transcendence of past hurts and loves and their influence over others. He found whoever has been hurt will hurt others, just as someone being loved can love others deeply. He experienced the deep love of his grandmother and shared:

“The deep love from grandmother who protected and loved me in my despair was in fact the love and grace of God. This encountering motivated me and transcended me from my brokenness to love myself and others fully”.

Participant B’s transcendence took the form of starting to become aware of self and others. Through his self-awakening, he experienced a transcendent connection with his deeper self and his interactions with people. He also told how his father’s love had been transformed into energy and passion to serve. Participant C was the only one who connected with the “Ah-ha” moment as she saw beauty in all things during meditation. The other participants experienced transcendence

through love and God. Participant D transcended her pain at her father's death by transferring her love and service to others, much like the wounded healer. She used this transcendence to support others whose loved ones had died. Participant F transcended her feelings of anger from conflicts to empathy and calmness. She felt more at ease after silence and stillness and received a new spirit of concern and care.

Transformation was the emergent theme, and was derived from the categories of redeeming the past, positive change and the discovery of new life/direction. However, only one participant, A, shared how a redeemed past experience led to a new life/direction, while three participants, B, D and F, shared their positive change through a paradigm shift. The most frequently-mentioned category from the participants was positive change and a new paradigm shift that emerged.

Redeeming the Past and New Life/Direction

Participant A was the only one to share an experience of redeeming the past through trusting God in suffering and remembering His love in past hurts. Two participants shared their discovery of new life and direction. Participant A felt his grandmother had been watching him and asking him to transfer her love to other relationships. Participant F found transformation led to living fully.

Positive Change and Paradigm Shift

Participants B, D and F shared their positive changes and paradigm shifts in the second interview. Participant B said his positive change was an increase in care and compassion. He had deeper feelings towards and connections with people, and had changed from his more superficial contacts of the past. In the past, he said he only acted and reacted. Now, he felt his care and

compassion were coming from the heart. He was more sensitive to intimate relationship with his wife and had learnt how to accept her limitations.

Participant D's paradigm shift helped her to a major change in perspective. She recounted:

"I discovered the one hurting me most was in fact the one blessing me most. I found all the accomplishments and blessings came out of the promotion failure and being transferred. I gained new life and direction as I was searching hard for God's will after the transfer".

Participant D also shared that she found transformation was a process. It was a process that started from her spiritual practice and meditation with the heaviest moment being suffering from her father's death and her unhappy work situation. She also discovered healing was a process. It was a process of letting God work on her to find her calling. She admitted that she was willing to be the wounded healer and witness to and bless others.

Participant F's paradigm shift helped her to establish a new relationship with her husband. F gained her self-control and self-awareness in stillness, especially realizing her inner feelings:

"I started to feel and control my anger and stayed quiet, reflecting and not exploding. I believe this process of change was coming from my willingness to be still, discern and change. I could discover more when I could sit still".

In facing her accumulated conflicts with her husband, participant F started to be still and understand her husband's past wounds and obstacles to joy. She realized the effects of their

differences in family upbringing, values, education and started to appreciate her husband's spiritual strength and love of children. F shared:

“I had a new paradigm with new eyes to see my husband and our relationship. This was coming from the Holy Spirit through meditation, compassion and forgiveness”.

Emergent Themes at the Third 2-weeks: Meditating about God

In the third fortnight, which was meditating about God, themes of connectedness, discernment, and transformation emerged.

Theme One - Connectedness

The emergent “connectedness” was a more prominent theme in the third stage. However, only two dominant categories of connecting to self and God emerged with a total of 33 and 32 sub-categories respectively. The third category of connection with significant people and critical incidents in the past was derived from 20 sub-categories and was not as dominant as the previous two categories. Connecting to shadows did not appear as a category as in the first and second interviews, and was only suggested by C and D, and with limited descriptions.

Connecting with Self

The concept of connecting with self in the third interview continued and was shared by all six participants. The common sub-categories that appeared were the same as the first two interviews, including negative feelings, negative self-image, and self-discovery, but with the addition of a new element of positive feeling and identity. In particular, participant B shared most of the experiences out of the six participants, producing 14 sub-categories, while participant E shared

only one reflection on connecting with self. At the same time, after all the negative feelings and self-image of the first two interviews, Participant C shared her positive feelings in this third interview when speaking about connecting with her father's love and her personal development. Other participants A, F and D had experiences unique to their contexts.

Participant B felt stressed and had a painful struggle in both life and work. When connecting with self, he discovered his weaknesses, including procrastination, lack of determination and hesitation to change, and found his biggest obstacle was the fear of making wrong decisions. He claimed his self-awareness started with the spiritual practice, which made him realize his emotional disturbance and led him to a process of knowing his own fear and will. This self-discovery also led him to question more:

"I started to query my current mode of life and the conflict between my life goal and the banking world. My will and long-term direction came from the influence of Chinese culture as I wish to leave a legacy in Chinese culture. The wish hidden in my heart was to contribute to society. I understood more about my midlife struggle and conflicts".

In contrast to participant B, participant E shared a limited reflection, together with repeated discoveries from the past two interviews about God's mission being accomplished in her building the church. However, a new important element emerged, which was the sacred place of St John's cathedral. She shared this was the place where she experienced the most intimate relationship with God during the darkest moments of her life when her mother died.

Another new element was a positive feeling when connecting with self. Participant C experienced the positive feeling for the first time through connecting with the memories of her

father's love. She mentioned repeatedly that she had grown up so fast and really missed a parent's love and childhood memories. She claimed that these positive memories were a sign of God's grace, which led her to discover herself and her life direction (salvation history and redeeming the past).

Participant A found himself in a dilemma and experienced other rich feelings when connecting with self. He shared that on the one hand he wanted love, but on the other hand, it was not easy to find. He recalled the social crisis of June 4, whereupon he felt a strong nationalism and awakening of his Chinese identity and destiny. His unforgettable drowning experience caused him pain, suffocation, despair and helplessness. It was through this experience of physical dying that he returned to God and found spiritual healing (connecting to a critical incident, awakening to God's healing and a return to his love). In the third interview, participant F shared she had faced a lot of crises and unexpected disturbances in the family. She was torn and helpless and could not concentrate on spiritual practice. However, she also discovered that God did exist in chaos and real life. Participant D discovered her main concern in spiritual practice was her calling. She had been struggling about the timing of leaving her existing workplace and pursuing her vocation. She was deeply moved and touched when reading the words of the gospel during her commuting to work at the subway.

Connecting with God

Connecting with God was a clear theme of connectedness in this third interview. All five participants shared connection with God, except participant B. Participant D shared the greatest number of categories concerning relating to God in love and in the context of making decisions.

Three participants, A, C and E, connected with God through His grace and blessings in their lives. Participant A discovered God's grace in his experience of surviving drowning, while participant C counted the blessings and grace of God through her positive memories of the past, including her service to youth and the needy. Both also found God had turned their suffering to blessings. At the same time, participant E remembered God's abundant blessings through His promises and fulfilment in her life. She shared God's blessings in converting her sister's family to Christ and saving her sister from all past suffering. She remarked that God had confirmed His greatest love again and again and was always in the process of nurturing her. God just needed her response to count on Him. She shared:

“God spoke to me directly recently. His message addressed to my situation. I was in a much deeper and more intimate relationship with God. God had made my dream come true and his presence was always there”.

On the other hand, participants C, D, F related to God from different contexts. Participant C was struggling with the decision to become a deacon and found God had paved the way for him to serve. His meditation on Jonah's experience had confirmed God's message for him to serve the church. God had led him to serve and follow the path of Christianity. Participant D connected with God through Jesus as role model. Through gospel meditation, she meditated about Jesus being betrayed by Judas and surrounded by groups. Jesus's impact and influence on the community helped her in relation to her calling and healing. The context of participant F was different. She experienced God in the third fortnight, which was filled with unexpected

interruption and crisis. However, she experienced peace in chaos. She also shared she felt intimacy with God in stillness and calmness when dealing with her relationship with husband.

Connecting with Significant People and Critical Incidents

In the third interview, the theme of connectedness was derived from the category of connecting with the past through significant people and critical incidents. Participant B was the who one shared most frequently in this area, and this was followed by contrasts and similarities with the experiences of participants A and C.

Participant B reflected a great deal about connecting to his work, boss, life and father. He shared that he was asking about his life direction because roused by his boss's expectations at the workplace. He wondered if the banking life was his destiny. The stressful banking life was in contrast with the peace that he received from spiritual practice and the enlightenment he received from silence. God led him to think about his desire in life. Following this searching process, B took the initiative and revealed the messages. He then connected with his father's teaching on Chinese culture, saying:

"I was influenced by my father's teaching on Chinese culture. It related to my direction and vision of life. When opening my heart in meditation, I discovered my mission and God's plan".

Both A and C connected with their parents but the difference was A connected with the divorce and hurts from parents, while A reflected on the love of his parents, the joy of his father when they moved to a new public estate, and positive experiences of childhood. Both also shared a

connection with critical incidents. A shared his unforgettable drowning experience while C shared the fire incident. These incidents were the important salvation of God which led them revealed the precious love and grace of God. Participant E reflected on the unfairness of her boss and her calling in the church, which made her witness to the amazing grace of God.

Theme Two - Discernment

In this third fortnight meditating about God, the theme of discernment emerged with clarity. All participants shared their discernment, while participant D shared the greatest number of categories in discernment, and participant A received his discernment for making a decision, while participants E, B, C and F all shared their discernment about their personal contexts.

Participant D shared her discernment about God's calling for her vocation. She was enlightened by the gospel of putting new wine into new wine-skins. This illuminated her ideas about the concept of "new". She reflected there were many new things that appeared with a new life direction, including new context, new confession, new gospel, new salvation, new relationships, a new vocation and a new focus. At the same time, she connected with a deeper and specific calling. Through Henri Nouwen's book she experienced enlightenment about a charge to serve people with intellectual impairment, and she sensed she was also being sent. She shared that God was calling her to a community and calling her to spiritual education. She also discerned healing from the past.

"I felt my sins were forgiven. It was a movement towards my vocation and I felt released from the past and joyful and free. It was a spiritual healing. The letting go of the past and moving on in the process of spiritual healing was God's acceptance at the next level,

which surpassed all sins. God has powerful cleansing. Suffering and calling were related”.

Participant A shared that his discernment of God’s will came from his long suffering. He admitted that he also discerned his calling and new life were to love all the people surrounding him fully, including his wife, fellow church members, colleagues and friends. At the same time, he shared he had encountered God when discerning if he should accept the invitation to be deacon of the church. He found God could make everything possible beyond limitations:

“God turns impossible to possible when under His will. I was very puzzled and felt inadequate to be a deacon. I turned to God through my meditation and just listened and was silent. Then I discerned a voice: “Do it for me.” I had a vision of expanding the church with a new concept and vision in Asia and China. I realized all the management training, leadership and mindset change were God’s equipping me to serve.”

Participant B found the discernment process was an awakening process for God to use different people and incidents to enlighten his life. He believed his calling was a process that began with his starting to question life and then calling his inner heart with an internal touch, and also his emotional struggles towards enlightenment. He stated that this research helped him connect all the dots in his life. He had discerned God’s will and his commitment to Chinese culture and was preparing to make a change in life.

Participant C had seen her new meaning of life as being a companion with others in their own life processes. As part of the discernment process and through reading Mark’s gospel about Jesus

healing the sick, she discerned her deepest joy is in serving the needy. She then recalled her satisfaction in serving patients as a nurse or accompanying terminally-ill patients and their families in the past.

Participant E kept discerning God's promises to make her dream come true and give even more than expected. She discerned her calling in church. When God gives more, she should serve more. She also discerned wisdom in relationships as well as the direction of the next phase of life. Her enlightenment came from her intimacy with God. The process of discernment let her know what God wants from her. The most important awakening for her was that her life belongs to God and is under his full protection and she just needs to follow in everyday life.

Theme Three - Transformation

The theme of transformation emerged with "ah-ha" moments and transcendence along with the transformative moment.

Participant F experienced positive changes through a new perspective that allowed her to see the blessings of her life with a renewed heart and mind. She compared her changes to the feeling of returning home:

"I was not so anxious and impatient and could be at peace with myself. My calmness and stillness helped me admire and see all the blessings. This was a change of heart as I became able to feel, see and admire people and things with meaning and freedom. I could with connect the wounds of my husband and the blessing of my job. I also could enjoy life

and relationship with my children and husband. I finally realized that my family was my vocation”.

Participant A said his transformation experience came from critical incidents. One was the awakening of his Chinese identity with his turning point of life occurring on June 4. He also found the unforgettable drowning experience was also transformational with an “ah-ah” moment of discovering God’s grace. It was no co-incidence that he was saved by a student whose car had broken down and who had stopped on the highway and saw him drowning with his hands raised above the water.

Participant D shared that she met with Jesus and her heart was filled with a feeling of release, joy and freedom. The change was not only physical healing, but spiritual healing. At the same time, participant D said she had found a new understanding of God and had experienced the transcendence of her identity. Through her ah-ha moment of encountering God, she was shocked and touched about both her old and new life. This shock came when she was reconnected to her calling to pastoral/spiritual care from two years ago.

Participant C shared connecting with Jesus’s compassionate heart and sadness through reading the Sermon on the Mount. She was suddenly touched at Sunday worship by Jesus healing her of unforgiveness and an evil spirit. She felt strongly about God’s compassion and healing. She wanted to be a wounded healer and share her experience with others, especially the sick and the needy. Participant E found transformation when something changed inside her, but it was not a big change. Participant E found the compassionate God who had sent people to surround her

during her darkest moment in life when her mother died. God's encouraging words about death and resurrection, hope and peace, were salvation to her. Participant F discovered and felt her experience in struggles and in reflections from life experiences.

Emergent Themes at the Fourth 2-week Overall Reflection

In the last fortnight of spiritual practice and in the fourth set of interviews, all participants had a reflective attitude when reviewing their overall eight weeks' practice according to their unique contexts. As mentioned earlier, the findings from the spiritual practice are related to the entire process during which the participants experienced the complete model, which will be analysed and discussed later. The overall general evaluation of the eight week's spiritual practice, along with comments on the model, will also be discussed later to provide an overview of how the participants looked back at their journeys of midlife spiritual transformation. Therefore only three themes emerged: connectedness, discernment, and transformation/ transcendence.

Theme One - Connectedness

Connectedness was still an obvious theme in the fourth interview, and was derived from the categories of connecting with self and God. The connection with self was experienced by five participants in a deeper way, involving clarity about life priorities and aspirations when connecting with God, leading to awakening and action.

Connecting with Self

Participant A mentioned his realization that connecting with himself had to do with finding his goal and mission in life. He realized his confusion and fear were caused by his lack of feeling for

self and others. He also reached a new understanding of a self who was over-committed, over-stretched, fatigued and unhappy. Living in each present moment was a new discovery. He admitted that he had forgotten how to connect with self, others and God in the here and now.

When evaluating the past eight weeks' practice, he also questioned his priorities, especially for the second phase of life. He drew pictures describing his experience of those eight weeks and his strong desire for freedom and release from past shadows.

Participant B connected with himself, not only in discovering his issues as in previous interviews, but also in taking initiative and action. His most important self-discovery was from knowledge to action. In the past interviews, he revealed his procrastination issue and gradual willingness to take action, such as reconciling a relationship or pursuing his dream to be an advocate for Chinese culture. He discovered his change from being a passive recipient of God's plan to an active contributor to the next phase of his life. He also started to nurture his sensitivity to self and others including feeling the nature of God's love and receiving it with an open heart:

"I know there are obstacles of making big decision – personal fear of lack of preparation. Not prepared to understand self, world....making for uncertainty".

Participant F acknowledged connecting with self as an important turning point for her life. During the process, she had a deep self-discovery, which was her passion to use her knowledge to enrich people and build up their self-confidence. She shared that it was effortless and enjoyed being an advisor and mentor. She spoke as follows:

“I came to a turning point in my life journey after meeting the dark shadow of my life. I encountered many things, including dealing with the dark shadow of my life. In last eight weeks, I found my aspiration. I realized I love mentoring children/teenagers to raise their confidence and provide educational advice to parents. I felt joy and am motivated to enrich people.”

Connecting with God in Awakening & Action

Participant A shared repeatedly that he had a strong feeling that God wanted him to do one thing that he could do best. He found God had made him a special platform on which to perform. His eight weeks’ practice and reflection enabled him to link to and relate to all things and prepared him for his next phase of life.

Participant C admitted that the encounter with God awakened her about her heart journey. She said she knew God loved her, but it was only knowledge at head level. The recognition of her service was from people, not from God. She shared that only when she experienced deeply how God loved her in listening and waiting that she could connect her heart. This awakening in close relationship with God led her to realize her need for rest in order to have renewal in life. She will experience God’s grace in daily life through total surrender.

Participant E believes God is a knowing God. God had worked wonderfully in His way and accomplished wonderful plans in her life, including crises and joy. She echoed Mother Teresa on listening to the voice of God and taking action to serve the poor. This discernment through connecting with God increased her confidence in service. She admitted that she had experienced

a very intimate relationship with God through his words of encouragement and comfort. God knew her heart and all things in her life. Her awareness and sensitivity also increased her listening to the small whisper of God during her regular spiritual practice.

“God was also an awakening God as He awakened me even to something already hidden and put inside my heart for long time. God kept reminding me of his promise. It included my dream of studying theology and writing books to remember mother. The knowing God knew all my thoughts and made all things possible”.

Theme Two - Discernment

Discernment was another important emerging theme shared by all six participants in the fourth interview. The participants discerned different meanings related to their unique contexts and desires in life.

In the last two weeks of spiritual practice, Participant A had discerned his mission and vision of God’s will for his life. He shared he had been caught in a dilemma between glorifying God and focusing on financial security and work. He was aware of feeling trapped in material needs and emptiness. In the midst of silence, three key words of discernment came up: “to love fully”. He was awakened to love through action, and through spending time and caring for people. Another discernment was to do his best in just one thing. He discerned his ultimate goal and deepest desire was writing and researching the impact of a mega church on Chinese society. This was a vision to re-interpret the church’s function and extend God’s kingdom.

Participant B had a unique discernment in a cross-cultural context. He discerned his desire to contribute to society, although it had been vague in the past. He could find his deepest desire now and felt a more clear direction related to culture. He discerned his direction through silence, music, gospel reading and reflecting on the way Chinese culture and arts had integrated into his life. At his workplace, he discerned the need to facilitate the growth and transcendence of colleagues. His focus became totally different from other leaders. He shared he had found his real meaning in his job. His new understanding helped him to apply his nurturing heart at his workplace more. All his suffering and challenges at work and in life helped him to become centred and make changes.

Participant C shared her discernment about letting go of her stubbornness and problems making daily life decisions, including dealing with her helpers, daughter, housework, and all the trivial things. When she could let go and relax, God took charge and all things became easier.

Participant D found a lot of discernment through the gospel of Mark, which connected to her calling. The gospel of Jesus healing the blind was important in the discernment of her calling. She admitted that she was only seeing vaguely at the beginning, before feeling Jesus leading her to see the way and direction more clearly. She felt deep regret and hurt from her past experience, which was similar to Jesus's experience in his ministry. She was reminded of Jesus being with her and not just doing. She shared she was reminded of her being through the close meditation of walking with Jesus.

Participant E found discernment and transformation were related. Her transformation came when she discerned how to be human and how there was too much focus in her past on doing. Her discernment came from a personal dialogue with God through past incidents. She believed Ignatian spirituality helped her to look back and reflect on the past after the process. It helped her to realize God's mission in her was to build the church. She believed God's blueprint is deeply rooted in our desires and dreams, and will gradually be realized.

She talked about the importance of responding to discernment.

“While eating at friend's home one night, I was watching a burning candle and suddenly discerned an answer to my long thought whether I should be a deacon again for another few years. I realized in a moment of discernment, God's calling is to respond to Him”.

Discernment about midlife was also noted by participants E and F. E discerned two phases to her life. She shared the first half of life had been about counting on her own strength, while the second half will depend on God. The midlife search was a process and she always made progress when she was focusing on what God wanted. She believed in God's wonderful life changing plan and was just waiting for this plan. The discernment of being with God has an impact on others and is far more important than doing.

Participant F's discernment was a new experience for her. She discerned her vocation as that of a mother nurturing two children to growth and self-confidence. She discovered something that she had not seen in the past. It was about precious parenting time with her daughter. She discerned that she could be the teacher and tutor to her child through quality time. She also discerned a

voice saying that she should not run away. She had a paradigm shift of letting go of her CEO world and entering into the paradigm of her children's world:

“I find myself I enjoy the peace of the journey and discernment coming out—that I have experienced this discernment—I know it needs conditions to be silence and empty”.

As for her discernment about midlife, she had discovered self-control and an openness to bringing new things into her life. She shared that her second phase of life depended on what content she wanted to put in the container.

Theme Three – Transformation

When evaluating the whole eight weeks' experience, another obvious theme was transformation. All six participants had their transformation and experience in a unique way.

Participant A shared that he had experienced tremendous transformational change. He showed me a few pictures that he had drawn that related to this change. They illustrated how his life had changed from confusion and despair to joy and renewal. He also shared his inner freedom and the energy gained from his research, which drove him to love others fully.

He integrated three things in the picture, his passion for teaching, his strength in training, and the opportunities that God gave him, in particular this research. He said he could clearly see the different platforms God had provided in the last eight weeks in order that he might achieve God's will and plan.

For participant B, transformation was a deeper understanding of self and shadows as well as motivation for taking action. When he became aware of his procrastination and fear through meditation, he began to take the initiatives and actions to change. His transformation started with an awakening to the need for deeper care and support of his wife. At the same time, he realized the growth journey was a process of nurturing his heart. He admitted that last eight weeks had been a journey from head to heart in terms of interacting with Chinese culture. B described learning how to live with God and Chinese culture as follows:

“When I am using my head, I am only living as a mechanic. I am walking in God and learning how to live with God, especially with my context of Chinese culture. Buddhism was an awakening and realization of my original heart”.

Participant C discovered God was always with her. She felt God’s presence in spiritual practice. She admitted she had changed from the way she was before the research over the eight weeks. She shared that before she was easily frustrated and lacked energy and peace. God heard her prayers and turned her to emotional stability and peace of mind. She claimed that this was about transformation and mindset change, rather than doing and serving without pause.

At the same time, her life was reconstructed as she shared that her heart was refreshed and renewed. When her heart was renewed, she knew more about the will of God.

“Now I was not so eager to seek a definite answer for life direction, but rather to wait and listen in silence”.

Participant D felt her transformation was a process of experiencing suffering and hope with Jesus through the cross. She shared how her experience of suffering met with Christ's suffering and resurrection. From all her old history, she found new elements and hope in life. She received confirmation to leave her existing workplace and pursue her vocation. She had had the desire to seek confirmation of her calling for a long time, but was surprised to receive frequent messages and confirmation when meditating on Mark's gospel. She shared she resonated with Jesus, who had left the place where he was rejected and had pursued a new direction with joy.

An interesting and unique theme of transformation was shared by participant E. She said her experience of transformation was an unnoticed, gradual happening with the discovery of small changes in her life. In particular, she claimed that she had had a new experience of transformation in terms of a new concept that discernment is a process.

Participant E also experienced the enlightenment that God might not give her a definite answer, but just needed her to trust in Him. She shared she could transcend all things and let God lead, as He had made all past dreams come true:

"The process of transformation was unnoticed, but it was happening. It involved listening to God through prayer and faith with confidence in His direction. Originally I wanted to find a definite answer about my life through this research. Now I realize there is no fixed definition or answer. I recognized I had experienced God in the process of connecting with significant people and critical incidents. God had brought me to the place where he wanted me to go from past to present and will continue in the future".

For participant F, transformation became a living habit. It was real change for her when she kept remembering and connecting with small but important things in meditation.

“When I emptied my basket, I poured out the unnecessary things and I remembered the important things, like the people who loved me or people I needed to care for”.

Participant F also shared that her relationship with her daughter improved when she became more patient and calmer. Her daughter was very pure and now growing closer to her. Her change also led to increased bonding with her son. She felt the spiritual practice also led her to see her vocation. She found she had better relationships with people and family when she became more patient and calm. She felt her vocation was to nurture the children in love. F also shared her transcendence into a new life where she now knew how to live, and said that she had reached a stage where she did not want to go back to her old life. She was awakened to the realization that her differences with her husband in terms of upbringing, values and brokenness could be seen in their conflicts in raising children and marriage. She also acknowledged her transcendence came from the Holy Spirit walking with her and changing her:

“When being in silence and heard the small voice of God, I was reminded to have a new attitude to life and preserved my peace of mind. The silence allowed the Holy Spirit to empty me of thoughts. I saw the difference in myself over the eight weeks. It was a journey of transcendence in accepting myself and others more and with stronger resilience”.

With this fourth and last stage of the spiritual journey, the above findings provided a large quantity of data which could help explain and substantiate how the participants experienced their

own unique process of spiritual transformation as midlife Christian executives in Hong Kong. The three themes of connectedness, discernment, and transcendence/transformation could be further supplemented by the other phenomena, which were also recorded. The phenomena presented below were useful in providing an even more comprehensive understanding of the transformational process of midlife Christian executives.

The first phenomenon is *Desire*. The theme of desire was derived from the first stage of the interviews. It came from the categories of desire for change, desire for more and desire for God. Different participants shared different kinds of desires. All participants expressed their desires, except participant B.

The Overall Reflection

When the participants reflected on their eight-week spiritual practice journey overall, many used words like eagerness, willingness, desire, attention and enlightenment.

Participant A had deep feelings and discovery from the eight weeks' practice. He discovered the importance of attention and focus during the process. He shared he had started attentively walking, eating, touching and enjoying all things.

Participant C reflected that her eagerness to seek direction for her second phase of life at the beginning, and her desire to come out from her confusion, drove her to seek more. Her letting go process in listening to God's voice was a very special journey. She was getting closer to God through images like phoning him to return home, seeing flower blossoms as signs of hope, and

receiving God's words, healing and consolation. She admitted that enlightenment came through our willingness in the process:

“When we are willing to listen and let go of our past, we feel the companionship of God in all the experiences and realize His guidance and plan”.

Participant E also echoed the importance of willingness. She discovered finding God will find lead to finding her life. She reflected that we can discover God when we are willing and pause to taste our past with God:

“This research was a heart seeking journey and I had found an answer. In fact, I realized that God had given me an answer in the process of my life. He had promised me and guided me all the way. I just needed to let go and let Him drive. Let God be the director and I will be the actor”.

Participant E also found enlightenment through connecting with her shadows. This helped her to be close to God and she realized her lack of trust in people. She found these shadows became blessings. Another reflection was that being was more important than doing. Being was key for her and affected her relationship with the people surrounding her. She felt she had this ability to impact others through being. This was the consequence of seeking God and being silent, firstly. She also reflected her journal reflection had led her to discovering God was in the midst of her life and how He had intervened in her life in the past.

Participant F wrapped up her eight-week journey with celebration. She spent time with her sick aunt alone at Penang during her last week of practice and she found it a spiritual journey. It was

the end of her eight-week journey, but the beginning of another new journey. She felt her mindset had changed. She was calm when preparing her luggage, going to the airport, and arriving at Penang because of her quiet time and meditation. She experienced something different from past travel, with all its rush, chaos and confusion.

“In the past, I wanted to leave and get away from my chaotic life. Now I was relaxed.

This was something to celebrate from my eight-week spiritual journey. I discovered I could feel, capture and enjoy small things. It was a real spiritual rest, which gave me physical and spiritual renewal”.

Summary

Through a comprehensive and detailed process of data analysis and collation of data using key words, codes, categories and emerging themes, this chapter has presented the empirical factual findings with their emergent themes of connectedness, discernment and transformation. The rich and vivid descriptions of the participants have also been presented through consolidated summaries, providing a clear picture of what happened to them through the phenomena of connectedness, discernment and transformation in a four bi-weekly spiritual journey, following the model of spiritual practice.

Upon the foundation laid by these rich data and emergent themes, the next chapter is an interpretive discussion of the findings, and addresses the central research question about midlife Christian professionals in Hong Kong.

Chapter Five: Interpretive Discussion of the Findings

Introduction

Chapter four provided comprehensive and rich factual data findings that resulted in three emergent themes. In this chapter and the next, an interpretation and analysis of these data answer the research question about the midlife transformation of Christian professionals in Hong Kong. In Chapter five I analyse the empirical findings on three different levels, and in Chapter six I present a dialogue with the theoretical perspectives.

Before proceeding to the three levels of interpretation, it is necessary to point out that for a comprehensive analysis and interpretation, I needed to select relevant and appropriate quotes and specific examples from the participants' reflections. These quotes and examples are intentionally chosen to substantiate and support my interpretation of the experiences of the participants. In certain cases, some of these quotes might be used again for a different interpretation in a different context. This should not be considered duplication or repetition, for some quotes or examples contain multiple dimensions of meaning that can be applied in multiple contexts and for multiple purposes.

Three Levels of Interpretive Analysis and Discussion

In the previous chapter, the participants recounted their experiences from their respective spiritual journeys. Following the IPA methodology, their primary accounts provided the first level of interpretation, with the emergent themes representing the key features of their lived experience. The basic principle of IPA is "to explore in detail how participants are making sense

of their personal and social world” through examining “the meaning particular experiences, events, states hold for participants” (Smith & Osborn, 2003, p.53). Following this process involved interpreting the participants’ experiences when they connected with themselves, with critical incidents or significant people from the past, and with God. This process reflects the philosophical foundations of a phenomenological approach that focuses the lived experience and allows things to appear as they are (Langdridge, 2007, pp.11-13).

Before undertaking the second level of interpretation by the researcher, as suggested by IPA methodology, I adopted Lonergan’s theory of the four levels of consciousness (EUJD), to analyse the deep interior movement experienced by the participants. The three themes of connectedness, discernment and transformation were extracted from a large amount of data shared by the six participants, involving many emotions and interior movement at different levels of consciousness, namely experiencing, understanding, judging and deciding. Analysis of these dynamic movements affords deeper understanding of and insight into the interior spiritual journey.

As the researcher, I have my own perceptions and interpretations, which “are required in order to make sense of other person’s world through a process of interpretive activity” (Smith & Osborn, 2003, p.51). At this level of interpretation I make my own interpretative analysis of the themes of connectedness, discernment and transformation in answering the research question about the midlife transformation of Christian professionals in Hong Kong.

In order to capture important insight from the data and the in-depth experiences, a comprehensive interpretative analysis of the findings is required. Therefore, the chapter is structured into three sections of interpretive discussion in order to achieve this goal with some precision.

The first analysis section of the empirical findings comes from a review of the six participants' experiences in terms of both their commonalities and individual uniqueness. This interpretive discussion, which is both an individual and a collective analysis, allows for an understanding of what happened to the six participants during their spiritual journeys, and also identifies those phenomena held in common and those that are unique.

When reviewing commonalities, I found all the participants shared a yearning to look inside their lives and find out what is happening. To trace this interior movement, I applied Lonergan's theoretical perspective to the empirical findings in the second section. Lonergan's perspective was chosen because EUJD is a dynamic operational tool. The fundamental principle that the four levels of consciousness do not represent a rigid division of stages is particularly effective because the phenomena revealed in the spiritual experience of the participants were evolving, and the process of the movement was never divided in a clearly segmented way during their eight weeks of spiritual journeying. After reviewing the first and second section, the third section discusses my interpretation of the finding in answering the research question. Therefore, the three levels of interpretation and analysis of finding include an analysis of commonalities and individual uniqueness in the first section, which is followed by the analysis of interior movement

through the lens of Lonergan in the second, leads to my interpretation of the empirical findings in the third.

Section One - Commonalities and Individual Uniqueness

Drawing on the rich empirical data, the commonalities between the six participants and their individual unique experiences enable us to understand vividly the experience of connectedness, discernment and transformation.

Commonalities of the Six Participants

Connecting with Self – Knowing Self, Negative Self and Hidden Self

At the first level of connecting with self, the commonalities experienced by the participants involved them seeing and knowing themselves more clearly. Their hidden-selves were discovered through God's eyes when they connected to the dark shadows from the past.

Many participants shared their connection with their negative selves encountered in the practice of self-examination. The commonalities in connecting with oneself included negative self-image and self-discovery. Participants C and F were both mothers and disliked themselves, uttering negative self-image comments relating to self-centeredness, stubbornness, confusion and physical fatigue. Participants A and F both faced their weaknesses, such as coldness towards people, lack of empathy and avoidance of relationship. At the same time, Participants A, B and C had facing their fears in common. Participant A was fearful of close intimate relationships with people, while B had a fear of unhappiness and of making decisions. For her part, C was afraid of her lack of control when changing her role to become a full-time housewife and mother.

Connecting with Shadows from the Past

Connecting with critical people or incidents from the past, enabled many of the participants to face acknowledge, embrace and overcome the shadows that resulted from those histories. During their silent spiritual practice, Participants A, E and F recognized their shadows in their common experience of a traumatic childhood. Participant A discovered his shadows related closely to the impact of his womanizing father and parents' divorce; Participant E lost her trust and confidence in people as a result of her poverty-stricken family and irresponsible father; while Participant F became aware her emotional disconnection from people was caused by her lack of parental love.

Shadows and suffering were an important medium for revealing the grace of God. Traumatic past wounds had created the accumulation of anger, unforgiving hearts and lack of love that was hindering their holistic growth. Participants A and E were clearly aware their childhood experiences and parents' divorces had a major impact on their perception of marriage and close relationships. Participant F was fully aware that her shadow, with its accompanying lack of empathy, affected her ability to bond with her children and husband. The common insight was an understanding that their shadows were all suppressed, hidden or ignored until, as a result of this spiritual journey, they finally had the opportunity to face, embrace and be willing to overcome them.

Through the experience of connecting with their shadows, a sense of forgiveness was common experienced by the participants. Participant A was enlightened in his silent meditation and shared that he gradually became aware of the importance of loving himself and others. He knew he had

to forgive his father before he would be able to resolve his shadow. Similarly, Participant E admitted that she had already forgiven her father when he accepted Christ during the sickness of his last stage of life. It was the grace and gift of Christ to convert her father. Participant F forgave her mother when she discovered the love of God had provided her with all blessings in life and had protected her from the difficulties.

Inner Desire for Change

Another commonality among the participants in the spiritual journey was an inner desire for change. Even when facing their shadows, the spirit of God led them to realize the meaning of suffering. The acknowledgement of the shadows and the desire for change led to open hearts in facing and tackling the shadows.

Participant A noted that his strong desire to love motivated him to let go of the past and take action. He could slow down and care about the people around him, including enjoying his relationship with his sons and wife. Both Participants C and F had a strong desire to move beyond past suffering and seek God for new life. Participant C received a message from the gospel and was enlightened by words such as “refreshed”, “strengthened” and “encouraged”. This experience motivated her to seek holistic healing and not just physical healing. Participant F had a strong inner desire to escape all her confusion and her negative self-image. Similarly, from the accumulated shadow of humiliation at the workplace, Participant D had a strong desire to seek God’s direction about leaving this situation. All these desires for change and this yearning for God emerging out of long suffering were also commonalities.

Intimacy with God through Sacredness

Participants B, D and E experienced a common phenomenon in relationship with God. It was an intimacy with God through sacredness. Participant B shared that he saw the sacredness of the world through experiencing the sacredness of small things. He shared his sacred moment when he remembered sharing an orange with his father. He acknowledged he was grateful to God for this encounter with the sacred, as he had not had the chance to express his feelings before his father passed away. Participant D encountered the sacred while she meditated about her sick mother and felt the strong love and peace of Jesus. This godly companionship to her mother gave her strong comfort and hope in the sacred. Participant E's connection with God during a sacred moment at church concerned her mother's death. The touch of sacred love in deep sorrow renewed her relationship with her sister after the death of her mother. These commonalities among the participants through connecting with the sacred paved the way to transformation.

Discerning the Love of God

The experience of discerning the love of God came through connecting with past suffering. This experience also led to forgiveness and renewal. Participant A had a strong connection with unforgettable past incidents that revealed the process of his deepening relationship with God. His experience of surviving in drowning had a transformative impact on him. He discerned the love of God in his challenging life journey, including his confusion as a teenager. Similarly, in the prolonged unhappy relationship with her husband, Participant F encountered God's grace and gradually discerned the meaning of her life. She then gained more compassion and care for her husband's past wounds. This change of heart led her to understand with empathy and build bonds with her family.

There was solid evidence of the discernment of the love and spirit of God among the participants. The whole discernment process related closely to connectedness, as it was a precious discovery that emerged from connecting with self, the past and God, which led to an interior journey with the goal of understanding His will for transformation of life.

Tradition and Church Teaching

The influence of tradition and church teaching was common among the participants, especially when they interpreted self, past and God. Both Participants C and E faced a dilemma and a paradox in understanding themselves and God because of their churches' traditions and teaching. Church teaching about God was always linked to sin, according to Participant C. That was the reason she hesitated to ask for holistic healing even though she had suffered from chronic knee pain for a long time. She thought she was not deserving of God's healing as she was not perfect. She was influenced in this by the teaching of her church about sin and the healing of God. At the same time, how Participant E thought God looked at her also had an impact, especially on her self-perception as a Christian role model. It affected the way she dealt with her inner emotions and why she tried to suppress her emotions. She believed she had to maintain the image of a rational "proper" Christian, especially as a deacon of the church. She faced the internal dilemma of having to suppress her emotional and adventurous side, since the teaching of her church emphasized the ideal Christian as objective and rational. She worried very much that she would not glorify God and not be able to be a witness of God if she allowed her emotions to come first.

There was a common understanding from church teaching that many shadows or human weaknesses were related to sin. Participant C, for example, revealed her belief that her

weaknesses were her shadows and sins. She was therefore too sinful and imperfect for total healing. These commonalities stemming from the influence of church teaching affected the participants' perceptions of and relationship with God.

Discernment and Transformation

The change or transformation experiences were varied, but also had features in common. There were commonalities among the participants in the sense that many participants were transformed through a process of discernment, including discerning a mission, a calling, or a change in relationship, attitude or behaviour. There was a very strong sense of change from self-centeredness to God-centeredness among the participants. This change or transformation was a natural result of the movement from connectedness to discernment and then to transformation through unification with God.

Participant A had a strong will to love the people surrounding him wholeheartedly and to use his professional skills to serve the church as deacon. He acknowledged that he had experienced the process of discernment and of listening to God's voice concerning his calling. Participant D discerned the confirmation of God's message to leave her workplace and pursue her calling to serve in the spirituality and growth of people. She received her confirmation through encountering Jesus at her humiliated workplace and discerned the letting go of the past burden so as to pursue her calling.

Transformation and Transcendence

Another commonality in the participants' experiences was the encounter with transcendence and transformation. Participants A and F shared the common phenomenon of a deep and strong sense of transformation and change during these eight weeks. Participant A had strong negative self and shadows from his traumatic childhood. He had the strongest connection with his grandmother's love during his meditation. The warmth and deep love of his grandmother were a sign of God's love in not letting him fall and in loving him dearly. This strong emotional connection with God through his grandmother was transformational. He felt grace and gratitude for the transcendence from pain to love. This motivated his transference of love from his grandmother to his sons. He acknowledged a tremendous change from despair to hope from the first to the last week of the spiritual practice. He received a strong vision of change and a confirmation of his life-calling.

At the same time, Participant F felt God touched her hidden heart and redeemed her past. The discovery of her illness and the grace of God helped her to let go of her past and forgive those who had hurt her. This healing led to gradual changes in different aspects, including slowing down, complaining less and becoming more joyful as she realized God's plan in her life. She acknowledged that this was transcendence, as she was more open to new things and willing to take one more step to loving and letting go of herself. She could then connect with and enjoy being with others. The amazing transformation came with transcendence during meditation and in seeing the beauty of all things. Transformation took place when she was awakened from the past with redemption.

Besides the obvious transformation of Participants A and F, Participant C's transformation experience came from the encountering of different images of beautiful nature and transcending herself to renew and rest in God.

Individual Uniqueness of the Six Participants

Besides the commonalities in the experiences of the participants, individuality and uniqueness was also manifest in the emergent themes of connectedness, discernment and transformation. In connecting with his self and shadows, Participant A experienced a major revelation from a key phrase that emerged. He was meditating when three words came up: "to love others fully". He recognised that these three words were the means of tackling his shadow. He had been disconnected from people and self in the past. He became aware of the need to love himself and be more sensitive to people. He took action immediately by taking the time to greet and care about the cleaning lady and security guard at his residence.

Participant B was unique in his experience connecting with Chinese culture and tradition. However, there was no evidence of discernment or transformation clearly seen in his situation. When connecting with the pressure at work and the expectations of his boss, he started to query his life and direction. B mainly shared his awareness of his own weaknesses, such as procrastination and fear of emotional connection, and his willingness to make changes and nurture his sensitivity. It seemed that his reflection on the past and connectedness with self were limited. One of the key characteristics of B was his unique application of Chinese culture and calligraphy as a meditative practice. This special means led him to an inner journey of exploration.

At the same time, Participant D also experienced a unique phenomenon of spiritual transformation. She also discerned very quickly the need to connect with her calling, even during the first stage of spiritual practice, since she had been trying to discern her vocation for a long time. The frequent and direct messages from her gospel meditations, especially from Mark's gospel, were astonishing and as an experienced meditator even surprised herself.

Different levels of Transformation

Because of their unique experiences, participants engaged with the dynamic process of spiritual transformation at different levels. Participants A and F noted obvious changes in their thinking, seeing and acting, while Participant E reported her transformation was imperceptible. Participant D had a gradual and dynamic process of change through her spiritual discernment of her calling. Different levels of transformation also appeared, from knowing to awareness, as in the discernment of changes that took place between of Participant A's first and fourth interviews. The nature and level of changes happened differently with the different participants. Some might have changes in feelings, some had behavioural changes, while others experienced attitude changes and actions. It seems it was not the form or the way, but the regularity, persistence and commitment in spiritual practice that had critical significance.

Interpretive Discussion of the Phenomena

Looking at the uniquely individual phenomena in connecting, discerning and transformation, it was obvious that the different personal contexts of living in Hong Kong affected participants' various experience. These contexts included religious tradition and culture, family background, work experience and current midlife issues.

Participant A had a very traumatic childhood with a broken family of divorced parents and an irresponsible father. Although he had been playing different roles as a training consultant, a devoted Christian in a Protestant church with regular fellowship and worship, a responsible father of two sons and a husband, he was empty and unfulfilled, with the dilemma of strong feelings of love versus alienation within himself and others, even the most intimate people in his life. That is why he kept a distance from people and maintained his busy lifestyle, just like many other Hong Kong people, so as to avoid touching his wounds or thinking too much. However, when A started the silent spiritual practice, he deeply enjoyed his solitude and sacred moments with God, especially reconnecting with himself and his unredeemed past wounds. This was a spiritual consolation and healing that addressed his inner desire for deep love. The space of solitude and silence in spiritual practice, together with the remembrance of past suffering, allowed his heart to be touched and healed with God's revelation. It was fully explained by the beatitude that blessed are those who are poor in spirit.

At the same time, during self-examination, Participant A's emotions were stirred up strongly, with mixed feelings of love and hatred when connecting with loving and significant people in his life. His strongest emotion in meditation came from his connection with his grandmother's love in his traumatic childhood. With the grace of God's spirit, A discerned the meaning of loving God through his grandmother's love, which released his past burden and renewed his paradigm that he might see his suffering. A's transformation was significant, as he moved from negative despair and suffering at the first stage of the interview, to hope and blessings at the fourth stage. Participant A was very serious and committed to the regular spiritual practice, through which he discerned his choice of being a deacon of his church and received clarity about using his gifts.

From his desire to connect with his hidden self and shadows, he renewed his life by loving others wholeheartedly. This reorientation towards loving others became a transformational force for his next phase in life.

Participant B found the investment banking life stressful, as is typical in Hong Kong, with its long work hours and emphasis on an accumulation of wealth and success. Together with his struggling relationship connecting with people (including his wife), he doubted the meaning of his life. His personal situation caused him to be concerned mainly about his work direction. The connectedness through meditation did allow B to become more aware of his own weaknesses, such as procrastination or insensitivity to people. However, the phenomenon of discernment or transformation was limited compared to other participants. Besides his limited connection with his history, one of the reasons for this might be the lack of continuous regular spiritual practice, or perhaps not following my designed spiritual practice model. B admitted that he did not follow the spiritual practice model or have regular daily self-examination. He liked to use yoga, music or calligraphy instead, but not in a daily regular practice. All of these factors might have led to B's limited experience of discernment and transformation.

As the only Catholic participant, B shared that he had had some experience of spirituality at a spiritual retreat and had listened to some spiritual lectures. It seems that this was predominantly head knowledge for him. One of the unique and prominent characteristics of B was the influence of the Chinese Confucian tradition inherited from his father. B was interested in learning more about life and had been pursuing Confucianism and Buddhism through a local Chinese organization promoting Chinese culture. B therefore practiced his heart meditation through

calligraphy and other means, as he believed the inner heart journey in Chinese culture integrated heaven, earth and people. Many Hong Kong Chinese families have inherited Chinese culture and tradition, including worship of ancestors or the practice of Buddhism or Taoism.

Participant C struggled a lot in her midlife stage connecting with strong negative emotions, self-criticism, and confusion about her identity as a full-time mother and housewife after her twenty-year nursing career. However, she was also the one who connected with God intimately in revealing the reason she had not sought God's healing for her knee pain. She realized the obstacle to connecting with herself and with God was her perception of God and her lack of confidence in seeking God's healing as an imperfect Christian.

During her meditative practice, a number of images led her to reconcile her past and to forgive others. At midlife, there is a lot of history from the past which can be positive, but also negative shadows we are not aware of hindering joy. C did not know why a long-forgotten relationship with an ex-boyfriend came up during meditation, but it had affected her relationship with her husband and her trust in marriage.

The image of a circle of boiling bubbling water symbolized C's inner spiritual movement and yearning to escape from her confusion and suffering. C also connected with many images in meditation, including a blossoming flower signalling her colourful phase of life, a vine and branch relating to her relationship with God, and a drawing on the wall reminding her of returning home to God's love. Finally, C discerned her life direction as the beloved daughter of God, rested, renewed and refreshed and without seeking to do anything. This is precisely the

most important direction for many midlife Christian professionals in Hong Kong who are exhausted, and who have forgotten all the sense of beauty in life. They just need rest and renewal in the love of God.

Participant D had been thinking about her vocational change and the right timing to leave her workplace for a few years. She was under pressure from her husband and from the norm in Hong Kong, where finances and position are so important that quitting a permanent stable job or taking early retirement is deemed totally ridiculous. Her struggle revealed the pressure that many midlife Christian professionals in Hong Kong experience when facing the conflict between personal vocation and work. Her deep inner longing for a real calling in the workplace and her suffering over her sick mother had led her to pursue the study and practice of spirituality. This background laid an important foundation for D to receive a very strong imaginative connection with Jesus through gospel meditation, and Jesus's presence helped her leave her humiliating workplace.

As a deacon serving thirty years in a Baptist church in Hong Kong, Participant E is a Christian role model at her church with a strong faith. This particular church tradition might be an obstacle to her becoming real about her emotional adventurous self, which she realized was her inner desire during meditation. The paradox, she admitted, had led her to suppress herself in order to be a rational Christian role model. In connecting with herself, she interpreted God rationally as a blessing, loving God in her history of wounded love relationships, or time of suffering when her mother died. E obviously had a desire to participate in this research and wanted to seek her midlife direction, but she did not experience strong spiritual discernment. This might be due to

her strong rational mind and suppressed emotions, as well as her satisfaction that her calling is being fulfilled through many years serving and building the church. Her midlife issue seemed to be the pursuit of her calling, but her deep yearning for a loving relationship was still there, as she lacks a fulfilled loving relationship on earth. It was easily replaced by God, according to her interpretation.

Participant F had many roles in her midlife, including chief executive of a media company, a committed Protestant who worshipped regularly at a local church, a mother of two children, and a wife in a tense marriage relationship. F realized fully she was in a confused and negative midlife state as she connected strongly with her negative self-image of fatigue and menopause, an incapacity to connect with people emotionally, a long-term bad relationship with her husband, a life direction lost in busyness and in the fast, rushing city of Hong Kong. Her life had been chaos. She had been praying and seeking God for answers desperately. The invitation to this midlife research with spiritual practice was an answer to her prayer she claimed. She was therefore totally committed to this eight-week practice as it was the right timing for her.

The stillness of silence gave F tremendous peace during the eight-week regular spiritual practice. She was able to stop and dialogue with God and discover her inner tension and her history. It was in that silent space that the compassionate God redeemed her past wounds. Silent meditation and spiritual practice allowed for full attention to the rich message of God in the midst of her suffering at feeling abandoned in childhood and receiving insufficient love from her family. Because F had difficulties slowing down to pray, being alone with God during a pause in her busy life allowed her to connect with her true identity as the loving child of God. That sacred

moment with God, making peace with herself, and reconnecting with her past were all transformative. In particular, the discovery of her ADHD and the grace of God in her life led her to forgive her mother for abandoning her to overseas study at the age of twelve. F experienced discernment with spiritual guidance about having compassion for her husband's brokenness and renewed her determination to rebuild the relationship. The transformation also led F to see her calling as a mother nurturing her two young children with love.

There was no single model of spiritual practice for transformation that could completely explain the complicated transformation of midlife Christian professionals in a dynamic Hong Kong. However, the spiritual practice model in this research did provide an important period of time for busy midlife professionals to pause. It was during this moment of pause that the participants were awakened, found discernment and were transformed in the process of encountering God.

A Short Summary

Out of the rich and dynamic findings, one important phenomenon among the six participants was the yearning for and experience of looking inside themselves. They experienced an interior journey connecting with self, past and God. Through connectedness, the participants found richer meaning in inter-relating, inter-connecting, rediscovering and reconstructing. Connectedness helped the participants interpret a greater holistic picture, knowing their true self, created by God through connecting all things (the dots in life) and discerning all things. At the same time, connectedness required a condition and a desire to seek or to initiate some action as the first step. This condition was the willingness to pause, and be still and silent through the spiritual practice in order to create a space and time to connect.

In summary, the present spiritual practice model provided a special space and time for busy midlife Christian professionals in Hong Kong to pause, taste and connect with all things in life, including self, feelings, people, incidents and nature. For many midlife Christian professionals living in Hong Kong, life moves too quickly and there is a lack of space to see, think and act. During these eight weeks, the connection with positive and negative struggles as well as the reconnection with the past ignited the inner desire for a discovery of the hidden self. Many participants started to realize being out of touch with themselves had led to accumulated self-doubt, a negative self-image and confusion associated with an unredeemed past.

In the process of reconnection, remembering and rediscovering the past, the compassion of God was revealed, and this enabled the participants to form new interpretations of their experiences. These experiences were hidden deep inside the core beings of the participants. When the hidden self was discovered with the stirring of inner movement, the voice of God was discerned in reconciliation with the past. Spiritual practice allowed the inner self to be reconnected, thereby facilitating exploration and discernment of choices and decisions in life. Discernment was indeed a collaborative partnership with God, and came from listening to His familiar voice in an intimate trusting relationship.

Having analysed the commonalities and individual uniqueness of the experience of the participants, the next section explores the deeper meaning of the participants' interior movement through the lens of Lonergan's four levels of consciousness.

Section Two - Interpretive Analysis from Lonergan's Perspective

Lonergan's four levels of consciousness: Experience, Understanding, Judging and Deciding (EUJD), were applied when analysing the interior movement of the participants. There were many reasons for choosing Lonergan's EUJD model for this purpose. Firstly, as mentioned in Chapter one, I experienced the effectiveness of Lonergan's approach when seeking to understand my own interior movement during the five-month Ignatian spirituality foundation programme, and these benefits were shared by other retreatants. Secondly, Lonergan's concept has helped shape the overall design of the research, especially the model of spiritual practice. It was therefore reasonable to interpret the participants' experience from Lonergan's theological perspective. Thirdly, Lonergan's perspective was chosen because the EUJD method is a dynamic operational tool. It is dynamic in the sense that "just as a dance is a pattern of bodily movements, or a melody is a pattern of sounds.it calls forth and assembles the appropriate operations at each stage of the process, just as a growing organism puts forth its own organs and lives their functioning" (Lonergan, 1971, p.13). As stated by Lonergan at the beginning of *Method in Theology* the four levels of consciousness are to be understood as a dynamic process, because "the basic pattern of consciousness and intentional operation is dynamic. It is dynamic materially in as much as it is a pattern of operations" (p.13). In sum, EUJD denotes four levels of consciousness that are dynamically interrelated or evolving. They are not mechanically separated or rigidly divided.

The Participants' Spiritual Journeys from Lonergan's Perspective

Because of the large amount of relevant data that could be used for illustration, and following the precedent set in Chapter four of selecting just three cases for explanation, this section mainly

presents the experiences of just three participants. Their specific experiences are representative examples demonstrating the dynamic and complex interior process of movement. It is also important to mention that the process of interior movement has a dynamic flow that requires the researcher to trace the entire process over the eight-week journey.

Participant A's Experience

When tracing the journey of the participants, the theme of connectedness emerged as the most prominent phenomenon underlying their midlife question. Because they were linking up with their internal wounds and hurts from the first half of their lives, with those people who were important in their lives, and with God, the emotional and spiritual struggle was intense. Using the analytical tool of EUJD, I could see how they were starting to experience and be aware of what had happened in their lives and what these experiences meant to them in the past, and also in the present when they were brought face to face with the feelings associated with the wide range of memories that emerged.

Participant A confessed that:

“In my meditation, I connected with an incident and discovered I was cold and non-Christian. I was assessing a trainer in a class. I assessed and just left with no interaction with anyone or greeting. I felt shameful as a Christian and could not face myself”.

In connecting with his self, he was confronted by the awareness that, despite his faith as a midlife Christian professional, he was always very cold. He wondered whether he was facing a midlife crisis. It is important that this connectedness with his childhood shadows brought him to a very significant process of experiencing how his past had affected his personality. This

experience of awareness of the reason for his cold personality led him to an understanding of the impact of his childhood shadow on his personality and relationships with people.

In the interview, Participant A reacted very quickly and shared his six shadows systematically.

“How to face my shadow? I have revealed my shadows quickly and discovered my six shadows that I needed to face, embrace and overcome. I am not expecting my inner child little A (participant’s name) to grow up. I assume the little baby has been crying. I try to face my shadow. He is seeking love to calm him down”.

Because of his experience in professional training, he reacted very uniquely during his journey. He showed his abilities in systematic thinking from his human resources development and training and professionalism. He could integrate and use his professional skills for a spiritual connection. He was addressing the shadows of the past and starting to deal with this experience of a hidden yearning for love. From the perspective of the EUJD, the “experience” stage of Participant A witnessed his emotional interaction with deep wounds from the past evolving into images of crying babies yearning for motherly love, allowing him to move closer to an understanding that it was he himself who was eager to be loved.

One of the most stirring moments for Participant A was when he reconnected with the love of his grandmother. He was in tears when he shared this experience during the interview, and also during his meditation when recalling this significant person in his life.

“My most important discovery was the moment when I remembered my grandmother. I cried seriously during my meditation connecting with her. When I knew there was someone 100% loving me without condition, this love touched me deeply. Grandmother

did not know how to speak, but she intervened and stopped my mother hitting me. This feeling was so strong and vigorous.....I felt the taste of heaven on earth. I had never reminisced about this love”.

Through this connection, Participant A began to experience again the strong stirring of emotion from the love of his grandmother. This human love made him understand the deep love of God. He understood that he was cold in his daily behaviour and yet the complex movement of interiority was a hidden desire for the kind of love he could no longer taste in the bygone days of his childhood. What was striking was the velocity of the interior movements he experienced, and his becoming aware of and understanding their meaning. He moved very quickly from experiencing (the first two weeks) to the level of understanding. He then transitioned again very quickly to a judgement process, analysing how his memory of grandmother’s love was moving him closer to God. This is what judging is about, moving towards God or moving away from God.

At the same time, Participant A gradually differentiated his negative past shadows from the positive love and joy of God. After choosing God, he started making a decision to transfer this love to his son and his wife. The dynamic EUJD process happened to Participant A in the first four weeks of spiritual practice. With his professional background in training and being accustomed to reflection and analysis, his decision came quickly in an effective, lively and dynamic process of movement.

During the third and fourth weeks, Participant A received discernment through connecting to self, others and God:

“In my prayer, I was deeply touched and three words came up: ‘To love others fully’. I meditated about these words and discerned my personality avoiding close relationships with people and always hiding myself. That night, I realized to love fully means loving fully those people surrounding me and others. God has put all the people surrounding me there to love me. I discovered why I could not find myself. Next day, I immediately paused and greeted the security guard at my residence. I decided to care for and love people I met in daily life”.

In this discernment experience, Participant A gained new insights through understanding and judgment. His experience of understanding the shadow of his lack of love came through recalling his relationships with others in the past. Then he realized the blessings of being loved and judged what to do. His judgment became clear and he decided to love the people surrounding him in everyday life. In his interior movement, the process of EUJD was very dynamic. A sudden message of judgment and decision came together in the message: “to love fully”. At this point, he returned to a deeper understanding of the true meaning of the emotional burden of his past. It was a continuous and dynamic process of searching. He grasped a new dimension to his internal hidden-self yearning for love. In this spiritual practice, once again using Lonergan’s terms, he experienced and understood the love of God by analysing his situation and deciding to extend his love to others.

Later, at the last interview, Participant A gained a clearer view of his interior condition, became convinced, and shared the following:

“My first half of life was full of confusion, despair, sorrow and death. Now, I believe that life does not belong to me. My renewal of life is to let go and allow God to come into my heart. I am eager to turn despair to hope, and darkness to light in my next phase of life”.

He revealed he had his experience of discernment and transformation more or less at the same time, which could be interpreted as having reached the stages of judgement, decision and action. His self-reflective journey was dynamic, illustrating the path he went down to attain new ways of assessing his midlife issues.

A Short Summary

Participant A's midlife difficulties were an accumulation of his childhood experiences, which he fully embraced during the journey. He came from a broken lower middle-class family. He had to work hard to gain recognition in life. Because of his professional background as a trainer in Peter Drucker's management theories, he had very systematic analytical skills which were applied in his own self-examination and analysis. The results of his connectedness to experiences and his understanding levels were very impressive and extensive. Another feature was that he could move on very quickly to the levels of judgement and even decision in the early parts of the journey, with glimpses of discernment and transformation following and/or running parallel.

Participant A was greatly influenced by his childhood experience, with which he dynamically reconnected and which he analysed. His judgment and decision came out quickly too, and this he

soon acted upon. He was brave and committed to this spiritual practice, which helped him to face his midlife issues and shadows of lack of love. His yearning for love was obvious through the stirring of emotions when re-experiencing his grandmother's love. Through understanding and judging this love of God, he made a decision to change and love the people surrounding him actively and fully. This is a decision after judgement to move closer towards God.

As a tool developed from Ignatian teaching, EUJD can also be seen as a means of helping him act out his everyday life spirituality in his busy professional life. "To love fully" was what he discerned to be his calling in terms of living differently than before. He immediately acted out this new transformational direction by talking nicely to the man at the door of his building. He began to change his attitude to his wife. His judgment on the culture of his church also changed from a critical outsider to an engaged Christian servant by contributing his professional training skills to serve the church.

Participant C's Experience

In the second example of Participant C, it is possible to see how EUJD helps in analysing her experience. Even early in the process of connection, Participant C was confronted by her midlife issues:

"In my first week, I was worrying and angry. I was facing myself. I could not sleep due to an active daughter and exhaustion preparing dinner for husband and housework. When the helper could not do it my way, I felt angry and unhappy and could not trust her".

In her moments of silent meditation, images appeared:

“I saw an image of a circle with boiling water bubbling inside the circle and wanted to come out”.

From experiencing midlife confusion and issues as a full-time housewife and mother, Participant C understood that she had a strong desire to escape from her suffering. Her progressive move, almost simultaneous with her experience of connecting to her past, soon touched on the stage of discernment which ran parallel to the judgment level of Lonergan’s consciousness.

At the same time, her meditation on the gospel led her to another image of flowers in blossom. She was excited:

“I was amazed that I saw the blossoming flowers. I can still have blossoming and hope in the second phase of my life”.

The discernment of Participant C was obvious through experiencing and understanding that the images represent her yearning and desire to change. This understanding moved her to analyse, judge and later decide to rest in God at the end of the practice. This was depicted vividly:

“This eight-week practice has led me into walking closely with God as He gave me guidance, teaching, healing, consolation....I found God loving me not because of what I was doing. I gradually became not so desperate to seek an answer, but willing to wait and let go of myself. I realized that I just need rest and renewal in God”.

The connectedness and encounter with God enlightened her discernment and judgement concerning her relationship with God through His love. This understanding of her identity

strengthened her to let go and make the decision to just rest in God. This movement of going towards God is a process of transformation through experiencing, understanding, judgment and decision.

A Short Summary

As a professional nurse with strong sense of achievement, Participant C's midlife issues of career change, her role change as a full-time mother and her spiritual yearning had accumulated for a while. However, it was obvious that her strong Christian faith helped her immensely in this spiritual journey. With her close relationship with God during a committed spiritual practice, she naturally entered into a process of transformation through experiencing, understanding, judging and deciding to let go, rest and renew in God. Her experience of connectedness, discernment and transformation were clearly revealed in her dynamic interior movement.

Participant F's Experience

In the third example, provided by Participant F, Lonergan's EUJD perspective reveals again a complex interior movement in a participant's transformative life process. Participant F was living an extremely busy life tied up with multiple roles. It was clear at the beginning of her journey that she was experiencing deep interior confusion from her emotional disconnection from herself and others. In her sharing, she expressed her strong sense of frustration at her present life and a passionate desire for a new direction:

"I had difficulty following the spiritual practice pattern at the beginning due to my full responsibilities, multiple roles and busy life. The pressure, dissatisfaction with myself and tiredness had suffocated me. I felt desperate in my 20 years' Christian life that I could not

be still to pray. However, I had a strong desire and determination to change through this spiritual practice and believed now was the best season in my life”.

Participant F was not only tied up in her busy life, but she was also experiencing a deep frustration and seeking an answer. At the same time, awareness of the reason for the conflicts with her husband and her changed attitude to caring are major changes for Participant F, who is experiencing a process that can be explained from Lonergan’s perspective.

“My husband and I grew up in different worlds and were brought up very differently. He is locally grown and had no desire to study abroad. I was brought up in elite education with rich resources while he comes from a local education and traditional family. During my silent and solitary moment of meditation, I remembered the love and hatred experience with my husband and strong stirrings of emotion came. I was enlightened by the Holy Spirit that he was divorced and wounded in his first marriage. This realization made me release my anger and start to feel his internal struggle. I then received more compassion and forgiveness”.

When connecting to her husband, Participant F experienced the past with a deeper understanding of her husband’s wounds. She could sit down and be still to discern. With the help of the Holy Spirit, she could analyse and judge the reason for the conflicts and start to be more compassionate with his difficulties. She then made a decision to care more and reconcile the relationship. The process of interior movement through experiencing, understanding and judging and deciding were clearly demonstrated.

Participant F also reflected that she discovered her turning point and realized her important calling as a wife and mother during the encounter with her dark shadows. The deep connection of past suffering and broken relationship led her to see the compassionate love of God accompanying her in darkness. In the hidden shadows, she found her sense of insecurity and deep yearning for love. Due to this touch of love and the Holy Spirit, she realized the misalignment and frustrations of raising children and a poor marriage. This experience of God through connecting with her shadows helped deepen her understanding of herself and her history. The decision to let go of herself and renew life came from an empowering love in union with God. She acknowledged that it was a transformative process through purification and healing.

She acknowledged also that she went through a process of spiritual transformation and gained a much clearer vision of her second half of life. She joyfully noted:

“In the midst of all of my complicated and confused life, I dealt with my shadows. God has given me an answer. I allowed myself a new start. I started to examine my selfishness, bitterness and relationship with my family. I understood that God has been walking with me in these incidents. In silent meditation, my heart was touched and I became more sensitive to many things. I was not so easily disturbed by other things, even the noisy TV, the demanding job, the housework....I started to enjoy bonding and swimming with my children”.

The movement from experience to understanding and to judgment was fast. In experiencing darkness, self-examination helped her understand and realize God's presence in her life challenges. In the process, she began to open her heart and became more sensitive. This

gradually led her to judge what she should not be bothered with and what was important in life. She experienced the changes and became more sensitive to herself and her loved ones. She was more alert and awake. The biggest finding for her was her sensitivity to listening and enjoying slowing down. She became aware of the importance of enjoying the process, and not always focusing on the result.

More positive changes happened in her life:

“Even the world is very confused with work, crisis of husband’s accident, chaos and different responsibilities....., I was not confused and anxious. I was more connected with the children and slowing down my temper. In managing different roles, I was driving my husband, taking care of children, I could feel love and care. I achieved for the first time in my life willingness to take one more step for the loved one. I could also let go and expand my horizon, seeing my children growing up with a different way of life”.

This whole process of change and revelation for Participant F was a clear demonstration of a movement that went from experiencing to a deeper understanding and judgment, and then to a decision to act and change. Participant F had chosen different ways of life to slow down, to enjoy the process and to build a new relationship. This change is a real transformation for her, even while living in crisis mode or in a confused world. From an EUJD perspective, this internal movement helped in connecting her to a deeper discernment of her condition, feelings and emotions as a busy professional. Her decision was her willingness to let go and open herself up to care and love. Through this process of dynamic movement, she was gradually transformed to see new things and find renewal of life. At the last interview, she acknowledged:

“I have changed perspective to see my current job gives me flexibility to use my resources to help others. I discovered my calling was indeed my family. When I was willing to listen, I found what I was called to do at this moment was to nurture the two lovely children in love. I just needed to make myself accessible to connecting with them more and less of myself”.

Their spiritual journeys of the three participants, A, C and F, were rich and filled with intense human emotions, spiritual stirring and movement, which could be studied in much greater detail in the future. Their journeys also provided insight into different dimensions and aspects of how the four levels of consciousness (experience, understanding, judgment and decision) manifested in the three themes of connectedness, discernment and transformation of these participants. Their efforts at connectedness helped them find the roots of their midlife challenges, and they received spiritual resources from God, which moved them on to deeper understanding, judgment and decision, thus manifesting the themes of discernment and transformation in the everyday spirituality to be found in Hong Kong.

A Short Summary

Lonergan’s EUJD, used as part of an interpretative phenomenological analysis, showed the three themes more clearly, not as three separate themes, but an interior movement like a dance or a melody Lonergan referred to. The three themes are dynamically evolving in the process of spiritual journeying. To be more precise, experience and understanding are more closely related to the theme of connectedness, because the participants started to connect to self, others, and God. At the same time, they were reaching a broader and deeper understanding. When they

obtained a broader and deeper understanding of their past and present, they moved to the level of judgment. Hence, understanding and judgment can be considered closely and interactively linked. This interactive level of consciousness is the appropriate tool for analysing the theme of discernment. The interior movements of the participants as represented by the theme of transformation can be analysed in terms of judgment and decision together. When the participants began to reflect on new and different perspectives produced at this level of understanding, they were able to use these perspectives to differentiate between and judge the options for understanding. They finally arrived at the level of decision. Therefore, judgment and decision can be put together in analysing transformation.

From the insights revealed through the EUJD model, the different levels of consciousness emerging from themes of connectedness, discernment and transformation, were not rigid divisions of stages. It is obvious that the process of interior movement is not a linear one, but one with four levels of consciousness, and EUJD can move and shift back and forth. The experience may be better understood and presented as a whole, instead of clearly divided into stages of the evolution of the consciousness of experience.

Section Three – Answering the Research Question

After reviewing the commonalities among the six participants as well as their individual uniqueness in the first section, and using Lonergan's EUJD perspective to analyse the interior movement of the participants in the second, this section answers the research question about midlife transformation of Christian professionals in Hong Kong through an interpretive discussion of the empirical findings.

Interpretive Discussion in Relation to Midlife

The theme of connectedness drew together the midlife experience of the participants in relating to their selves, shadows, significant others, God, and the cultural and religious environment of the city. In this interior and spiritual process of self-reflection, the participants looked back on a wide range of matters that had occurred in the first half of their lives using vivid descriptions. Connectedness was particularly important for the participants in revealing the deeply-entrenched feelings buried in the bottom of their hearts and the dark memories of their past. The theme of connectedness represented vividly how their midlife experiences were in fact conditioned by these dark shadows of the past.

Connecting the First Half of Life with Past Shadows

The midlife context of each of the six participants was different due to their different professional status, and social and family background. In spite of this, as long as they were willing to pause and be silent, and to connect with self and the first half of life, deeper midlife issues started to emerge in every one of them. In the first four weeks of spiritual practice, where the focus is to examine oneself and critical people and incidents from the past, some experienced very dramatic reactions and responses to their inner stirrings from the hidden shadows. Connectedness was a broad and inclusive concept comprised of different aspects of connection, especially with the challenges of midlife in their careers and personal lives. Generally speaking, a relatively large amount of data was generated in the first four weeks of the practice. Another observation was that participants' personal backgrounds, and their experiences from childhood and relationships, were all factors that determined the emergence of midlife issues.

Connecting with Traumatic Childhoods and Family Relationships

The midlife issues related closely to childhood experiences and family relationships. My analysis started with participant A, who had a traumatic childhood and suffered from growing up in a broken family. Because of this background, Participant A grew up to be a lonely and cold person who avoids close personal and working relationships. Yet by examining his self, he became fully aware of his deep yearning for love. His shadows came from his negative childhood and irresponsible father. His midlife context was to find his true self and overcome the influence of his past negative experience. He was seeking himself as well as God. The connectedness with his grandmother and her unconditional love had touched him with a strong stirring of emotion. By reconnecting with his past, he came to realize that his midlife struggle was a result of a lack of love and his deep desire for love. In meditation, the words of discernment, “to love fully” appeared which he realized was the solution to his shadow. In this process of connecting with his unredeemed history, he gained a new understanding of the meaning of love from God.

The midlife struggle of Participant F connected closely with a number of things, in particular her past shadows to do with lack of parental love, causing her emotional disconnection with people, and lack of empathy. Together with her multiple roles as chief executive, mother of two slow-learning children and her physical exhaustion from menopause, she took refuge in her work that she might avoid being a caring mother and taking up the role of a lovely wife that she did not know how to play. Her strong yearning for life direction explained her commitment to this research. She believed her prayers for a midlife solution would be answered by participating in

this research. Hence, her midlife quest and this spiritual journey were grounded in hope and faith in transformation.

Connecting with Role Change and Work Environment

Participant C's midlife issues of identity confusion came from a change of role in both her professional and family lives. She was a nurse, but with the birth of a child, had to change from being a successful, professional nurse to a fulltime housewife and mother of a young child. She was disconnected from herself and her family relationships. During her meditation, she connected with the negative emotions of anger, anxiety and confusion when she faced her midlife issue of transitioning to a new role. Through this eight-week spiritual journey, she re-examined her Christian faith and her relationship with God.

For her part, Participant D had an unsatisfying working environment and a difficult boss. She had been yearning for direction in her calling, as well as when she should leave her humiliating workplace of many years. She had been searching through her study of spirituality and spiritual practice. This is why Participant D received very strong discernment and connection, mainly related to her vocation. She therefore had a clear midlife question in mind through this eight-week spiritual practice, concerning the direction of her vocation and the best time to leave her current workplace. Due to her rich experience of spiritual practice and journaling, her reflection on her past resulted in a strong connectedness with God. Her discernment process related mainly to her profession and calling. She shared a lot of spiritual promptings from gospel meditations on Jesus, especially her vivid experience of connecting with Jesus at her humiliating workplace.

An opposite situation was found in the experience of Participant E, who had a stable working environment as a public servant in Hong Kong with a secure job and routine. Like her job and life, she was quiet and without much emotional stirring. She did not have much anxiety or worry about midlife issues. Participant E's yearning for a midlife quest was not very strong. As a single person without her own family, she has no financial worries, a stable job, and a long history of committed service as leader in a local church. She believed her mission had been fulfilled after helping to build the church for thirty years. When connecting to her past, her only challenge was some past failures in love relationships. She might have some interest in finding out more about the direction of the next phase of life, but there were not many obvious midlife challenges for her, even when she took a closer look at her past.

Connecting with the Intercultural Environment of Hong Kong

A special phenomenon was found in the experience of Participant B when pursuing his life direction under the theme of connectedness and discernment. When connecting to his self, he found much interest and inspiration in the study of Confucianism, which created a growing concern that he would have to choose between a money-making investment banking career and a life-long aspiration to promote the legacy of Chinese culture. He reflected on his midlife direction, as it related mainly to the legacy of Chinese culture. He looked back and connected with his father and his influence in this matter. As challenged by the pressure at work, his midlife struggle was basically a conflict between his banking career and his life goal to advocate Chinese culture.

From Past Shadows to Discernment and Transformation

Participants A and F had to deal with their shadows with much greater effort, comparatively speaking. Before joining this spiritual practice, Participant F had not known much about the impact of her unresolved past on her midlife issues. The connection with her shadows came from her committed meditation and breathing practice. She was able to face her shadows early in the practice by investigating her disconnection of emotion, difficulty in slowing down, and conflicts in relationships, together with her physical fatigue from menopause and exhaustion from her multiple roles.

At the same time, during meditation, Participants C and F both connected with their hurtful experience of being abandoned by their ex-boyfriends. They both affirmed and realized the feeling of being undeserving had an impact on their negative self-image and marriage relationships. However, the love of God enabled them to see the blessing of children and husband. The emergence of these wounds enabled them to cleanse and purify the past and rebuild the image of self and relationship with husband. Connecting with God helped them gain new insights and discernment to determine to let go and transform.

At the same time, both Participants C and F found out that the turning point of their journeys in this spiritual practice was their time of solitude with God in their busy schedule, and gaining a new paradigm to examine their multiple roles as mother and wife, after facing their hidden self and connecting with their shadows. The deep connection with past hurts and relationships led them to see the love of God. This was discernment for them. They also realized their sense of insecurity and yearning for love.

For Participant F, she also realized and understood the misalignment with her husband in raising their children and her unhappy marriage. This deep connection with her shadows revealed and deepened her understanding of her role and allowed her to let go, forgive and care. She admitted that it was a healing and transforming process. She noticed her discernment and recognized the feeling of transformation with confidence. The three emergent themes were fully manifested in her practice, which turned out to be vivid and dynamic.

A Short Summary

Among the three emergent themes in relation to midlife, connectedness dominated the discussion to a certain extent, revealing how the midlife issues of the participants were related to complex issues buried in the dark corners of their hidden-selves. All except Participant E managed to find insights and discernment from among the different kinds of implications of the hidden burdens of their first half of life. Some of the midlife difficulties came from a change in role from full-time professional to a full-time homemaker, and some due to negative working environment. With the successful management of the dark shadows of the past in connectedness, the participants could begin to enjoy new insights of discernment and ultimate feelings of transformation.

Interpretive Discussion in Relation to Professional Life

In tracing the spiritual experiences of the six participants through the themes of connectedness, discernment and transformation, professional life as Christian played an important role, including how their work lined up with their families and their Christian faith. They assessed their first half of life in career development and the present state of their work in light of their

connection with God. Because of the intercultural and inter-religious context of Hong Kong, their views may also have been influenced by Chinese cultural values emphasising family bonds. Furthermore, because of the busy schedules and fast-moving pace of working habits in Hong Kong, they found their own personal ways of developing their relationships with God and practicing what Philip Sheldrake describes as “everyday spirituality” (Sheldrake, 2013). Their experiences during their process of connecting their selves with their working experiences, and through such connection attaining discernment and transformation, demonstrated how in a modern and commercialized city like Hong Kong, spirituality and professional habits can be linked.

One of the characteristics of the discovered phenomena was that the professional background of many participants allowed them to connect, understand and discern quickly when they paused and meditated. Participant A was very quick to organize and articulate his six shadows in a systematic way because of his training and professional background. He reacted very quickly when discovering his shadows, acknowledging them and overcoming them. He shared that he did not expect his inner child to grow up but would embrace and calm him. This experiencing and understanding through connectedness showed the ability of Participant A to apply his skills as a professional trainer to spiritual connection and systematic thinking. His strong ability to absorb new ideas also facilitated the ways he drilled into the dark and shadowy experience of his past and discovered his hidden yearning for love. The vivid feature of connectedness was shown in the images or words of participants in connecting with their stirring emotions. Participant A was very sensitive and quick to discern when connected with nature or during his alone time. His systematic organization of his shadows showed his strong analytical, organization and

articulation skills. This ability came from his professional background as trainer with good organization and communication skills. Spirituality was linked to his daily professional work. He began to gain new insights into how his everyday professional practice could be viewed from the spiritual perspective of relying on his close relationship with God.

Similarly, Participants D and F were employed in professions as knowledge workers. They were also quick to connect and discern. At the same time, they were very used to learning and putting things in a systematic way and articulating clearly. Participant D was a training and education officer. She also put things systematically, such as connecting with her calling. She articulated her calling well when connecting with God directly. Participant F was an efficient multi-tasking senior executive. As a professional, she described herself as workaholic used to the mode of non-stop doing, taking children to school, arranging family and housework, the children's daily lives and learning logistics, her own work schedules, Sunday church and other activities. She was yearning for more time as she felt torn and exhausted. With new insights and discernment, she wanted to continue this practice of spirituality in her everyday life.

Participant C's professional development and experience were the root causes of her midlife challenges. She was a successful head nurse leading a team with recognized achievements. She was experienced at serving terminal patients and youth, which gave her good training in understanding human issues. Yet this professional background did not help her face a change of role with the birth of her baby and the responsibility of becoming a full-time housewife. She admitted suffering depression, but could not find ways to deal with it. She received considerable

support from her church community, yet she did not have the opportunity to really dig deeper into the roots of her midlife challenges until this spiritual practice.

Christian Faith and Profession

When looking at their professions, the Christian professionals always connected with their Christian values. It was not just a job they were doing. In a busy life in Hong Kong, most professionals will evaluate their results to measure their success at their job. This group of Christian professional participants were seeking a Christian perspective with which to see their profession and find their calling.

The experience of Participant A showed how he applied a Christian perspective to critically reviewing his professional experience and labelling his cold attitude towards colleagues as non-Christian behaviour at the workplace. He was not fully aware of his own problem until he started the eight-week spiritual practice and this self-critique came out early in the practice. At the same time, he had warm memories of his former Christian boss, whom he regarded as a Christian professional role model with strong faith. Lastly, in the process of seeking his midlife direction as a Christian professional, Participant A gained discernment of the spiritual value of a profession. This discernment led him to a transformation with a new vision of his service and profession. The process was full of detailed and lively descriptions of his journey in the spiritual practice. When interpreting their professional jobs, the participants used Christian values as criteria. During the eight weeks of practice, Participant A changed his way of assessing his own career from a secular and professional perspective to the value he had found in new connectedness with God.

Participant D finally decided to leave her existing workplace and take up a new calling. Confirmation of her career change came from her discernment in the spiritual practice journey. When Participant D meditated on Jesus' intervention in releasing her from her workplace, she was relieved of the heavy burden of anger and hate. She could then forgive her boss for hurting her and could reinterpret her past suffering as a blessing. She was using a Christian paradigm to reinterpret her work and reconcile her unresolved relationship from the past. Participant F also found spiritual practice helped reveal her true self, calling and family relationship. Her Christian faith affected the release of the past hurt at work.

Besides adopting a new perspective for assessing their current working situations and careers as a whole, participants also had a chance to review their concept of Christianity when immersed in deep connection with God. In the process of the spiritual practice, Participant C revealed her relationship with God. She reflected on her fear of praying for healing of her chronic pain, due to lack of confidence in God, as well as her perception of God and herself. Because she believed she was undeserving and imperfect, she felt God would not heal her. However, the experience of her physical healing connected her with her Christian faith and she discerned her relationship with God. This awakening caused her to understand the need for spiritual healing. This spiritual process facilitated Participant C in re-examining her Christian faith and re-interpreting her relationship with God.

The perceptions of Christianity and the faith of Participants C and E were influenced by church teaching and the tradition of their denominations. Participant C's concept of spiritual healing was shaped by her pastor. Participant E believed she could forgive significant others for hurting her

once they were baptized. That was why she forgave her father and sister when they became Christians as they had been saved and forgiven by God. She seldom shared her feelings or emotions from the past and claimed that external things do not affect her inner joy with God. Although she admitted she faced a dilemma sometimes, she suppressed her inner emotions in order to be a rational Christian leader. When asked to explain, she said that it was right not to allow her emotions freedom as she needed to glorify God and not fail in the Christian role. She shared her dilemma about suppressing her emotions in order to be a rational Christian leader and role model, and said she believed she had to glorify God even if it meant giving up her joy.

A Short Summary

In sum, the professional experience and skills of these Christian professionals influenced how they underwent the process of spiritual practice over the eight weeks. It was also clear that the Christian roots of these professionals were diverse and shaped their perceptions of Christianity and how they behaved as Christian professionals. They recognized a strong linkage between profession and faith as Christian professionals. They could change their paradigm of understanding and interpreting challenges and problems with their work and life from a purely secular and professional perspective to a spiritual one, based on a closer connection with God.

Interpretative Discussion in Relation to Hong Kong

Intercultural and Interfaith Environment of Hong Kong

The fact that Buddhist mindfulness was adopted by all the Christian professionals, as recommended, at the beginning of the spiritual practice reflects one fundamental feature about the intercultural and interfaith environment of Hong Kong. Hong Kong has a long cultural

tradition of Confucianism, Daoism and Buddhism integrated with Chinese folk culture and religions. Christianity as an imported religion, together with Euro-American culture, are also widely accepted and respected. Interfaith marriages are also common. All the participants were Christians and they had no problems in starting their practices with Buddhist mindfulness. Participant F quite enjoyed it and Participant A found it useful, especially when he extended this practice to enjoying his solitude on an island for silent meditation. Participant B sometimes used Yoga to supplement Buddhist mindful breathing.

In addition, under the theme of connectedness, a fairly large proportion of the experiences of the participants in connecting with their selves, shadows and significant others were directly related to their families in childhood. This phenomenon reveals the Chinese family ties that are tightly knitted in family structures and relationships in the society of Hong Kong. Four out of six participants came from broken homes, with either an abusive father or one who died early. Participant A was particularly attached to his grandmother who protected him when he was young. Participant B was influenced by his father's interest in promoting classical Chinese culture.

To go deeper into Chinese culture, the experience of Participant B showed how a busy banker might practice silence and meditation through a mixed means of Chinese cultural and oriental practices, such as calligraphy, yoga and classical music. Participant B also used these mixed meditative practices, which are popular in Hong Kong. The inter-cultural environment of Hong Kong revealed the common practices of east and west. Even though Participant B stood out as

the only person manifesting this phenomenon, by extending the implications more broadly, the social and cultural context of Hong Kong could be properly appreciated.

It was difficult for him to calm down and practice in his fast-paced cosmopolitan life. However, mindful breathing with meditation in calligraphy helped him to connect self, body and mind. Chinese culture played an important role in his interpretation of life experience and the direction of his calling. In particular, Chinese practice enabled him to connect with his original heart and resist external demands. This concept of an original heart is related to Buddhism.

Everyday Spirituality in Hong Kong

Even in fast-paced Hong Kong, the participants could practice solitude, and they found sacredness in the midst of crowdedness and busyness. The spiritual practice model could be applied in an easy, simple, practical way anywhere and anytime, revealing its practical effectiveness. Everyday spirituality can be nurtured to produce a positive outcome through active practice of this model.

One of the key features of the spirituality of these midlife Christian professionals was that it was an everyday spirituality in busy contemporary Hong Kong. As a results-oriented and multi-tasking professional and mother, Participant F created her sacred space in her daily life by walking through the park to the subway station, having her time of solitude with God in her car after work, or by listening to meditative music in the car. This phenomenon of everyday spirituality in Hong Kong was also shared by participant D as she enjoyed her gospel meditation and journaling in a crowded and noisy restaurant while having her breakfast. These phenomena

reveal that significant everyday spirituality practice can take place anywhere or anytime, without being disturbed by noise, and busyness, even in a cosmopolitan world like Hong Kong. Thus Participant E spoke passionately about her faith in God, saying that she would “find God and find life in life”. It was out of their commitment to faith that these six participants could, in different degrees, demonstrate this inclination to spiritual practice in everyday life in the busy environment of Hong Kong.

A Short Summary

In reviewing how the three themes help in understanding the socio-cultural context of Hong Kong as a highly modernized and internationalized city with roots in strong Chinese traditional culture and values, the research successfully adopted Buddhist mindfulness by asking these Christian participants to start their daily Christian practice with a Buddhist act. The result was rewarding, with all the participants implementing the Buddhist practice of silence, breathing and meditation. Moreover, the entrenched social and familial values and relationships played a significant role in conditioning and shaping how they connected with their past and their relatives, especially in making an effort to manage those dark shadows from their family histories through new insights and by taking determined action to transcend past wounds. Lastly, Chinese classical cultural values are still respected in the city and it certainly was not an alienated or rare case among Chinese professionals in Hong Kong to have these kinds of intellectual and cultural bonds.

The above analysis discussed how the three themes helped provide a deeper understanding of way the six midlife Christian professionals underwent their spiritual experience during the eight

weeks of practice. The midlife issues were particularly vividly revealed through the theme of connectedness. As Christian professionals, the participants showed different ways or styles of working and living in bringing their professions together with their faith. Then the intercultural and interfaith context of Hong Kong afforded a bird's-eye view of how these participants lived in terms of time and space.

Summary

By tracing the spiritual journey of the participants, as reflected in connectedness, discernment and transformation, this chapter has presented a fair amount of analytical information and rich interpretation and analysis of the empirical findings. Through the first level of analysis of commonalities and individual unique phenomena in section one; the use of Lonergan's EUJD to analyse the detailed dynamic and complex process of spiritual movement in section two; and my interpretive discussion of findings in section three, the research question about midlife transformation of Christian professionals in Hong Kong was answered.

An important insight about the interior spiritual journey of the participants was revealed through these comprehensive interpretive discussions of the various dimensions of the findings. These interior spiritual journeys of connecting with their past histories and discerning the deeper meaning of God in them that were shared by the participants were filled with intense human emotions, spiritual stirrings and movements. The next chapter explores this important interior spiritual journey through a dialogue between the themes and the theoretical perspectives.

Chapter 6: Spiritual Journey of Interiority: Emergent Themes/Theoretical Perspectives

Introduction

The emerging themes of connectedness, discernment and transformation represent the central features of the journeys of interiority of the participants, a small sample shedding light on the previously unexplored phenomena of midlife transformation of Christian professionals in Hong Kong. Even though the sample is small, this pioneering project has something to offer in terms of revealing how the participants felt about their journey.

This chapter focuses on the discovery of a journey of interiority through dialogue between the emerging themes of connectedness, discernment and transformation and the theoretical perspectives of the Halftime model, Ignatian spirituality and Buddhist mindfulness, the three conceptual models adopted in developing the conceptual framework and design of the spiritual practice. It is important to point out at the start that the whole discussion needs to be placed in the contemporary context of Hong Kong, a highly commercialized city with a strong intercultural and interfaith environment. The life of midlife Christian professionals has to be assessed against a busy and fast-moving working pattern and the burden of multiple roles, juggling individual, family, social and professional expectations and commitments. It is therefore important to use specific examples from the participants' lived experiences to support and illustrate these discussions.

The theoretical perspectives I adopted to construct the conceptual framework of the research started with Buford's Halftime model, which is assessed here through the experience of the participants and the three themes in order to produce insight about the journey of interiority. The dialogue between the themes and Buford's Halftime perspective affords a deeper understanding of the challenges Christian professionals face at the midlife moment of time. Buford's Halftime movement inspired me to take up my own search for an alternative model of spiritual practice aimed at experiencing interiority. The findings of the present research are useful in assessing the significance of this choice for addressing halftime issues.

In relation to my evolving model, the mindfulness practice of Thich Nhat Hanh opened a doorway to connect with an interior heart journey. This journey continued with Sheldrake's active-practical and everyday life spirituality, which facilitates connectedness and discernment in ordinary daily life in the context of the fast-paced cosmopolitan city of Hong Kong. Then, through connection with self and the past, the interior stirring of emotion and discernment are understood in a deeper way in light of the dynamic levels of consciousness taught by Aschenbrenner, Lonergan and Gallagher.

Dialogue with Buford's Halftime Concept

Buford's Halftime model is practiced by midlife Christian professionals in the United States, Australia, Singapore and Hong Kong. It raises the issue of searching for new meaning in the second half of life. However, Buford's model is directed more toward management training and coaching. The phenomena of connectedness, discernment and transformation recorded in this

research represent a different kind of experience from those described in Buford's two books on halftime. His books are full of stories of how midlife Christian professionals in the United States have used the process to review their core values, capacities and the contexts in which they are placed, in order to decide on significant work for their second half of life. This is the 3C model Buford promotes. Buford also adopts the concept of the "sigmoid curve" from Charles Handy's *Age of Paradox* (1995), which guides midlife people to start another curve before they approach midlife, a new curve of moving downward a little in preparation for a new upward movement toward the goal of "significance". This approach is typical of an executive management training model. It is certainly very practical and easily appreciated by business executives and professionals, stimulating them to reflect on some of the fundamental issues of life.

It is also true that Buford accepts the need for midlife Christian professionals to leave their busy work schedules and find some quiet moments to reflect on what kind of halftime life to lead. He recommends setting aside some time for introspection almost every weekend. A successful halftime needs structure, including time to pray, read the scriptures and think (Bufford, 1994, p.68). Yet in Buford's book on Halftime and my experience of the Halftime summit, I found no emphasis on interiority or the search for the core inner being.

The Halftime model advocates that midlife Christian professionals review the experiences of the first half of life and take stock of the core beliefs, capabilities and context, in order to utilize them and plan for the future. However, the finding of this research record a much more complex stock-taking including feelings, emotions, confusion and dilemmas from participants' first half

of life. In the first two weeks Participant A was already submerged in a flood of mixed and strong emotions when connecting with his past. He shared:

“I had a lot of dilemmas in life. I did not want to see my mother who had hurt me deeply and for a long time. But as a Christian, I have to love her. I have changed to believe in God and not in human weaknesses. God can make anything possible. It is a clear message for discernment. God has asked me to forgive”.

In her first week of connectedness, Participant C understood the work of the Holy Spirit in realizing how her past experiences related to her midlife issues:

“In the first week of spiritual practice, I was worrying and connecting with my darkness. I wondered why I was so worried and angry. I realized I was facing myself, my change as full-time mother, my yearning to know who I am and my past life....This feeling came from the special work of Holy Spirit which I had not experienced before”.

The contrast could continue with Participant D, who was able to connect to her own shadows and transcend them with faith and meditative prayer:

“My shadows are my anger, biased judgement, emotions and lack of self-control. The unfair boss, humiliating environment and demotion at work. It had been a long heavy burden for long time.....All these were past already. Whenever I wrote my journal, I needed to say goodbye to these past burdens in life. ...In meditation, God was working on me and healing me in my vocation”.

To complete the demonstration of how varied and complex were the experiences of the six participants, the phenomena manifest by Participant F deserve a closer look:

“I felt my shadows. One night, it was raining and I got very weak and tired after work when driving home....My energy level and spirits were low and I asked how long I have to live this kind of life. Sometimes, I got grey message and negative about life....Another shadow was about my relationship issue and I was lost in life. My impulsiveness, self-centeredness and selfishness were my real shadow”.

The diverse reflections of the participants reveal the complexity of their spiritual experiences, which clearly demonstrates that they were doing a very different kind of stock-taking of their first half of life; they were not counting external achievements, but internal and deep levels of feelings and emotions. Revealed through the themes of connectedness, discernment and transformation during the spiritual journeys of the participants, the findings of the research provide a detailed record by the participants about how they felt or thought about what they had experienced. Based on the findings and the three emergent themes, IPA analysis identified how they experienced their internal struggles when they had a chance to be silent, remain in a state of solitude, and let their minds move into the interior, to pause and take stock of the first half of life.

The phenomena of connectedness, especially with their past and with those close to their hearts, became a focal point where they expressed a lot of yearning, feelings and emotions hidden inside their hearts and waiting to be explored, opened up, and released to the surface. Connectedness as the first emergent theme became the gateway for me as an observer and recorder to accompany them while they shared their experiences of the eight weeks of practice. This was a search for

deeper meaning from the complex experiences of the first half of their lives, and through this search they had a chance to reach some kind of discernment and transformation to help them think out new directions for the second half of life.

From the findings of the three themes, it became clear that the focus is on the important encounter with God through the inner stirring of emotion that comes from connecting with the hidden self, and significant people and critical incidents from the past. The spiritual practice model I designed helped the participants contemplate their halftime issues from a different perspective. The halftime reflection became an important moment in life to silently pause and take stock of their interior experience so as to discern God's meaning therein. The process of remembering, recalling and tasting the rich content of life is complex and dynamic.

A Spiritual Experience of Discernment and Transformation

In contrast to Buford's approach of seeking insights into the second half of life through self-analysis using the 3C model, the participants underwent a short eight weeks of simple spiritual practice. The intimate relationship with God developed through the eight weeks' spiritual practice of connecting with the past, and discerning the true-self led to an authentic midlife transformation. It was a dynamic spiritual experience for each individual participant in their own context. The discernment of deep meaning and calling addressed not only the halftime questions of who the midlife Christian professionals were, where they belonged, and what they believed, but also led to positive changes and actions in their everyday lives.

Participant A provided a straightforward reflection, summing up his eight-week experience:

“In reflecting on the last eight weeks, this journey provided a map for reviewing my first half of life connecting to shadows of confusion, despair about family, a death experience. Now, I believe that life does not belong to me. Renewal of life is letting go to God”.

A journey of interiority did not require Participant A to go through a rational self-assessment of his capacity and working context. Through connectedness, he believed he had obtained new insights into the process of discernment into his future life.

The themes of connectedness, discernment and transformation emerging from this research demonstrate that in the case of my participants, the meaning of the second phase of life comes from a spiritual dimension in the journey of interiority. This journey does not emphasize “action” or “doing”, which the halftime model promotes. The path towards the journey of spiritual transformation goes to the interior and deeper into the heart than the area of success and action. The midlife issues interpreted by the participants emerged from their heart journeys of connecting with their emotions in remembering the past, through which the discerning of spirits led them to dynamic changes. This transformation resulted from finding God in all things. The question about midlife was answered through a gradual interior journey of connecting with self and shadows, discerning God’s message, and understanding the meaning of all their experiences in order to transform their ways of seeing, acting and living.

Participant E made a special point about the spiritual practice and her inner joy, which came not from acting or doing, but from constant prayer to be connected to God. Her reflection was direct:

“Why were my shadows not affecting me? It was because of my spiritual practice and relationship with God. He made me in a constant state of joy consistently. I felt inner joy and this is the result of spiritual practice. Therefore, I am not affected by externals. I have sunshine inside me and this is provided by God”.

Her reflection was clear: it was “an inner joy” resulting from spiritual practice and “the sunshine inside” was provided by God. The search for answers to the second half of life for the six participants came not from Buford’s model of “doing” and rational self-analysis. The journey was interior. Similarly, Participant F recorded her last line in the interview at the end of the eighth week:

“I made important progress in life from doing to being. It is a turning point of spiritual growth by passing through the wall”.

The anxiety of most, if not all of the participants, further demonstrated the urgency of the midlife challenges Christian professionals confront. The search for direction for the second half of life for these participants was a journey of interiority, moving from doing to being. This was a common feature in the experiences of this group of midlife Christian professionals in Hong Kong, who were taking an alternative path to Buford’s Halftime model.

Mindful Breathing as a Doorway to the Heart Journey

The influence of this simple practice of mindful breathing was obvious, especially in the theme of connectedness, when it guided the participants to experience different kinds of interior movements and stirrings that caused them to look at their selves, their past, others and God. In Thich Nhat Hanh’s teaching, mindful breathing is designed for use in daily practice before self-

examination, and serves as a doorway to spiritual awareness. He emphasizes living in the present: instead of chasing after the illusion of impermanence, what is permanent is the present moment. Thich names this mindful practice “the Sun of Awareness” (Thich, 2008, pp. 36-38).

What were the participants aware of spiritually and what was present in every moment of their experience? Through the theme of connectedness, deep regular mindful breathing became a powerful tool leading participants to a state of stillness and silence in their hearts. It was a doorway into their inner hearts. Just as Thich Nhat Hanh describes it, many participants mentioned their feeling of ease and peace when connecting with their quietened-down minds and bodies (Thich, 2008, p.24). By experiencing the spiritual journey through mindful breathing, participants started to relax and rest by connecting with a silent heart.

In their silent mindful breathing, the participants also shared their mindfulness of self and relationship with others. For example, Participant A recorded his experience of silent mindful breathing in very simple way:

“Every day after mindful breathing, I looked back at the day. It helped with reflecting my feelings in interacting with people and whether happy or regretful.....especially listening to God. This process was very special.....I felt mindful breathing helped me to stop thinking and give my full attention. The strongest feeling of thanksgiving appeared as I could breathe and experience life. Thanksgiving is a real feeling and experience. Every time I finished mindful breathing, I was awake and alive”.

Mindful breathing helped him reflect on his feelings, especially towards people and about listening to God. He remembered slowing down from his busy life and greeting the security guard at his residence. He became more aware, more sensitive to himself and others. This is connectedness revealed in mindfulness.

Participant B also shared that he became more mindful of his insensitivity to people and pattern of procrastination, as he shared that he could be more sensitive to his surroundings, especially the needs of his colleagues at his workplace. He also started to face his unhappy relationship with his wife and not delay dealing with the problem. Participant F admitted she found her sacred space in mindfulness practice, which facilitated her calmness in crisis. Crises in her family, like the unexpected accident of her husband and the high fever of her daughter came suddenly, but she shared she could handle these with calmness, and knew this was the result of her mindful practice.

According to the tenets of Buddhism, we have to let go of all burdens, including our past shadows and gradually become detached from personal fixations and attachments. Buddhism holds that suffering is caused by grasping or holding tightly to all attachments, by our yearning for impermanence. Through silent meditation and mindfulness, the participants became detached and let go of worries and anxieties. In silent meditation, mindfulness connected the participants with the present moment and allowed them to let go.

The Ignatian Perspectives of Sheldrake, Aschenbrenner, Lonergan and Gallagher

Of the three theoretical perspectives underlying the conceptual framework for the research, the Ignatian spirituality developed by the four Ignatian theologians, Sheldrake, Aschenbrenner, Lonergan and Gallagher, played an important role. The teachings of these four scholars of Ignatian spirituality were chosen because together they helped lay down the fundamental values of a spiritual practice for a journey of interiority through direct interaction with daily life.

The Catholic tradition of apophatic meditation and prayer emphasizes the way of negation, that is, a way of emptying oneself of all thoughts, images and feelings. Opposite to this is the kataphatic or positive approach, which embraces experiences, images, symbols and ideas from the basic belief that through these one can find God. Ignatian spirituality belongs to the latter category. Since the evolving model designed for the research was aimed at discovering more about the spiritual experiences of this group of midlife Christian professionals in Hong Kong, the kataphatic tradition of Ignatian spirituality was more suitable. Moreover, in the rich Ignatian teaching, the examen of consciousness and the discernment of spirits are essential practices that provided a range of interpretations for understanding the experiences of the participants. Of the four theologians, Sheldrake's concept of everyday life and urban spirituality with its accompanying regular active practice was relevant for addressing the professional lives of these participants living in the highly commercialized and modern city of Hong Kong. Aschenbrenner's concept of the examen of consciousness is suitable for facilitating understanding of the interior movements of the participants. With his contribution to method in theology, Lonergan provides an important analytical tool in the four levels of consciousness, which can be used to supplement Aschenbrenner's broad and general prescription for the examen

of consciousness. Following in the footsteps of Aschenbrenner, his mentee Gallagher presents a popular concept for appreciating the interior movements of Lonergan's EUJD. His threefold paradigm of awareness, understanding and action provide a supplementary tool for interpreting these movements across the four levels of consciousness.

A Dynamic Process of Interior Movement

Sheldrake's Everyday Life Active-Practical Spirituality

With their busy schedules in the fast-moving pace of life in Hong Kong, people's spirituality has to be cultivated, nurtured and sustained through continuous regular daily practice. The present research was aimed at finding out how the six participants went through their eight-week spiritual practice, and the findings reflect the rich meaning of Sheldrake's urban and everyday life spirituality. The goal of this spiritual journey of interiority is to find God in everyday life. Participant A took a break and went to an outlying island of Hong Kong to relax and contemplate, as one of his favourite habits is to put aside his heavy work of the day:

"Every day mindful breathing, looking back, reflecting, feeling....listening to God. This process was very special. Being alone praying on an island connected my internal flow of emotions. The spirit of life came with thanks and letting go. Deep gratitude for the love of God that I experienced on an island continued in my everyday life and became a habit".

He could integrate the spiritual practice into his regular pattern of his life, without pressure or any special effort to break away from his routine habits of daily life. This was what Sheldrake calls the spirituality of everyday life.

Moreover, connecting with and discerning God is an experience of everyday life. Different participants experience God in different ways in everyday life, without needing to fix the format, place or time. Sheldrake describes four types of spirituality, one of which is “active-practical”. According to Sheldrake, “active-practical” spirituality is a process of continuous regular practice with active internal prayer, which sees everyday life as “the principal context for the spiritual path and quest for authenticity” (Sheldrake, 2013, p.16). It is thus closely related to the concept of the spirituality of everyday life, which is exactly the type of spiritual formation process this present research has been engaged in. The midlife Christian professionals could find everyday spirituality whenever and wherever they had a mind to practice, regardless of the disturbance of noise, busyness and crowdedness.

In this matter, Participant D followed her regular daily practice of meditation in a noisy café during her breakfast:

“I am having my meditation in a café during breakfast. In the noisy crowded café, I am not disturbed but am enjoying my gospel meditation. I am encountering God with an inner joy”.

This was a demonstration that in ordinary daily life she could actively participate in meditation of the gospel. The inner joy in encountering God was not disturbed by any noise or crowdedness.

Participant E’s spiritual practice reflected the stability of her work and life. Yet in the daily short spiritual practice, her process of discernment helped her confirm her commitment to her faith. She shared:

“Although not a big transformation, I felt something changed in me. The daily devotion and spiritual discipline are so important. I enjoy very much even 15 mins meditation in the morning. I know God is pleased as He loves me even when I am tired”.

Participant F shared her inner peace while enjoying solitude in her sacred space in the car. This practice demonstrates Sheldrake’s everyday life spirituality in a busy urban world in real life. She reflected with joy:

“Life is always busy, but I can allow my own space and time to prepare my heart as not so busy.....It is so important to have my solitude. Every day after work, before leaving my car at the carpark, I find my sacred space with God alone. In that silent solitude, I listen to that small whisper of God and find my inner peace”.

Participant F used to be very hyperactive with difficulty calming down. However, she was very passionate about her regular spiritual practice of meeting God. The journey of interiority was gradually nurtured in her everyday busy life.

From the vivid examples from the mundane lives of the participants in the city of Hong Kong, the research finding supports Sheldrake’s statement that “this type of active-practical spirituality seeks to find spiritual growth through the medium of ordinary experiences, commitments, and activity, including the service of our fellow human (Sheldrake, 2013, p.16). The participants found ways to experience this aspect of spiritual growth in their daily lives.

Sheldrake's model of active-practical spirituality can be more broadly understood in the context of his ideas about secular spirituality in our contemporary cities, which he analyses in relation to healthcare and the meaning of cities (Sheldrake, 2013, pp.210-219). This is a new approach to studying contemporary spirituality, especially in a globalizing world. Sheldrake talks about spirituality in business, having in mind the busy professionals of the marketplace facing external challenges in work and at home, and while embarking internally on a spiritual search for a holistic meaning to life. The experience of the participants can be understood in this broader context of the spirituality of everyday urban life.

As a whole, the participants demonstrated willingness to carry out their spiritual practice and allow this to change their habits, their physical and emotional condition, and their ways of looking at incidents in their daily lives. This willingness fully reflects Sheldrake's concept of active-practical spirituality in everyday life. Their spiritual journeys were diverse, lively and dynamic. Moments of connectedness with their lives were sometimes dark, with memories shifting forth and backward, up and down. However, they maintained this practice throughout the eight weeks, forming a routine in their daily lives. From this, the research can show that in the fast-moving work and private lives of these midlife Christian professionals, participants could be flexible about the time and location of their reflections and the pursuit of their search. At the same time, this lived spirituality was an ongoing dynamic journey of creating and recreating the meaning of joy and shared lives. The phenomena of everyday lived spirituality were inspiring. The busy midlife Christian professionals did not need to go to monasteries for solitude. Their ordinary everyday lives could become the backdrop for daily spiritual practice, thus providing real examples of secular spirituality in a contemporary world.

Aschenbrenner's Examen of Consciousness and the Discernment of Spirits

The phenomena of connectedness, discernment and transformation bear witness to the dynamic process of interior movement and of finding God in all things through the examen of consciousness and the discernment of spirits. The three themes show these movements in the different contexts and experiences of the participants. They represent a simplified and yet distinct description of the complexity of an interior spiritual movement. The recording of these themes also demonstrates how they interacted with and related to God. The emergent themes reflect the experiences this group of midlife Christian professionals went through during this eight-week spiritual practice. Their experiences deserve to be measured alongside the concepts of these Ignatian theologians who helped construct the framework of this research.

Aschenbrenner (2007) understands the relationship between human beings and God as the core of all human activities. The examen of consciousness, or his “flow of consciousness” (Gallagher, 2006, p.9) is particularly important when looking at the complex interior movements in the human mind, heart, and spirit. Aschenbrenner’s view is shared by Lonergan and Gallagher. After pooling the theological resources of these three important interpreters of Ignatian spirituality, the dynamic experiences of the six participants can be analysed and assessed.

Following Aschenbrenner’s prescription, the examen of consciousness is not concerned with the rights or wrongs of our behaviour, but with relationship with God. Through the discovery of connectedness, discernment and transformation, the stirring of emotions from connecting with the past was a way of getting closer to God. God reveals our utmost core being by stirring up our

inner emotions, and by us remembering our history, and recognising His love. Aschenbrenner's examen of consciousness brings about an intimate relationship with God through connecting with self and the past with a discerning spirit. The spiritual journey of the participants provided a small sample for the researcher to look at ways their experience could be brought to bear in a dialogue with Aschenbrenner's concept of the examen of consciousness.

Of the three themes, connectedness represents the phase of the journey where the participants were most exposed to their own selves, to the shadows that came from memories of their significant others, and to God. This experience was not about assessing rights and wrongs in the pattern of examining the conscience; it was a much more complex struggle to face the wounds and unhappy incidents of the past, resulting in them digging up hidden feelings from deep within their hearts.

When connecting to his feelings during meditative prayer, Participant A was able to move to a deeper level of understanding with the help of images that emerged during meditation, and through which he discovered the sense of loneliness hidden deep in his consciousness. He shared he has been hiding his loneliness and avoiding close relationship with people. Participant A questioned his ability to love when an image reminding him of his loneliness was revealed through his experience of connecting with his own self.

The effectiveness of connectedness was shown again in the effort of Participant B to connect with his father through a love letter.

“I wrote a letter to my father with thanksgiving, expressing my understanding of his difficulty and helplessness.....Under his limitation and trying hard, I understand his limitations and my imperfection. I tell my father that I understand the past and that he had a lot of suffering at work and illness. I felt deeply my father’s suffering and he gave me power to feel the people who are suffering”.

Through an act of recalling his relationship with his father, B became aware of the complex feeling between his father and himself at a deeper level of his consciousness. The spiritual journey of interiority clearly touched this level of consciousness because he experienced a significant person again, but with new understanding.

Participant C, who by her own silent meditation discovered her hidden wounds of being abandoned and not recognized by her ex-boyfriend, remembered:

“I had a new discovery from meditating on the past about being abandoned by an ex-boyfriend. I just realized that this hurtful incident affected me in my relationship and marriage. I found that I felt undeserving, not recognised and abandoned....”.

Participant D’s connectedness was through scripture reading and encountering Jesus through gospel meditation. Meditative prayer produced the effect of her spiritual healing.

“In Mark’s gospel, I came across the gospel about physical to spiritual healing. I associated with Jesus’s experience and He accepted me and forgave my sins. I found cleansing was an internal interior healing, releasing the past, being accepted and forgiven. This purification is the most powerful cleansing”.

Through the meditative prayer of connecting to God, she began her journey of discernment, of forgiveness, and of purifying her past at a deeper level of consciousness.

Participant F's spiritual struggles led her to have a very direct experience of feeling and sensing an interior movement within her heart. She had a lot of interior movement during her experiences.

“My mom enjoys watching TV very much. My children love playing games, which I hate. Through regular meditation, my heart was stirring and changing as I was yearning to connect more with my mom and children. There is a voice inside me asking me to change, to let go of my ego and sense others more”.

Through all these examples, the participants touched their interiority at different levels of consciousness during their spiritual practice. It came naturally in the moment. When they were touched with deep feelings, they discovered themselves and developed real affective relationships with God. They saw what had to be faced, understood, decided and acted upon. Participant F had a strong desire to seek God for an answer to her deep suffering, as she was facing a negative self-image, fatigue, disconnection from emotions, and long conflicts with her husband. Through her committed regular silent meditation, she connected with God and was deeply touched by the love of God through physical and spiritual healing. She then gradually entered into an enlightenment process with a discerning heart and acquired compassion for her husband's past wounds. She acted upon this urging spirit and responded by forgiving, letting go of her past, and rebuilding her family relationships. This process of development a discerning heart journey echoes Aschenbrenner's teaching of affective consciousness.

Aschenbrenner points out that “the specific exercise of examen is ultimately aimed at developing a heart with a discerning vision....This is a gift from God” (1972, p.17). Participant C dared not ask God for total healing as she thought she was not perfect and felt undeserving. Through the encounter with God in her physical and spiritual healing, she understood her lack of faith in the past and developed a discerning spirit in the love of God. She became aware of her healing even though she was not perfect. During silent meditation, she recalled and remembered the love of God through connecting with her parents’ love in childhood and with critical people and incidents in the past. The process of encountering the unconditional love of God, stirred vigorous inner emotions, and tears were flowing as part of her discerning vision of the heart during the examen, which Aschenbrenner describes as grace and a gift from God. She realized a gradual process of a discerning heart had led her to find true relationship with God.

What happened in the inner being of the participants and how God is working in them requires an open heart. It is in the depths of their affectivity, at times spontaneous and strong, and at other times shadowy, that God moves and deals with them most intimately. These interior moods, feelings, urges, and movements are the “spirits” that must be sifted through and discerned, so they can recognise God’s call to them in this intimate core of being. The dynamic interior movement of the participants demonstrated the examen as an important means of discerning their interior consciousness in this process.

Aschenbrenner's Interior Stirring As "Ah-Ha" Experience

In Aschenbrenner's introduction to the concept of the examen of consciousness, he brings up a point that may not be easily noticed, but is highly relevant to the spiritual journey of the participants found in the research. He opens his new interpretation with a simple but powerful statement: "For many people today life is spontaneity. If spontaneity is crushed or aborted, then life itself is stillborn. In this view, examen is living life backwards and once removed from the vibrant spontaneity and immediacy of the experience itself" (1972, p.14).

In the experience of the participants, the inner moments of stirring spontaneity that did occur in their daily lives were abundant, and can be called "Ah-Ha" moments. The importance of those "Ah-ha" moments was that they were transforming experiences of being lifted up by the Holy Spirit. Hence the experience of Participant A when he went to a small island where he meditated and started his journey of connectedness. He had his Ah-ha moment as follows:

"When connecting with nature, it was grace, energy, spirit, thanks and happiness with small things. When eating tofu, clean water, beach, lying on the beach and enjoy. How wonderful it was..... Discovered I was integrating with nature on the island with thanksgiving. I felt very relaxed after that. Realized a happy and rich life was indeed surrounding me. All things are blessings".

Participant A did not have much silent meditative experience. Yet at the beginning of his spiritual journey, his connection with nature suddenly endowed him with a wide range of special experiences. He started to feel differently about all the small things, with wonder, joy and thanksgiving. "All things are blessings" sums up his sudden realization that his life was "happy

and rich”. This happened during the early part of his journey and the “Ah-Ha” moment came to him unexpectedly early. His connectedness with the beauty of nature opened his eyes to the blessings in his life. He then started to love himself and the people surrounding him more fully.

These “Ah-Ha” moments can come silently and subtly in small incidents of life. Participant B experienced such moments in the form of a sudden urge to make a change and act on something small in his daily life. He reflected on the moment:

“I suddenly realized and felt a strong need to transcend myself, a desire to transcend and change. Transcendence happened the first time of realizing what I can do, e.g., I am not a sociable person. At the company’s 25th anniversary, I felt the drive to reach out and realized I can mix around and understand others more. I then stayed and interacted with themI could see myself and others more. This is a transcending experience”.

In recalling this special moment of a sudden call to change, participant B described this kind of breakthrough in daily life as a “transcending experience”, putting aside the habitual limitation in his personality concerning interacting with his colleagues to “see myself and others more”. It was a sudden opening of a new horizon in life. For participant D, this kind of sudden call for action related to something more important: a decision to make a change in her career. She reflected on her meditative experience:

“I was meditating on Mark 3: 13 – 19 that Jesus chose 12 disciples and sent them into the world. Suddenly, I was deeply touched and cried while reading it. In fact, I was reading it in the MTR [subway]. Although it was only simple words in the gospel, I was touched

suddenly and absorbed in the words. I was immersed in the scripture and key words like “presence, sent, preaching.” I want to be different and unique in my life”.

A short passage in the scripture triggered energy and spiritual stirring within her heart to take a leap of faith and make a major change in her life, to be different and unique. These were also moments of discernment and transformation, with decisions to act, to follow a new orientation in life, and to pursue her vocation. These were moments of enlightenment that were spontaneous and felt to be sacred and uplifting by the participants. These spontaneous feelings are supported by the notion of “allowing the truly Spirited-spontaneity to happen in our daily lives” (Aschenbrenner, 1972, p.14).

Participant F gained discernment about her relationship with husband. She confirmed her strong moment of discernment thus:

“This is my discernment. My discovery about his wounds from the past he had not dealt with. I found we both needed attention and love and both were being hurt. I started to be compassionate with his difficulties. I should not be so hard on him....I was meditating and connecting with him”.

These spontaneous moments were experienced by Participant F in that she realized in herself their mutual need for “attention and love”. This kind of complex interpersonal relationship with a close partner can be difficult to break through. However, the sudden realization was that she had “started to be compassionate” with her husband’s difficulties and “not so hard on him”. For her, this was a discernment.

The spiritual experiences of the participants provide evidence in support of Aschenbrenner's efforts to reveal the meaning and broaden the scope of interpretation and application of the Ignatian *Spiritual Exercises*. With the examen of consciousness he places a broader and richer set of interpretations over the Ignatian concept of the examen. This interpretation helps facilitate a fuller appreciation of the interior movements in the spiritual journey of the participants.

Dynamic Interior Movement from Lonergan's Perspective

In the last chapter, I used Lonergan's EUJD as an analytical tool to supplement my second level of interpretation of the factual findings about the three emergent themes. In this section, I situate EUJD as four levels of consciousness with Sheldrake, Aschenbrenner and Gallagher's contributions, together forming the four key components from Ignatian spirituality with which to dialogue with the empirical findings. Together, the interpretation and expansion of the Ignatian teaching helped shape the design of the spiritual practice and the underlying direction of the research as a whole. Therefore, in this part of the discussion, I do not repeat the analysis of the last chapter, but instead identify specific aspects of Lonergan's schema that can support the concepts of the other three theologians in assessing and understanding the emergent themes from the experiences of the participants.

After the participants started their spiritual journeys of connectedness, discernment and transformation through the examen of consciousness and discernment of spirits, they moved deeper into the levels of consciousness Lonergan prescribes. Their experiences reveal clearly the complexity and diversity in the way these interior movements are born, emerge, evolve, and shift

forward and backward in irregular patterns or modes. The dynamism and the four levels of consciousness are never really clearly separated, because consciousness itself has to be understood in abstraction. As a pattern of visualization, EUJD can facilitate interpretation. However, the experience of the participants reveals that the wide range of ways each participant actually went through the process makes it difficult to generalize.

The dynamism in the interior movement was revealed when the participants experienced the sacred and divine within themselves. In Lonergan's *Insight* (1983) and *Method in Theology* (1971), he describes his hermeneutical model of EUJD as a simple and dynamic operational tool; it is dynamic "just as a dance is a pattern of bodily movements, or a melody is a pattern of sounds" (Lonergan, 1971, p.13) The experience of connectedness, discernment and transformation was very dynamic. Participant F's experience revealed that the process of EUJD was not a linear process, but a dynamic shifting back and forth. From the vigorous emotions connecting with her childhood of abandonment, ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder) illness and then an unhappy marriage, she experienced and understood the grace of God in her past. At a very early stage of spiritual practice, she experienced the internal stirring of an emotional movement when connecting with God's love. In the process, she gradually discerned her calling and made a decision to build her family relationships. This whole spiritual journey showed that the interior movement through EUJD is a dynamic, lively and active process.

Out of the three themes identified, connectedness played a critical role in experiencing and understanding, even to the level of judgment, the participants' connecting with self (especially

their shadows), others (especially family members, colleagues, household maids, and those problems in career, home and work) and the subsequent discernment and transformation that occurred. This back and forth dynamic process enabled the participants to go back and connect with and face their shadows with a new paradigm for interpreting the past and for reconstructing a new life with the help of the Holy Spirit. A stirring of feeling and internal movement enabled the participants to dig deeper with faith, to discern, and to be transformed to bear the fruits of the Holy Spirit through positive changes and actions.

At the same time, the process of transformation was condensed and quick. Participants A, C, D and F had connected to and discerned a special phenomenon of a highly condensed process of transformation. The enlightenment and touch of the Holy Spirit, in the here-and-now spirituality over a short period of time, showed that having the experience, discernment and enlightenment could be a condensed intensive process. Once they were able to connect with God, life changed. This connectedness was not a superficial understanding, but a much deeper movement in the process of transformation. The EUJD concept helps us to understand connectedness, discernment and transformation as an integrated dynamic process. The remembering, and the connecting with self and past and with significant people and God can be realized through this simple and direct model that was designed for the research.

Even though Participants B and E might have had less vigorous internal movement or discernment, they connected with much of their past histories in terms of rich intimate relationships with significant people. This remembering and recollection enlightened them about their existing midlife situation and the direction they needed to pursue in life. Identified by

Lonergan as the four levels of consciousness, EUJD matches Aschenbrenner's examen of consciousness closely. The dynamism of the spiritual journey of the participants as a whole bears witness to the intensity and complexity of this journey. The joy of attaining a feeling of connectedness with unforgettable people and then God, in trust and love, was, as Participant C put it, "a journey of mystery revealed by God". Her words manifest this joy vividly:

"I trusted more will be coming. It is a real awakening. God answered me through Gospels and hymns.....It is a journey of mystery revealed by God. When connecting with unforgettable people, it is a touch of love and is transforming us".

Of the darker side of the experience, Participant F shared her strong feelings of frustration and pain when she tried to face all her negative emotions during the first two weeks of her spiritual journey. The interior movements were painful. She struggled, but could not break away:

"I have had a lot of unhappy experiences in my past 20 years and many feelings. I do not have many outlets. I do not want to think and want to escape as I am afraid to break the current relationship. I can count a lot of negativity. I know I escaped to unravel the relationship with my husband. I had my discernment. I was so torn the last two weeks. My emotions and feeling were bad. I was torn very much in the last two weeks. Cannot be peaceful the last two weeks".

Lonergan and Aschenbrenner together provide the core elements supporting the conceptual framework of the research. It was a spiritual journey of interiority that occurred on the four levels of consciousness that EUJD and the examen of consciousness prescribe. The participants did not have any prior knowledge of or training in Lonergan or Aschenbrenner before

undertaking the spiritual practice. Compared with Buford's Halftime model of self-analysis through the 3Cs (core values, capacity and context), the difference was clear. Buford serves to draw attention to this special group of midlife Christian professionals. Yet the approach his model adopts is clearly different from the one designed for the present research. This distinction can be further elucidated by Gallagher's threefold paradigm of "Awareness, Understanding and Action" (AUA).

Gallagher's Threefold Paradigm in Association with EUJD

In terms of content, Gallagher's AUA is an elaboration of Aschenbrenner's examen of consciousness and a simplification of Lonergan's EUJD. The concepts of the three theologians formed the foundation for the conceptual framework of this present research, illuminating the phenomena of the transformation process. With Lonergan's EUJD as the background, it is not difficult to recognize Gallagher's threefold paradigm as an appropriate partner to the tripartite conceptual framework of my research.

Awareness, as the first step of the threefold paradigm, is closely associated with connectedness and discernment. Of the six participants, A, C, D and F became aware of their interior movements in the beginning stage of the spiritual practice. Participant A was already aware of the interior movement at the start of the first fortnight:

"Every day after breathing, I looked back on the day. It helped with reflecting on my feelings in interacting with people and whether happy or regretful.....especially listening to God. This process was very special".

Awareness was also present at the very beginning of Participant D's recollection:

"I imagine a lot and feel very connected to God. The intimacy with God led me to find God from all the struggles to stillness and silence.... Silence connects me with the experience and helps me to transition well".

The awareness that brought out the spiritual meaning of the experience of the participants was explicitly leading them to the second phase of the journey, which for both Lonergan and Gallagher is understanding. Understanding brings about judgment and decision in the third and fourth levels of Lonergan's map of consciousness. In Gallagher, understanding leads to action as the last paradigm. The process of understanding is a reflection on stirrings noticed, and involves recognising what is of God and what is not. Gallagher describes "understand" as reflection on such stirrings. This is discernment, or judgement in Lonergan's terminology. In Gallagher, spiritual awareness, and understanding followed by action help a person appreciate the interior movement of connectedness, discernment and transformation (Gallagher, 2005, p.23). Thus Participant A concludes at the end of the spiritual practice:

"Over 8 weeks, I got deep feeling and discovery. The importance of attentiveness and focus like attention to walk, eat, teach, train.....and enjoying all things. Discovered the integration of my passion, strength and opportunities. My passion and strength in teaching and training had provided me opportunities to perform on various platforms. The integration of three things was the way of my next phase of life".

He became convinced that he had to teach training in management in order to serve with passion and strength on different platforms. This was a clear example of awareness, understanding and action.

Participant B's commitment to acting on his new understanding during the second phase of life was also clear:

"In my second phase of life, my wish is to contribute not only my wish list. My work is to enable any growth and transcendence at the workplace of my colleagues. My focus is totally different from other leaders. This is the real meaning of my job. I need to learn what I learnt and apply it in work".

As a full-time nurse switched to a full-time mother, Participant C found her awareness, understanding and action in a new perspective about her second half of life, resting and giving the daily burdens and personality issues to God:

"God did answer my prayers, and differently from the past. In the past, before the research, easily frustrated and lack of energy, not feeling peaceful and seems God knows my prayers. Now this has changed. More peaceful with God".

Towards the end of the eight weeks of spiritual practice, Participant D's action went even further, and she started to openly share with her friends and cohorts:

"I shared my eight weeks' spiritual experience in a retreat with friends and also shared the enlightenment of my road and way. Many friends did show an interest in what have I experienced in this research, especially my connection with God. I shared with them during the two-day retreat and many were surprised. My testimony was a real witnesses to them".

Participant E had a disciplined and stable eight weeks of spiritual practice without too many experiences of emotional waves up and down. Her journey of awareness, understanding and

action demonstrated how connectedness, discernment and transformation represented her experience of stability and full confidence in the guidance of God:

“Originally I wanted to find a definite answer for my next phase of life. Now I have changed, as this is a process and am not trying to find a fixed definition and answer. I always wanted to find a blueprint in the past. Now I realize I have been and am in the process. Through people and incidents, God will bring me to the place where he wants me to go”.

In contrast to Participant E, Participant F went through a stormy and dynamic eight weeks of practice and her journey of connectedness, discernment and transformation fully manifest how awareness, understanding and action from the threefold/EUJD paradigms of Gallagher and Lonergan became clear indicators of progress in the journey:

“I discovered I have a new attitude to life especially preserved my peace of mind. I heard a small voice reminding me through silence. I saw many changes in small things and I find myself enjoying the peace in the journey. I have also experienced discernment. I know I need to be silent and empty”.

With the help of Lonergan and Gallagher, the embedded meanings of the three emergent themes could be deeply and fully excavated, starting with the connectedness with self and with past critical incidents and significant people during the eight weeks of spiritual practice when the busy midlife Christian participants allowed time to pause and notice what was happening in their inner spiritual experience. When connecting with God, the participants enjoyed their sacred moment with discerning spirits. They then discovered joy, hope and love in their history with

God. This was a kind of spiritual understanding. All had experiences when connecting to self and all things, but when connecting to God, the inner stirring and emotion became joy and love. Following these moments of discernment closely was the direct decision to “take action” to use Gallagher’s language.

Transformative phenomena found in the themes enrich the understanding of Gallagher’s action stage. Spiritual transformation is a dynamic process with inter-relationships between connectedness, discernment and transformation. Spiritual transformation should not be understood as the result of an action. In fact, spiritual transformation led some of the midlife Christian Professionals participants in my study to discover a renewal of life and of direction. All decisions, actions and directions of midlife follow such meaning and enlightenment. This meant a new orientation towards and reinterpretation of life.

Summary

The dialogue between the themes of connectedness, discernment, and transformation and the theoretical perspectives of the Halftime model, Buddhist mindfulness and Ignatian spirituality helps in explaining and interpreting how the midlife Christian Professionals in Hong Kong experienced their interior spiritual journeys. The spiritual experiences of these participants bears clear witness to the fact that these theological perspectives, which mainly originated from the western world, but which have been brought into the contemporary business community of Hong Kong, have significant implications for a deeper understanding of the spiritual journey of interiority for these midlife professionals.

After reviewing what happened over the eight weeks' spiritual practice and presenting the insights gained from the dialogue with the theoretical perspectives, the next chapter reviews and assesses the model of spiritual practice I designed for the research. This evaluation provides important input for evolving and developing the model for future practice.

Chapter Seven: Evaluating the Model of Spiritual Practice

Introduction

In Chapter four, I used the IPA approach to analyse the data, which were later grouped together in codes, categories and themes. This analysis helped in presenting the findings from the eight-week spiritual practice as expressed by the participants during their interviews at the end of every fortnight. In Chapter five, and following the IPA approach, I put forward my own interpretation of the themes and supplemented this with another layer of interpretation using Lonergan's EUJD tool. In the previous chapter, I created a dialogue between the emergent themes and theoretical perspectives, which generated a deeper insight into the interior spiritual journeys of the participants.

Up to this point, the spiritual journeys of the participants have been presented from at least four different perspectives to investigate what the participants had experienced, including the commonalities and uniquely individual phenomena in the data; the nature of the participants' interior movement using Lonergan's EUJD; my own interpretation in answering the research question; and finally a dialogue between the emerging themes and the theoretical perspectives. Following this comprehensive process of analysis with multiple levels of interpretation, this chapter will tie the final knot that binds the research into an integrated whole by evaluating model of spiritual practice that I designed specifically for this group of midlife Christian professionals. I also discuss the potential for developing this model for future practice.

The first section of this chapter presents empirical findings about the participants' experiences in applying the model. The second section consolidates the feedback from the participants and my responses thereto. In the third section, and based on the results of the first two sections, I discuss and evaluate my designed model in relation to the Halftime model, the ISE model and Ignatian spiritual practice. The fourth section is an attempt to develop the evolving model for the future, based on the insights gleaned from the first three sections.

Section One – Empirical Findings

The model of spiritual practice plays a central role in the whole research, for it enabled the participants to experience connectedness, discernment and transformation. The various dimensions and rich content of spiritual practice are found in the data from the eight weeks when they were asked to share their feedback on the model, including the principles, process, benefits and alternatives of the spiritual practice.

Principles and Process of Spiritual Practice

Many participants shared some basic general principles about the process of spiritual practice. Participant A spoke about the importance of listening when practicing, while Participant B mentioned stillness of heart. Participant C emphasized the importance of persistence, commitment, state of mind, flexible timing and a safe environment. Participant D shared the importance of inner silence, while F highlighted solitude.

In terms of the process of spiritual practice, Participant A shared his remembrance of past events or significant people in life, his discerning of God's will, and the connecting with God's grace

and spirit of life. He also shared connecting with his changed self, and spoke of the process of spiritual practice as being like a journey home. Participant D expressed the connection of her full and rich life with different kinds of struggle. Participant F described her spiritual practice as a process that moved gradually from a stage of confusion to the stage of emptiness.

Ways and Means of Spiritual Practice

For most of the participants, their means of practice was to follow the model, although some found another means. There were some differences in ways the practice were applied: Participant A enjoyed mindful evening practice while Participant E had difficulty was tired in the evenings and preferred morning devotions, where she captured fleeting moments through journaling:

“When writing and reflecting in my daily journals, many memories and witnesses in life came up. My journal helped me capture that fleeting moment. Journal writing helped a lot when I wrote regularly. I will not lose the important moment in life or even trivial things”.

Participant D was the only one with prior experience in regular spiritual practice and journaling over two years. She also used different means of spiritual practice, including gospel meditation, *lectio divina*, praying with different content and self-examination. In particular, journaling together with *lectio divina* developed into a regular spiritual exercise for her:

“In journaling, I found myself and a changed life. In stillness, meditative writing together with lectio divina always surprised me with God’s awakening messages. Writing a

journal reflecting the bleeding woman in Mark gospel was a self-healing process. I echoed the bleeding woman touching Jesus and was healed”.

She also said that she practiced mindful breathing and eating, noting:

“The contemplative practice could happen anywhere. In the morning breakfast in the restaurant, I connected with the messages from Mark gospel through mindful breathing and eating. There were a lot of touching messages and reflections from the gospel”.

Connecting with God and Images

Participants A, C, D and E shared the imagery they experienced during spiritual practice. Participant A encountered the image of a loved one, his grandmother, in his meditative practice. On another occasion, an image of money and a cross came up when he was meditating on his life direction. In the image, pressure from family demands and his wife led him to unwillingly choose money. There was no rest and no time to focus on the Cross.

Participant D connected a picture of God to her struggles in her current work condition and her longing to leave and pursue her calling in spiritual education. On a few other occasions, she had images of being with Jesus. One special image was the image of Judas pushing Jesus to the cross with his unfair treatment. She imagined she could feel the pain of Jesus, as she also felt herself being pushed to the cross. Participant E shared her image of Jesus facing injustice just as she herself was facing unfairness. She also had an image of passengers coming and going as if on a train as an analogy of her past relationships with lovers leaving her.

Participant C, in particular, encountered a series of vivid images on different occasions. An image of a circle of bubbling boiling water represented something wanting to burst out of its bounds. She described it as a spiritual movement inside her desiring to escape from suffering and confusion:

“I saw a circle and felt strongly something is bursting and wanting to come out. Something like a bubble boiling in a calm lake, but wanting to burst and come out. I felt excited with expectation. This excitement was maybe a spiritual movement”.

On another occasion, when listening quietly to songs in meditation, she visualized sunflowers blooming and blossoming. Another picture came up of a worm turning into a cocoon and transforming into a butterfly. Then, an image of a pool with water spilling out symbolized her desire for new life. She shared her awakening:

“I was not so anxious to think of where and what to be, but just rest and wait for the time to blossom. I realized I needed nutrition from God and listened to his whisper so that I could taste all the blessings in faithful experience”.

Benefits of Spiritual Practice

Concerning the benefits of spiritual practice, all participants except C stated they gained a lot of positive results. Participant A connected with his self and felt he had changed through regular silent practice. B felt thanksgiving in the practice and had started to care for himself and others. He felt energized and sensitive to connecting after silent practice. The stillness changed him to feel and care more. He discovered he was more connected to and caring about the feelings of

others while taking more positive action. The spiritual discipline and heart journey helped him find calm in his busy stressful life.

Participant F found her sacred space through spiritual practice and this helped her increase her focus and sensitivity. She expressed her connection with God and her inner joy:

“Every morning, I had my daily spiritual practice through silence, the gospel or hymns. I felt closeness with God and have that inner joy which resolved my shadows in life”.

Alternative Means of Spiritual Practice

Some participants attempted alternative ways or means of meditation or meditative prayer that were more suitable for them. Participant A enjoyed meditation in nature and discovered a lot through nature and listening. He shared his feeling of wonder about God through nature. Participant B used his personal style of mix-and-match meditation, song and yoga in daily practice. He found his connection of body and mind through yoga and silence and music. Besides practising mindful breathing and gospel meditation, Participant D also loved other means, such as *lectio divina*, songs and hymns. Participant F enjoyed various other ways of meditating, e.g., listening to music in her car, and reading Ignatian materials.

Of all the means of spiritual practice, journaling was considered by many participants as one of the most important ways. Participant A shared journaling was the most important tool for him. He thought journaling was a “must” no matter how long the writing took. His journal pushed him to summarize his feelings and reflections on the words from God. Even busy Participant F shared she might lose the daily practice but will not forget journaling.

Participant A also shared how he used morning devotions and meditation to surrender to and connect with God in his here and now moments. He repeatedly mentioned having hope in God. When he was alone, he had a dialogue with God, with himself and with love for ten minutes each. Participant D said she practiced self-examination in the first few weeks. By the fourth interview, scripture, silence and prayer were mixed, but all were interrelated. The gospel was the main means of practice for her, with meditation a request that God would talk to her. She also mentioned unexpected things happening when pausing and listening in silence. Jesus was her close partner in the process:

“The gospel helped me to quiet the storm and use words to create, heal.....not even needs to touch. Jesus’s suffering in the cross reflected my own vocation journey”.

Over the eight weeks, participants also followed some alternative practices according to their style or culture. Participant B shared the way he connected with his heart through music. Musical appreciation in silence was a means of nurturing his heart. His heart was then opened in meditation, because of his mild, soothing, peaceful state of mind.

Other means included connecting with nature. Participant C shared that she connected with a tree on her tour of Japan. She felt very close to God’s words about the vine and branches when connecting with nature. Participant E was an exception when it came to the practice. She was more familiar with the scriptures and not used to silent contemplation. She admitted that she seldom had total silence. Because she was very used to scripture, words which helped her to meditate.

Different Ways and Means of Spiritual Practice

One of the basic features of the spiritual practice model designed for this research was its flexibility, with very few guidelines and directives. The model gave ample room for participants to use their preferred ways of going through an experience of connectedness, discernment and transformation.

Participant B gained the benefit of spiritual practice when connected to his inner heart, where he found insight and inspiration. He liked to meditate using breathing practice accompanied by classic music. This connected to his deeper inner heart and released his inner stress and emotions. One particular exception for him was his connection with Chinese culture and tradition. He was enlightened by Confucius' teaching and spiritual practice using Chinese chi and calligraphy helped him strengthen this belief. Chinese culture also led him to a spiritual level that was beyond materials and self. He admitted that at times he found difficulty connecting as he had confused feelings. However, the Chinese way of heart meditation with silence and emptiness helped him to be still. He continued his practice through this unique Chinese Confucian meditative practice and found himself connecting with the Confucian concept of the original heart while eliminating the distractions of external needs. He also learnt from Chinese culture and practice in daily life as part of this process.

Participant D said she did not really need mindful breathing to prepare herself for spiritual practice. She had been having morning devotions and was very used to regular practice. She also liked to use the gospel in spiritual practice. She experienced many images when reading Mark's gospel. Meditation on the new and old wineskins, on the chosen twelve disciples, or on the

healing of the paralytic in Mark's gospel touched her deeply. She said she had never sensed such rich and frequent messages from Mark's gospel before. She also read other books, such as Richard Rohr's book about halftime. The first half of life was about rules, norms, expectations and constraints. She imagined various dialogues and now continues to imagine her resignation dialogue. For D, the greatest benefit from her spiritual practice was the connection to her calling.

Similarly, Participant E shared that even though she applied mindfulness at the beginning, she did not really need mindful breathing and could calm down and meditate quickly without it. She also said that she was not following the steps exactly by starting with mindful breathing because flexibility was important to her, and she was able to adjust and apply other means of meditation that she was used to. These alternative ways included meditating through gospel words and through mindful walking. She was able to shift her mindset and paradigm while enjoying a coffee, a casual walk or reading a fun book. She shared the following about mindful walking:

“Mindful walking was really refreshing, especially when my brain was heavy. When walking, I was emptying myself and praying about my second phase of life, which God revealed in a special way. The other important thing was a spiritual place, like St. John's Cathedral where I had my silent meditation when encountering critical life incidents”.

Participant F had difficulty in meditation in the first few weeks because of crises and distractions. She acknowledged that obstacles were always there in life, however. The key principle was discipline. She found spiritual practice laid down a foundation of calmness to help her deal with crises. She liked to practice music and was deeply touched with a still heart when listening to Chinese flute and classical music. She found music helped her heart to be still.

Participant A processed his childhood images and critical incidents through meditation. He acknowledged his practice focused mainly on sadness and thanksgiving to God. He shared that when meditating, tears always came with the presence of God. Participant C admitted in the third fortnight that she did not have a stable spiritual practice as she was disturbed by many distractions.

The recording of these factual findings ended with a general reflection on the participants' experience of the process of spiritual transformation as a whole. Together with the above analysis of the phenomena, especially those of the spiritual and mindful practice, this general reflection should reveal useful insights for answering the research question. During the last fortnight, all the participants made general reflections, including a reflection on the experience of the eight-week spiritual practice and on the model.

General Comments on the Spiritual Practice Model

Participant A commented that the model provided a good framework. He experienced deep healing when connecting to significant others, especially in the second fortnight. This led him to connect with his grandmother and changed him from despair to hope through the love of God. He found connecting with past critical incidents in his memories gave him the power of love. When experienced again, a powerful transference of love and experience made God's love very real. He could then transfer this love to his son. At the same time, talking to the researcher at each fortnightly interview helped him to recall his feelings. Through connecting with his shadows, God revealed He wants us to be human and lively, become our true selves, and not be burdened. God wants us to do one thing only and one big thing for God.

Participant B felt spiritual practice was a continuous process and life-long practice was needed. The spiritual practice helped nurture his heart and make it stronger and free from fear. He commented that the eight weeks provided the core of walking with God and union with the Holy Spirit. It was a trinity of walking with God and union with Holy Spirit. He believed he needed to continue the spiritual practice as well as opening his heart to find himself and find God.

Participant C had very positive comments about the whole model and process. She shared that it was a very good framework, with stages of connecting with self, shadows, others and God. She felt she had made gradual progress from understanding herself to knowing God. The guidelines were particularly helpful in individual meditation. She also expressed her special feeling about the research. She shared that it was not like a research and she was experiencing strong interior movement, enlightenment about her life direction and deep encountering with God. Through the eight week spiritual practice, she admitted she understood the reason of her confusion and discovered her needs of rest and renewal in God.

Participant D reflected the model provided her with a process for building intimacy with God at all times. For her, there was no “closest” time with God. She shared that a close relationship with God was a process at all times and regular practice was critical. However, participant D commented that it was a difficult discipline as it required time and commitment. It was easy for people to give up, especially at weekends. She admitted that it was a challenge for Christians to reflect on the weekends, as Christians usually had busy weekends at church. She also commented on the frequency of daily practice and how to avoid being too mechanical. She suggested maybe three/four times per week with bi-weekly reflection to discern any pattern of change. She

claimed that she experienced an awakening progress from doing to being in the eight weeks. It was a turning point in her spiritual growth, as if she was passing through a gate:

“All participants should see spiritual practice as a life-long journey. We should not count on the quantity but the quality of relationship with God. I felt God will not mind if we do not have daily practice. It was total grace to encounter God and ourselves. I had been writing a journal for a year, but these eight weeks were a climax for me. They led me to a special spiritual state of mind. As Matthew’s gospel describes, more will be given if you seek. It was an interactive process. God said I am in you and you are in me”.

Participant E felt that this was a good meditation model for those who did not have a spiritual practice or time with God. It could build on specific devotional themes beyond daily devotion times. She found journal reflection particularly important. Her many facets of life were revealed in journaling about God. Through writing in her regular diary, she found God. The spiritual practice helped her to be more sensitive to God's quiet voice, with the little changes or Ah-ha moments which came up at different points during the eight weeks. It was a process of uncovering God’s plan through the progress of life. She also commented on the importance of calming oneself and having quiet time to focus on God alone. She claimed that she will modify the model to fit her personal time, style and mode. She found the model was also good for stillness, silence, and meditation. It helped her concentrate and build a long-term relationship with God. However, she admitted it was really difficult for busy executives to have evening practice after a long day. Following the eight-week theme was a good idea, as many might not know how their life direction can be revealed by looking at the past.

Participant E's original aim for this research was to find a definite answer for her midlife direction, but she found instead that the spiritual journey of interiority gave her the insight that searching for midlife direction was a process without an immediate definite answer. She recognized the need to go through the process of knowing God and that God knew her prayer and heart. She received enlightenment in the process that God's answer was not clearly defined, but was in the process and the experience. She had to just trust He will lead her to see His blueprint. God will bring her to the place where he wants her to be through all people and incidents. Now she had changed as a result of experiencing the process. Her experience told her that this research was a journey or a process for going into her heart.

Above and beyond the other participants, Participant F was most passionate in her search. Her experience of connectedness, discernment and transformation was richer and more dynamic. She discerned new life from her long conflicts with her husband, their differences in terms of values, the education of children and many other matters. She became aware of and understood their different backgrounds in terms of education, family, and career opportunities. She discerned more of her husband's needs and wounds. At the same time, she became willing to let go of herself with more empathy. She found that the spiritual practice helped her lay down the foundations and she could then deal with all the crises that arose once she had this foundation. She shared that she saw herself change when she was close to God. It was a transformational experience of discovering a new foundation for the second half of her life.

Section Two – Consolidated Participant Feedback on the Model

The participants' feedback on the spiritual practice model is now consolidated in terms of specific features/themes:

Practical and Useful

The model was found to be practical and simple. It was easily adjustable to the individuals' working schedules and life-styles and they benefited from it. Participant E reflected on her increase of sensitivity to people and her feeling of being more relaxed, focused and attentive in daily life. Participant F gained more clarity in her confusion about setting her priorities. She found herself quietening down her mind and heart more easily, feeling more grace and struggling less in dealing with her stressful schedule.

In the fast-paced stressful life of Hong Kong, many participants adopted the model easily to suit their own pace, time and space. Participant A shared that he allowed himself free space at his private office for silent meditation and journaling without any disturbance and made enough time to meditate at his own pace. Participant D practiced journaling and gospel meditation in a noisy restaurant at breakfast time. Participant F was a multi-tasking executive and mother. After work, she found her silent moment in her car parked in the car park at her residence before going home. In that small space of her car, she found sacredness in being with God. No matter how noisy, crowded and busy the participants, they could still adopt the model with its simple practice in order to find sacredness in the Hong Kong environment.

Flexibility and Personalization of Practice

Participants had different religious backgrounds and personal styles of religious practice. Participant E preferred morning devotions using gospel meditation instead of mindful breathing. She admitted her evangelical tradition and her church's focus on scripture made her more comfortable using the gospels as a means of practice. Another participant, Participant D, who had been brought up in the evangelical church tradition, emphasized her preference for the use of gospel in spiritual practice. She had a rich imagination when reading the gospel. She shared she had received very rich messages from the gospel meditation during these eight weeks, such as she had not experienced before. Participant A enjoyed evening time for his mindful practice with silence and solitude, while Participant E found it very difficult to concentrate in the evening after a tiring and exhausting day. She enjoyed morning devotions as a refreshing moment with God instead. The model was flexible enough to allow the participants their personalized styles of practice.

A Good Way to Let Go

Participants felt burdened by different issues, but through the practice they were able to connect, discern and transform. One of the common experiences was their feeling of being able to let go. This was clearly a positive indication of the effectiveness of the model. Participant C reflected that her eight weeks' practice had facilitated her letting go and listening to God's voice as part of a special journey. For Participant F, the letting go in pausing for silent meditation was a real change for her extremely hyperactive personality. Letting go allowed her to see the long conflict with her husband in a new light.

Good Framework and Simple Process

Participant A endorsed the model because its framework allowed him to recall his memories. Even in the first and second weeks, he had already gone into an emotional reflection about the deep healing that occurred when connecting to significant people and critical incidents. As a professional trainer, he found the structure simple and effective, especially the bi-weekly interviews, which were open and flexible without formality and pressure, allowing him the freedom to express his feelings. He could listen to his own voice in a free and open manner.

Participant B found the model provided him with a process with which to nurture his heart. He shared that this continuous process of daily practice helped nurture his heart in his busy and stressful life in investment banking. The eight weeks' practice was a suitable timeframe and easy to apply. Participant C also had positive comments about the whole model and process. With its stages and foci, the process was clear, enabling her to connect with her shadows and her hidden self and discern God's will. In the daily and weekly practice following these clear guidelines, this gradual process deepened her self-understanding and she could see God's plan in her history.

Interfaith and Intercultural Openness

As mentioned in the last chapter, Hong Kong is an international city with a strong Chinese cultural tradition. As a Chinese folk religion, Buddhism has very deep roots here. The recommendation of using Buddhist mindfulness as the first major step for the participants to start their practice was well accepted and smoothly executed.

Concerning the intercultural features of Hong Kong, three specific points can be made: First, the traditional core value of family came out strongly in the practice. Family ties and relationship are very important in Chinese culture. In the meditation reflecting on the past, many participants recalled their families, parents or childhood experiences: e.g., Participant A and E's irresponsible fathers hurting their family; and Participant F's mother abandoning her at boarding school. Participant B was influenced by his father's Chinese cultural legacy, while Participant D was accompanying her dying sick mother and meditating with God for her. Only Participant C had strong positive memories of childhood and parental love. These kinds of complex family relationships were a very consideration in assessing the spiritual experiences of the participants.

Second, Participant B adjusted to his style of practice by taking up yoga and Chinese calligraphy. Yoga is very popular in Hong Kong, especially among middle class working people. Sometimes, he used classical Buddhist music during mindful breathing and while examining self, past and God. This dynamic intercultural context is unique in Hong Kong. Chinese calligraphy is well known as a Chinese art involving practicing concentration and giving subtle expression to inner states of mind and feelings (Zhang Qizhi, 2004, pp. 290-215).

Third, the openness of the model allowed the participants to connect with themselves through the practice of journaling. Many Chinese are brought up in a family culture that emphasizes humility, respect and politeness. They are usually less expressive, especially about sharing the dark moments of past shadows. Journaling thus became an acceptable and suitable means of practice and a channel for dialoguing with themselves in a private way. All the participants gave positive feedback about journaling. Participant A shared that journaling was a "must" for him, no

matter how busy he was. Journal writing helped him connect his feelings with words and God. In journaling, Participant D found herself and a changed life. She journaled about the spiritual promptings from the gospel meditation and this was a self-healing process. Participant E preferred journaling in the morning in order to capture the fleeting moments of life. Even the busy, multi-tasking Participant F said she might lose the other practice, but will not forget journaling.

Desire for and Commitment to the Practice

Many participants shared their experiences and feedback on the practice, using common words like eagerness, willingness, desire, attention and enlightenment. Their experiences revealed that their condition or state of mind when practicing the model did impact on the result. Participants A, D and F had very strong desire for change and were yearning for midlife direction. This attitude affected the seriousness of their daily spiritual practice. They were very committed to setting aside the time, space and heart for spiritual practice. Their strong yearning and desire to seek led them to connect with their past and they found new meaning for their second phase of life.

My Response and Reflection

I went through the eight-week journey with the participants; worked through all the recordings and analysed the results using the IPA approach. My role was to set the rules, witness the game as referee, and now look at the results as a commentator. It has all been very rewarding and spirit-lifting. Just as Ganzevoort (2009) writes about the “forks in the road when tracing the sacred”, I too clearly noticed all the complex experiences they underwent, and their spiritual

stirrings in the process of connectedness, discernment and transformation. Their feedback confirmed my observations as a referee and my assessment as a commentator that the model worked for them. Their experiences are thus valuable as part of a pioneering project to obtain information on the subject. The overall assessment of the model will be discussed in greater detail in the next section when my design is compared with the Buford Halftime model, the Kwan ISE program and the conventional Ignatian spiritual practice. Suffice to say here, the voices from the participants about the model of practice were very simple, direct and authentic. Their experience provided answers to the issue of the validity and effectiveness of the model. They found it practical, flexible, adaptable, intercultural, and in terms of interfaith matters, comfortable to follow. It also closely corresponded to the working and living context of Hong Kong.

Section Three – Comparative Assessment of the Model

The Halftime Model

From the empirical findings, I discovered the ways my model differs from the Halftime model. The Halftime model originated from Buford's experience as a successful CEO, and his target audience comes from a successful sector of the professional community. My model sets no demarcating lines in terms of achievement or level of responsibility in participants' organizations. The participants in my model came from the middle or lower middle class. Many of them in fact came from very poor families or were living in public housing. They were ordinary executives without strong financial or social status. There were of both genders and represented a diversity of professions.

The Halftime model takes no account of local elements, while my design is fully localized, allowing participants to express their personal and contextual views, both in terms of practice and opinion. As a model imported from America, the Hong Kong Halftime movement does not consider issues of localization. The general approach follows the direction of the American Halftime headquarters in providing training and coaching sessions for those who are interested. The two books by Buford are treated as the Bible and are the only sources of reference.

The Halftime model is structured in line with other popular executive training and coaching. Tests from Gallup Strength-Finders help members discover their skills and strengths, and there are guidelines and leading questions for self-reflection and small group discussion. It is by nature an executive training program. The spiritual practice element is relatively weak. By comparison, my design is a simple and open model that allows participants to take up spiritual practice every day in a manner they can adjust to their needs. Not even the recommended mindful breathing exercise is compulsory. They are strongly recommended to do journaling, however. What is required is the bi-weekly meeting for open-ended and free-flowing discussion. The conversation is not structured and there are no leading questions. However, from the results of the interviews for this present project, the six participants were able to share a lot of information from their hearts. It is a spiritual exercise during which participants do their soul searching about their interaction with God.

Kwan's ISE Programme

When comparing my design with Kwan's ISE program, I find my design, once again, is much more simple and direct. The ISE program is a semester-long course designed by Kwan for school

teachers to learn about spiritual education. Towards the end of the semester there is a one-day retreat where the class reflects on their inner feelings. It is primarily an educational program, in which religion is not an important factor and Christianity is not the deciding factor. Kwan adopts an inter-faith approach of the Buddhist mindfulness of Thich Nhat Hanh, along with the teaching of Saints Benedict, Saint Francis of Assisi and Saint Ignatius. In sum, he describes his view of spiritual education aimed at the transformation of life, which includes the notion that “life is real, life needs renewal and life is a gift” in his collected essays in a book *Reflection on Spiritual Education* (Kwan, undated, pp.15-24). His program offers important insights and knowledge for school teachers and students, which can be transferred to other social groups, including working people. He has started to move in that direction. Yet the ISE program is still a practical program of spiritual education. Personally, I gained a lot of insights from the program, although it is clear that busy midlife Christian professionals require a different kind of structure for their search for new meaning in life. This is why my design is more relevant and responsive to their needs.

Ignatian Spiritual Practice

The present model, which I designed, has its central elements extracted from Ignatian spirituality, supported by leading Ignatian scholars including Sheldrake, Aschenbrenner, Lonergan and Gallagher. I can claim that I have gained positive result when modified and simplified the age-old Ignatian *Spiritual Exercises*. In relation to the Ignatian spiritual practice, the present model is not in the form of a spiritual retreat over an extended period of time. The standard process includes a number of eight-day retreats, followed by a thirty-day silent retreat guided by a spiritual director. Ignatius decided that where people could not go off for 30 days, they could have “nineteenth-annotation retreats,” or “Exercise at Home” instead (Tetlow, 1992,

p.32). In Annotation 19: Exercise at Home, “a person caught up in public affairs or in occupation that he cannot interrupt...can make the Exercises by taking an hour and a half each day” (p.102).

As an overall review, my model is much simpler and does not require the guidance of the conventional Ignatian practice. I do not serve as a spiritual director, which is fundamental to Ignatian spiritual exercise. Hence the modifications and simplifications are structurally and quantitatively quite sizeable. However, one of the central aims of my design is to cater to the needs of busy professionals in their working and living schedules. The present model provides a direct and practical model for experiencing an interior spiritual journey. One might say this model could be the beginning of a spiritual journey, as it is definitely an evolving model. The participants also started to see the changes in themselves through this model. The present model thus contributes an important practice aimed at spiritual transformation in midlife Christian professionals living in the inter-cultural inter-faith context of Hong Kong.

Section Four – The Future of the Model

After reflecting on feedback on the model, this section focuses on evaluating the model and its potential for the future. After considering the feedback of the participants, I find there are key elements to be either retained or modified in the development of the model for future use.

Elements to be Retained

Assessment of the evolving model reveals certain core elements that should be retained. Firstly, the framework of daily and weekly reflection with its simple practice of silent meditation, mindful breathing and journaling should be retained. It was important to nurture the discipline

and habit of spiritual practice in participants' busy lives. Mindful breathing facilitated silence and emptying of heart, while journaling was a suitable channel for private dialogue with the deeper self that suits Chinese culture. The original design of the model, applying Ignatian elements supplemented by Buddhist mindfulness in a simple practice, was suitable for the East-meets-West intercultural environment of Hong Kong. Buddhist mindful practice is quite common and acceptable in Chinese culture. This practice, which aims at emptying the heart with a peaceful mind and eliminating the distractions of external needs, is needed by midlife Christian executives in Hong Kong.

Secondly, the gradual process of deepening meditation through moving the focus from examining self and reflection on the past to meditating upon God helps nurture a habit in midlife Christians to take time out of their crazy busy schedules. These foci allow the meditative direction of a search for the meaning of life. Thirdly, flexibility in allowing a personal pace of life and time should be retained. Fourthly, dialogue with the researcher is critical through either interview or conversation. This allows for expression of thought and for participants to listen to their own voices and reflect deeply in a free and open manner. A dialogue with the researcher on a regular basis is an important design feature, as it is like a mirror that helps the participants reflect on what they have experienced. The conversation becomes an effective progress review and provides motivation for a continuing practice. The reflective dialogue strengthens awakening concerning what has happened and the relationship with the holistic plan of God. In a free-flowing and open interview, without guided or structured questions, the participants feel completely free to share what they have experienced. Participants welcome this space for reflection and discovery in following the prompting of the Holy Spirit.

Elements to be Modified

It was firstly suggested that gospel passages and scriptures for meditation and reflection should be included for future development of the model. The rich messages and words of the gospel could facilitate a deeper connection with God.

Secondly, meditative content around family ties and relationships could be considered as this is an important and relevant topic in Chinese culture. In the feedback from participants, many meditative reflections connected closely with memories of family relationships and childhood experiences.

Thirdly, nature and connecting with the wonder of God and inspiration should be considered as a means of facilitating the interior journey. In the noisy crowded city of Hong Kong, nature can provide an effective and accessible means of spiritual connection as we meditate with trees, listen to the birds, feel the wind, or admire the beautiful sky, when attentive in heart and mind.

Fourthly, the element of calling or vocation could be inserted into the model. From the feedback of the participants, it was evident that midlife Christian professionals are motivated by certain midlife questions related to life direction or calling. The inclusion of meditation about calling or vocation could strengthen a future model targeting midlife Christian professionals.

Moving Forward

It might be necessary to take into account the backgrounds of different faith traditions when choosing the various means of spiritual practice. The use of the gospel, together with silent

meditation, might help Christians connect with God. Words of scripture can be used in refreshing, strengthening and encouraging ways. The use of the gospel or other means suitable for the local cultural context could make participants feel comfortable and facilitate their entry into the silent and meditative mode.

This raises questions about what can be applied flexibly and what core elements should not be compromised, however. The purpose of the model was to discover midlife transformation and for this the theological components of self-examination and discernment are essential. The meditative focus on examining self and past history, as well as the nurturing of heart, allow for the occurrence of self-examination and discernment. For this reason, the means of practice and application can be flexible, but not the core content of meditation, which is theologically grounded.

The simplicity of the practice and its suitability for contemporary real life therefore become important factors when considering the future of the model. This does not mean there are no boundaries. If the model allows freedom and space to practice within the busy schedules of the professionals, it might provide suitable moments for them to find the sacred in a secular world. A simple spiritual model focusing on the sacred which is flexible enough to be practiced according to the personal styles and working habits of midlife Christian professionals, might facilitate access to the sacred in their secular context.

Putting the Model into Practice

I had the opportunity to apply the model in my professional practice in January 2017, in parallel with the research. I was approached by a committed Catholic and business leader who is the founder of a genetics company called Gene, who wanted me to help with a transformative journey for her company executives. Because she observed the changes in her good friend, who was one of the participants in my research, she contacted me and shared her vision of transforming people's lives holistically and showed an interest in exploring my model. We shared a lot of common interest in integrating work, faith and life through spirituality. I also found her interested in Ignatian spirituality and meditative practice.

Over the past year and a half, Gene Company became the platform for transferring my research into a real-life professional practice. The positive result of my practice at Gene and the impact of the model on the executives there, demonstrate the applicability and transferability of my designed model. I designed six monthly workshops mainly for the top four leaders, with the mission of facilitating their empowerment through reviewing the past and reflecting on the future in both personally and professionally. I adopted the characteristics of the model for this purpose. The workshop design was based on the core elements of the research model of spiritual practice. Through bi-weekly workshops over six months, the focus was on examining self and on past experiences with critical incidents and people, together with regular daily silent meditative practice, mindful breathing and journaling. In the group workshop, the company leaders shared their experiences in daily silent practice and journaling, and observed their personal changes through the journey. The founder, in particular, shared her transformation, including a reconnection with her childhood hurts and her relationship with her mother. She recalled the love

of her deceased father-in-law, which compensated for her long desire for love. An awakening came with the understanding that the way of her raising the daughter was influenced by her mother's strict discipline. Through her own transformation, her relationship with her husband, family and colleagues changed and she became more caring and loving. There were different levels of changes and enlightenment for other leaders. The leadership team became closer with stronger bonding through an in-depth interaction and sharing of their life experience. They found this transformation workshop was unique, effective and crucial to build up the team and the individuals. The workshops then extended to the next level of managers as personal and organization development. Even though many of the participants were non-Christians, the model was effective, simple and user-friendly.

With the success achieved, and the positive partnership with Gene over the last year and a half, the senior management has indicated the intention to extend this mode of staff development to different levels of staff through a simple model of spiritual practice. This is a witness to the continuous adoption and development of the model from this research to suit another context and a different group of people.

Summary

The elements of the model to be preserved or modified were derived from a review of the feedback of the participants. These elements are very useful and will be critical in developing the model. At the same time, looking back at the characteristics of my model compared to the Halftime model, the ISE model and Ignatian spiritual practice, I believe I have demonstrated my

model has contributed to the dynamic interior spiritual journeys of a group of midlife Christian professionals. The uniqueness of the model, including its simplicity, flexibility, adaptability, inclusivity of intercultural and inter-faith elements in Hong Kong; its open-ended interview and dialogue with the participants for free expression of their experience, as well as the positive benefits experienced by the participants, has indeed provided an answer to the midlife questions Christian professionals in Hong Kong are facing today.

Chapter Eight: Conclusion

In this concluding chapter, I would like to begin with some touching experiences of the participants. The spiritual journeys and midlife transformation of the participants were exciting adventures in interiority. Similarly, I experienced my own transformation along with the participants in this special research journey.

“After the spiritual practice journey, I found my change in life from despair to hope and from darkness to light. The most critical is that I have experienced my interior journey”

(Participant A)

“Before the research, I was lost and confused in life. Something changed through these eight weeks. I found it was not like research. It was a special invitation and gift of God”

(Participant C)

“I realized God has been walking with me in my life journey. From doing to being, my heart is opened and it is a turning point in my spiritual growth by passing through the wall”

(Participant F)

Starting the Journey

Over ten years ago, I started this spiritual search for interiority. Buford’s model did help in raising the halftime concept, but did not help with answering my question. The anxiety inside me could not be calmed by my external professional success. I took up apophatic contemplation, but could not penetrate the deeply-hidden conflict between the values of the world and a life centred in God. I learnt about the concept “be still, that you may know God” (*Psalms* 46:10, NIV). Emptying my thoughts in the cloud of unknowing could not help me face the daily struggle

within my mind and heart. I then turned to the self-examination of an interior journey through Ignatian spirituality, while the Inspired Spiritual Education programme opened my eyes to Zen Buddhist mindfulness. Around that time, I went to Xavier Retreat House of the Society of Jesus to learn about Ignatian spirituality and practice. Even though I only pursued the foundational programme and practice, I could see a new horizon opening up in front of me. Meanwhile, I began my studies in practical theology, which turned out to be a reciprocal process enriching both my Ignatian spiritual practice and providing substance and direction to my doctoral research.

Both the process and the result of these dual journeys of personal spirituality and research into spiritual practice for the midlife Christian professionals in Hong Kong have been blessings, for me and for the group of six who participated in the research. I would like to capture my overall reflection in this concluding chapter:

“In the six years of walking the path of this practical theological study, I was transformed. The thesis created at the end recorded the spiritual journey of interiority of six participants in the research. Writing their stories transformed my life. That is the fruit of my study”.

I have gained a lot from the research, which has been challenging and yet rewarding. The participants I invited had their own unique experiences of this spiritual journey of interiority. They enjoyed and found it meaningful. I feel blessed and grateful to end this last phase of my dual journey with this final chapter of the thesis.

Answering the Research Questions

The research began with the question: what phenomena characterise the midlife transformation of Christian professionals in Hong Kong when using an evolving a model of spiritual practice? Out of an inductive qualitative research process and the employment of IPA methodology for detailed data analysis, I found the answer in the three emergent themes of connectedness, discernment and transformation.

The three levels of interpretation of the empirical data provided a comprehensive and in-depth interpretive discussion of the findings. Through identification of the commonalities and unique individual experiences of the participants, analysis of the findings from Lonergan's perspective of EUJD and my own interpretive discussion, I answered the research question about the midlife transformation of Christian professionals in Hong Kong.

When analysing connectedness, discernment and transformation, following Lonergan's schema of experiencing, understanding, judgment and decision, I could discern how the participants experienced complex emotional stirrings when moving into the four levels of consciousness. I became aware of the experiences of the participants through my interviews with them, and listening to their individual stories, which they shared with passion and sincerity, of how they connected to their hidden selves, shadows, past, and also with God. They shared their experiences of being touched spiritually and of beginning to move into the journey of discernment and transformation. I bore witness to their desire and yearning for transformation.

I acquired knowledge of this small group of midlife Christian professionals and the features of their interior spiritual journeys from an interpretive analysis of the themes. Through the dialogue between the empirical findings and the theoretical perspectives of the Halftime model, Ignatian spirituality and Buddhist mindfulness, I gained an even deeper understanding of this interior spiritual journey and its implications. The finding of the themes demonstrated that an external focus on the move from success to significance provided by the Halftime model could not satisfy the interior yearnings of midlife. Buddhist mindfulness, which leads into a silent mode in the spirit of love, and regular daily and continuous spiritual practice in the fast-paced society of Hong Kong, made it possible for participants to find God in all things in a secular world. When they paused and became silent, they connected with the past, which triggered deep stirrings of emotion. It was a complex and dynamic interior movement in which they were in the process of discerning the spirit of God's love. This was also true when they connected with significant people or critical incidents in life. It should also be noted that the research sample was small, and consequently it is not possible to make any kind of generalizations. Nevertheless, the phenomena of their spiritual experiences still showed, to a certain extent, that the theological perspectives adopted for the research have contemporary significance for the analysis of midlife Christian professionals in Hong Kong.

As part of the process of identifying the phenomena of the three themes, I experienced and discovered what I saw and noticed. Then, through dialogue between the themes and theoretical perspectives, I realized a deeper meaning of an interior spiritual journey and analysed the rich insights and implications. The decision that led from this was that of taking action to further develop and apply the model of spiritual practice.

After reflecting on the implications of the complex dynamic interior movement, I considered the feedback of the participants and evaluated the model of spiritual practice. Based on this assessment, I developed the model further by retaining or modifying key elements for future use. The model could be repeated continuously by other participants, followed by further review and improvement. Even during this research period, I have successfully transferred the model to my professional practice and have applied it in a different context. It is important to note that the model can evolve, and be developed and applied continuously with further input from similar groups of midlife Christian professional participants or larger groups of different audiences. This evolving model of practice will thus continue to contribute to an understanding of the spiritual experiences of midlife professionals.

Contribution to Knowledge

The theological dialogue and the practical applications of the model together contribute to knowledge by providing a new understanding of the phenomenon of midlife transformation through an interior journey of connectedness, discernment and transformation. On this level, there are two evidenced and major contributions. Firstly, the themes of connectedness, discernment and transformation answered the midlife transformation question at the heart of my small-scale study. Secondly, the model of spiritual practice produced positive results, which were confirmed by the participants, and hence it deserves to be continued and developed further. I will discuss the implications of these two main contributions.

Through the dialogue between the themes of connectedness, discernment and transformation and the theoretical perspectives of the Halftime model, Ignatian spirituality and Buddhist

mindfulness, the research has created a synergy among different value systems and theoretical concepts. This synergy is the first contribution to knowledge. The understanding of the midlife transformation of Christian professionals in Hong Kong, arose from a focus on exterior success of the contemporary halftime concept, and a realization of an interior spiritual movement from the thousand year old tradition of Ignatian spirituality. The eastern concept of Buddhist mindfulness and the western concepts of the examen and discernment of spirits from Ignatian spirituality provided an interfaith practice connecting with and discerning the inner heart journey. The spiritual experience of the participants revealed common phenomena through the three themes, but also diverse individual unique experiences in each of the different contexts. This research has therefore demonstrated the unique synergy contributed by various values and theoretical perspectives through a simple direct model of spiritual practice. These different value systems and theories came together in supporting the experiences of the participants individually and collectively. This synergy is a unique contribution to knowledge.

Secondly, the research and its empirical findings have addressed a gap in knowledge. From my exhaustive literature review, I could not find any other academic study directly addressing the midlife spiritual experience of Christian professionals in Hong Kong. By pioneering this research with a small group of midlife Christian professionals as participants, the emergent themes of connectedness, discernment and transformation filled a research gap and contributed the knowledge about the phenomena of midlife transformation. Moreover, I did not provide any training for the participants and it was thus a pure experience of allowing the participants to encounter God without any interference. The uniqueness of this is that it was solely the participants' experience, without interference or influence from me, before or during their

practice. This honest and personal experience was a pure gift of God allowing God to lead. Through this research, I have contributed the knowledge of midlife Christian transformation through this small group of participant's dynamic spiritual experience.

Thirdly, the research finding of connectedness, discernment and transformation demonstrated the relevance of the core Ignatian teaching to contemporary Hong Kong. This is a contribution to knowledge in pulling various Ignatian theologian perspectives together to study the midlife spiritual journey in a contemporary world. My use of Sheldrake, Aschenbrenner, Lonergan and Gallagher in constructing an important theological perspective from Ignatian spirituality, which I would then build into the conceptual framework, proved effective and yielded positive results. Sheldrake's urban everyday life spirituality helped place the spiritual practice of the participants in the urban context of Hong Kong. Aschenbrenner provided a broader vision to the understanding and application of the Ignatian concepts of the examen and the discernment of spirits. The concept of the examen of consciousness was essential for research into the spiritual journey of interiority, because it was to this concept that Lonergan's four levels of consciousness and Gallagher's threefold paradigm could be applied in order to dig into the deeper structure of the spiritual experiences of the participants. The contemporary relevance of Ignatian spirituality has been widely explored and promoted by organizations such as the Ignatian Loyola Press and the online dotMagis: Ignatian Spirituality. However, the attempt to pool the wisdom of Sheldrake, Aschenbrenner, Lonergan and Gallagher in a focused analysis of a spiritual journey of interiority was new.

Fourthly, by applying the wisdom of this group of Ignatian theologians to this study, one of the core concepts of Ignatian spirituality, i.e., the finding of God in all things, was illustrated in these participants in everyday mundane life. Through the movement of the examen and the discernment of spirits, they journeyed into their interior. This provided a new understanding of everyday spirituality in the city of Hong Kong. The features of everyday spirituality include having mindful silent meditation anywhere and anytime in the midst of an everyday busy stressful life like meditating in a noisy restaurant during breakfast or quiet solitude in the car before going home. This findings contribute to the knowledge of finding God in all things, the core feature of Ignatian spirituality, in the real world.

Contribution to Practice

Through the model specifically designed for the research, the spiritual experiences of these six midlife Christian professionals could be studied systematically and analysed using a practical theological approach which contributes to both knowledge and practice. My simple practical model was effective in facilitating their interior spiritual journeys and their various levels of connectedness, discernment and transformation. This is the major contribution to practice. The contribution of the model of spiritual practice can be appreciated from the following perspectives:

Firstly, I created a local Hong Kong-designed model of spiritual practice for Hong Kong Chinese that goes beyond Buford's Halftime model. The Halftime model, with its basis in American executive training, identifies the challenges confronting midlife Christians, but its approach is focused on activities to help them analyse their core values, their capabilities and their living

context. There is very little discussion or guidance about the interior spiritual dimension of their lives. My design takes a different approach, emphasizing interiority. From the positive results of the participants, having undergone their spiritual journeys and having left behind a full load of reflections and interpretations of their experiences, it is justifiable to say that this simple model is effective. This simple and practical model, with its theological foundation, can be further applied, refined and developed for other midlife Christians, for different age groups, or even for non-Christians. Feedback from the participants, which includes the simplicity and flexibility of the model in facilitating silence, meditation, journaling and connecting with self, past and God is useful. The suggested new elements are worth considering for future models, including the suggestion of connecting with nature or adding gospel meditations.

Secondly, putting the findings of the three themes and their interpretation together, a potential contribution is related the possibility of a broader development of a model based on Ignatian spirituality, especially its application and methodology, in assisting midlife Christian professionals in Hong Kong. The spiritual needs of this group of people are great. If Buford's model does not fulfil their spiritual needs, there is a good chance that some of the contemporary interpretations of Ignatian spirituality, including those of Lonergan, Aschenbrenner, Sheldrake and Gallagher, may be able to promote the localization process for these busy professionals. Basic concepts like the examen of consciousness and a discerning spirit, EUJD, and the threefold paradigm, are useful in helping these professionals find their spiritual fulfilment in daily life. This may be a point for me to consider in the continuous evolution of my model.

Thirdly, it is a unique model, simple and practical and with strong theological foundations. The design of the model is the first attempt to bring out the features of Ignatian spirituality through a number of prominent Ignatian theologians whose insights are melded into a conceptual framework. The characteristics of the Ignatian-based model are translated and applied in simple and practical ways through mindfulness, silent meditation and journaling. There is no complex theological language and no requirement for the participants to have prior knowledge or experience of any spiritual practice. To be true to the spirit of Christian meditation in general and in particular to Aschenbrenner and Gallagher in their writings about the examen and discernment, the model allows unlimited and unrestricted space and time for the participants to receive the gift from God. Hence, the character of the model and its construction are important contributions in themselves.

Fourthly, is the contribution of the research model in my professional practice. The transfer of the important features of the model and practice in the transformation workshop for leaders and managers in Gene company, have shown its effectiveness and transferability in different groups of audiences, including non-Christians in business organization context. This is an important contribution to professional practice with potential development in evolving the model.

Lastly, the model has made contribution to a dynamic intercultural context. The findings showed the spiritual experiences related to rich vivid remembrances and connections with childhood or family relationships. Many Hong Kong Chinese grow up in a culture very familiar with Buddhist mindfulness and the Confucian tradition, with its Chinese values of family relationships, face-saving and humility. This simple practical model, making use of journaling, silent meditation and

mindfulness, suits the intercultural context and contributes to the exploration of the interior journey.

In the future, the model just needs continued development in application and refinement for spiritual practice. The spiritual practice itself is one thing, and the other important thing is how the participants might sustain and continue the changes after eight weeks. There might be a need for follow-up and sustained effort. This is something to consider for the future.

Development of My Professional Practice

Since early 2017, after taking up a special in-house consultancy service to Gene company, I have applied my model and conducted a transformation workshop and retreat for four leaders and managers in Hong Kong. With the effective changes in people, the company has invited me to design a Gene Spirituality Academy for their colleagues in Hong Kong, and in the longer term, for their colleagues in the Chinese mainland. My vision of translating spirituality in the secular world is progressing and realizing because of this research. This positive transformation of the leaders through applying the features of Ignatian spirituality in real life practice has shown the significance of further developing and refining the model through my professional practice. As a result of this research, I have learnt the way and the importance of interiority of midlife Christian professionals living in the busy world of Hong Kong.

At the same time, there is much valuable content and many perspectives to be examined from the rich data from the interviews. Besides my professional practice, I have delivered talks and workshops, sharing my research with Catholics, Protestants and non-Christian midlife seekers.

Some Christian groups and communities have invited me to present my research findings at their conferences, seminars and group gatherings. Another potential development is an invitation to join the Ignatian spirituality conference and dialogue with international and local theologians. This is my mission in my second phase of life: to serve as a bridge between academia and the business world as well as to act as an agent facilitating spirituality in the secular world.

The Halftime Ministry and Institute and the Catholic community are aware of my doctoral research and are interested in inviting me to share the research and findings. Catholic BonFire Association, which aims to promote Ignatian spirituality for busy people after work in the city, has also invited me to partner with them to advocate my spiritual practice model particularly for executives in the stressful environment of Hong Kong. The future practice and development of the model could evolve when applied to a larger and more diverse group of people. They are likely to be interested in finding out more about the spiritual significance of the pioneering study and flexible model, especially the experiences of connectedness, discernment and transformation as representative phenomena of spiritual transformation, since this is probably the first study on the phenomenon of midlife Christian professionals in the city.

Limitations of the Research

Since this qualitative research was designed to allow the voices of midlife Christian professionals to be heard, the study presented a different understanding of the lived experience of the six participants' spiritual practice because of my interpretation. As a midlife Christian professional, my interpretation as a researcher is provisional and inevitably shaped by my own experiences and context. Throughout the twenty-four interviews, as well as the data analysis

process, I was extremely careful, and was aware of the need to make the process as transparent and objective as possible by listening to the interview recordings a few times, reading the verbatim reports line-by-line, coding the data on two levels, clustering the codes into categories and allowing the themes to emerge.

With the specific purpose of this research, the targeted participants were selected with the common characteristic of being midlife Christian professionals in Hong Kong. This is a relatively small-scale project and one might wonder whether this sampling of six participants can represent the midlife Christian professional group. As this research is a first attempt to investigate the specific midlife issue, it requires a broad and open sample. In its future evolution, a much more structured design for sampling could be considered. At the same time, even though there were just six participants, I collected empirical data from twenty four interviews: i.e., four interviews with each of the six participants over eight weeks' practice. It was thus possible to generate a very rich description and interpretation of this data to address what happened through practising the model.

Taking into consideration Peter Knight's (2001) study of small-scale projects, even though this is small-scale research with six participants, there could be a valuable contribution to the wider worlds of practice, policy, and theory. The key for creating value from small-scale research is the use of proper methodologies and theoretical considerations with an emphasis on sensemaking, claim-making, and complexity (Knight, 2001). I have offered a methodology of IPA with detailed data analysis of the twenty-four interviews, and also different levels of interpretive analysis of the rich spiritual experiences, as interpreted by the participants, my own

interpretation, and the theological perspectives of Lonergan. I have also designed a model of spiritual practice that contributes to a discipline and research practice by offering a reasonable way of obtaining information and hence allowing claims to be made about the midlife transformation experience.

The results from use of the model were revealed through the discovery of the emerging themes of connectedness, discernment and transformation of the participants. Different levels of transformation occurred in each participant through the themes of the interior spiritual journey, including new perspectives about their past experiences, direction of calling, relationships or positive changes in attitude and behaviour.

The research makes sense of a wider world through a detailed interpretive analysis or double hermeneutic. The claim that I have created a simple practical model of spiritual practice that midlife Christian professionals can use to connect their thoughts or beliefs and past experiences with God, and to discern the meaning of life and hence take action for life, is appropriate. This is a reasonable and research-informed achievement in its own right (Knight, 2001, p.125). Therefore, while this small-scale research might not be able to make strong claims that the study has any particular significance for other sites in general (p.126), it is perfectly fair to point out the research findings of the three themes that emerged from the spiritual experiences of the participants. The first level of interpretation by the participants, the analysis of Lonergan's EUJD perspective, the second level of the interpretation by the researcher, and the dialogue with the theoretical perspectives, all contribute to the understanding and knowledge of the midlife transformation and spiritual experience of Christian professionals in Hong Kong.

The model is designed based on experience and analysis of the Halftime model, the ISE model and Ignatian spirituality. There may well be other related questions about the model, e.g., whether it should be eight weeks or longer, or if we need guided or open questions, or prior training sessions before the practice begins, etc. The original decision to have eight weeks of simple practice was made because the duration of the practice should meet the needs of these busy midlife Christian professionals, who cannot afford to spend too long, yet need to be allowed to pause and reflect and experience the internal movement of the heart.

Reflection on My Intellectual and Personal Journey

In the course of six years of research, I have read intensively about spirituality related to the Ignatian practice, especially in the Hong Kong Chinese cultural context. My first doctorate in business administration took a quantitative approach to organizational management, which was very different from a qualitative study in abstract concepts and ideas. The first part of my academic study was related to social work and psychological practice, and did not involve much philosophical or theological training. At the beginning of the practical theological study, I had to make an extra effort to supplement my gap in these areas of knowledge with a lot of intensive reading. I began to build a foundation for theological study. The first two years, during a period where I was still the regional head of human resources in a global publishing company with demanding duties to fulfil, proved particularly challenging.

Since “the whole thrust of Practical Doctorate studies is to examine values, practices and performances in order to yield better performance” (Bennet, 2009, p.338), I am aware of

improvements in my performance in various different areas. I was not an experienced researcher before I started this Doctorate programme. This practical doctoral study has raised my level of thinking and conceptualizing, not only about the research issues, but in my experience of everyday life and in examining my own midlife transformation in relation to my values, passion and continuous calling. The reason for my midlife struggle is the desire to fulfil my inner yearning for something bigger than myself. It is because of the unity of God through this doctoral study that I know who I am as I find God in my own story and realize God has been searching me.

At the same time, practical theology is theological, as the research is about God and reveals not only our relationship with God, but who He is and who we are in His creation. My own transformative journey and the participants' experiences of connecting with past shadows and struggles are part of the journey of returning to the home of God and discerning our true identities. God was working along with me and the participants in the whole research process. He was calling us to find Him through the research of spiritual practice, in meditation and stirring of emotions. We find God in all things, but He has been yearning to find us in all our experience. For me, the practical theology in this research not only demonstrates the power of reflective practice, but also empowers me as a divine tool of God. I have a deep relationship in union with God through the spiritual experiences of six stories and myself. God is in the process of making use of the experiences of me and the participants to reveal one of the mysteries of Christianity: we are in Him and He is within us. Through this model of spiritual practice, I can appreciate what Ignatius means by "finding God in all things".

It is very clear from this research that my calling is related to advocacy and support for those who are struggling with midlife or a life direction generally, especially in this secular world. The practical doctorate has been a pilgrimage for me, not only in creating new knowledge and making changes in my professional practice, but also as a spiritual journey walking intimately with God. As a practitioner in business for more than thirty years, and with a doctoral degree in Business Management from a quantitative study, the qualitative approach of this research has forced me to go much deeper into the analysis of values and concepts, the hermeneutics of theological discussion and the appreciation of issues confronting spiritual practice in context. I can come out to the front to state the research has certainly helped me improve my ability to analyse the spiritual model, which is still evolving, and discern how to adjust it for different midlife professional groups in Hong Kong society.

My Personal Pilgrimage and Practical Theology

Looking back over the past six years, I recognize I have been transformed through this professional doctoral research. Because of this research, six participants have been transformed in the process of connectedness. They have experienced the process of transformation in different ways. I have now found the answer. Writing their stories, interviewing them, reflecting them, recording them, transcribing them...it is a process of practicing *lectio divina*. This process of writing their stories has transformed my life. I am transformed. As I designed the model to go through the journey, at the same time, I walked through this journey accompanying them, like the walk to Emmaus. Through the continuous process of analysing the experience of the participants and interpreting the data using IPA, I went deeper and deeper into their experience.

During the process of the eight week interviews, I had many grace-filled moments as I listened to the participant's ah-ha moment. I discovered God has given me the most graceful moment in midlife when I was struggling with the external success and yearning for my identity. Through my participants and my life stories, I am awakened that it is a home coming process to go through darkness, anxiety, lonely, confusion before seeing the light in it. The false-self has been lying to me and the participants that we are defined by success, wealth and position. The process of letting go, cleansing and purifying through the research process, experiencing the past with the hidden shadows, purifying the heart to regain the grace of knowing we are the children of God. The realization of our true-self come with the inner peace without any demands or needs. It is the true inner joy and freedom in the union with God.

Therefore, it was not just an intellectual analysis. I was connecting, reconnecting, and reflecting on their experience, enriching my spiritual confidence and this is the way to link up with God intimately. My faith grew stronger and I received confirmation that this is the way for professionals to practice spirituality. That is why I have full confidence in applying the model at Gene Company. In writing this thesis, I have received the confirmation that this is the way to resolve midlife spiritual issues. I began to feel that I was writing something spiritual. It is a spiritual record. In fact, my anguish, my desires and my deep anxiety through writing the thesis led to my own dialogue with myself, my past and God. This thesis ultimately became a part of my spiritual journey of interiority. Transformation took place from the start of the process till the end. The movement of interiority was one of increasing joy, even while going through darkness, shadows. This was thus a journey of recalling my own darkness and the grace of God. It was a

process of union with God through all the suffering. God has a purpose for us and wants us to walk in this purposeful journey, individually and collectively.

Over the last six years of this practical theological doctoral research, I have been practicing, reflecting, growing, forming, transforming and practicing again, together with developing the theses that started from my midlife search for a direction. These tasks included: exploring an inner journey through experiencing the Ignatian spiritual exercises myself; further examining the inter-religious elements of Kwan's ISE model; designing my modified spiritual practice model; applying important concepts and theological elements into the model; conducting the research; going through in-depth interactions through eight-week interviews; applying the key elements of my model in my own consulting practice; and leading key executives into an inner journey and transformation. At the beginning of the journey, I was still struggling with my own midlife transition, leaving a full-time successful senior executive role to pursue a new journey integrating my first half of life experience, and practicing and reflecting through theological enlightenment. The end of the study in practical theology has now opened the door to the next phase of my life, to gather the fruits of the research and the experience of creating this evolving model. The experiences the participants have shared with me have opened my eyes to the demand by midlife Christian professionals in Hong Kong for spiritual fulfilment. In my consultancy and coaching service, I have already applied the nascent model in modified forms to help professionals, Christian and non-Christian alike. This is a process I have been moving through, in order to integrate my learning with my practice, and to continue my search for a spirituality of everyday life.

Now at the end of this thesis, an important affirmation of my faith is fundamental. I have found God in all things, and in all the people I met, in the participants, in my supervisors, in my cohorts, in my family. All the dots of life connected together to make this research a witness to God's amazing work. Through this practical theological research project, my spiritual journey has been inspired, enriched and empowered. In my own context as a midlife Christian professional, living in a stressful fast-moving commercial intercultural society of Hong Kong, my continuous reflection on the rich findings of this research will inspire more people in their journeys and everyday spirituality.

Conclusion

Looking over the last ten years of my life, I see how I transformed from a seasoned Human Resources Director in investment banking into an advocate of spirituality for midlife Christian professionals. Through this research, I have connected with my hidden shadows my history, and God's will in giving me the desire, the gifts of experience, the passion and the opportunity to witness the transformation of the six midlife Christian professionals. Their transformation further strengthens and confirms my own transformation, and functions as a bridge of knowledge and practice for advocating spirituality in a contemporary secular world for midlife (or other) groups in the community and the world. This is the answer for my second phase of life, which had already begun in the process of this research. The success of planting the seeds of inner change with the executives at Gene Company has proven the worth of spiritual practice in transformation.

This practical theology research is unique in many ways. It is not only a pilgrimage integrating my personal reflection, theological understanding and a real-life spiritual practice model. It is also an original piece of work demonstrating a systematic practical means of transformation for a specific group of midlife Christian professionals living in intercultural, dynamic and fast-moving Hong Kong.

The themes of connectedness, discernment and transformation have answered the research question about the midlife transformation phenomena of Christian professionals in Hong Kong, and the effectiveness of the evolving model I designed. The rich findings of the six participants have proven the usefulness of the model. The process of midlife transformation is dynamic and complex, showing an interior movement of interaction with God that is closely related to experiencing, understanding, judging and acting. Even though the sample is small, I can see how a simple, regular, persistent spiritual practice can be possible, for these participants successfully went through this process in everyday life. Ordinary people, like midlife Christian professionals in Hong Kong, can practice every-day spirituality outside of the monastic tradition with its formal retreats. This means we can find the sacred anywhere and find meaning in life in the here and now. I have started to review the evolving model, which I sincerely hope can gradually expand and be refined to provide further research and service in the realm of practical theology.

The research is the beginning and not the end of the journey. It is the beginning opening up the mystery of spirituality and translating it through a simple practical model of daily and weekly spiritual practice. This research could have further implications and significant impact with continuous effort influencing many other professionals, ages and even non-Christians. This is the

mission I have, through this practical theology doctorate study, to articulate and translate spirituality in a simple way to the world.

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Appendix One: First Cycle of Codes

Participant A

1st Interview

My first feeling from the discipline silent practice and living was facing myself and feeling. It was a special 2 weeks facing self through incidents, people and feeling.

Comments and Coding: facing himself and feeling through silent practice; linking up self, incidents and people (Linking self and incidents and people).

I was driven with strong drive next morning to love others fully. I took the initiative and slowed down to greet the security guard working at my apartment. I was surprised what I did.

Comments and Coding: Following the awareness to love others fully, got a strong drive to take action and slow down to greet people. He was surprised of his positive change (Behavioral change with concrete action occurred immediately after initial spiritual practice).

Another second incident stirred up my feelings. I went to an island alone and enjoyed the process and experiencing something different. I found life is so vulnerable especially when I was alone. I tasted and felt that life is controlled by God.

Comments and Coding: His feeling was stirred up when alone and experiencing life and God.

Process and experiencing something different with understanding that life is controlled by God (Experiencing life and God with stirrings in solitude).

When connecting with nature, it was grace, energy, spirit, thanks and happiness with small things. When eating tofu, clean water, beach, lying on the beach and enjoy. How wonderful it

was..... Discovered I was integrating with nature in the island with thanksgiving. I felt very relaxed after that. Realized all happy and rich life indeed surrounding me. All things are blessings.

Comments and Coding: Enjoyed solitude in island. Connecting with nature and found rich life and blessings in small things. (Realization that through connecting with nature, blessings can be experienced).

It was quiet and relaxed to taste and remember. Everyday mindful breathing, looking back, reflect feeling....listening to God. This process was very special. Being alone praying in an island connected my internal flow of emotions. Breathing made me pause, feeling awake, alive and peaceful. The spirit of life came with thanks and just letting go. Thanks is a real feeling I experienced in the island.

Comments and Coding: Enjoyed experience of meditating alone in island, connecting self and nature and listening to God at the same time. A special process of spiritual life came out with thanks. Just let go. (The process of connecting self and nature simultaneously listening to God, feeling awake and peaceful. Thanks as a real feeling)

These 6 shadows had hindered my joy and freedom. I could acknowledge it and start to understand its impact. I was meditating and lighting up a candle in a dark room as if I was dealing with my shadows. In despair, three words 'to love fully' came up as the best way to deal with my shadows as it came from God's love. I need to embrace my shadow, face and dialogue with little inner child.

Comments and Coding: Acknowledged the impact of shadows hindering joy and freedom. He wanted to embrace it and overcome it. To love fully came from God to resolve the shadows (Embrace and overcome shadows in God).

I was like a crying child in my mother's arm and seeking for deep love. I know my shadows will not go away. These shadows had been hindering my joy and freedom. I could acknowledge the shadows bit by bit now and started to understand their impact on my life.

Comments and Coding: Faced with shadows during linking up inner self. Gradually accepted them to understand their impact on his life. (In linking up self and shadows, developed ability to acknowledge and understand impact of shadow on life)

In my silent practice, I was meditating that I was lighting up a candle in a dark room. I was prepared to tidy up the shadows even in a chaotic and confused environment. I also need to face the little A (his name) inside me. In my despair, three words came out: 'to love fully'. The best way to deal with the shadows was to love fully. Love fully meant to love myself, love all those people surrounding me.

Comments and Coding: When tidying up the shadows, he recognized the need to face the little A inside him. suddenly came up with three words to deal with them: to love fully. (Attempted to tidy up shadows in the hidden self, the little A, and to deal with shadows through love)

This is a special week facing myself and my feeling. I seldom experienced it but feeling just came out when connecting to self in silence. The past traumatic childhood appeared in the spiritual practice. My father basically abandoned us and he hurt us deeply. The sense of abandonment

was strong since childhood together with shame. When my father's affair was exposed to people at my school, I could not walk with my heads up The divorced parent, the irresponsible father and broken family made me hard to trust any relationship or anyone.

Comments and Coding: Silent meditation brought out feelings and saw clearly shadows of abandonment by father. (Tracing past relationship with loved ones hidden in shadows; acknowledging unredeemed past)

2nd Interview

I had a lot of dilemma. I did not want to see my mother who had hurt me deeply. But as Christian, I have to love her. I have changed to believe in God and not in human weaknesses. God can make anything possible. It is clear message for discernment. God had turned me to forgive.

Comments and Coding: In a dilemma of feeling hurt from his mother and struggled to forgive as a Christian. God had changed him to forgive (Redeeming the past and forgive through God)

When meditating, I got the strong and vigorous feeling when remembering of my grandmother. I cried seriously when remembering my grandmother during meditation. This was the first time I cried so much. This is grace and gratitude. When I know there is someone 100% loving me without condition, I felt a touch of deep love like God. This feeling was so strong and vigorous as if I was tasting the heaven on earth.

Comments and Coding: He was deeply touched by the love of grandmother with vigorous emotions and crying so much for the first time when remembering and reconnecting her. He felt it was a touch of God's love (While remembering love of grandmother with strong emotional

response, soon realized it was grace and gratitude of her full love for him. Then he was touched with this deep love like God).

I am very close to my boss and take care of 200 employees. I witnessed God's power in the world through my boss integrating business and faith. It is discernment. I discern a clear message that God always turns impossible to possible.

Comments and Coding: Witnessed the power of God through his boss; discerned God's plan turning impossible to possible (Witnessed and discerned God's power in his former boss).

It was a surprise as being invited as a deacon. I was puzzled and seek discernment of God. In silence, I listened a voice: "Do it for me." God turned impossible to possible if under His will.

Comments and Coding: He was surprised to be invited as deacon. He then discerned the decision through silence and listening (Discernment of God's voice in accepting deacon position).

Frankly speaking, the most important thing was the courage to lead and start new things, new concept, new idea, new environment..... It may involve higher risk. Then I meditated my long-term vision "Management Thought Leader" in Asia, China, HK.

Comments and Coding: When thinking about issues of courage to lead and innovate, he meditated to find his long-term vision to develop management thought leader in Asia, China, Hong Kong. (His professional background with his long-term vision to management helped him in church service).

Feel deeply that other thing is also important. I know the here and now time to relate to people is important. I pray for God at anytime anywhere and want to connect with God.

Comments and Coding: He realized the importance of relating with self and others here and now. He was also aware of the importance connecting with God (Desire to have here and now connection with God and people).

3rd Interview

The boss of this company affected me a lot. I observed how a Christian integrated his faith with business.....At that time, I was in the process of searching Christianity and amazed by my boss faith.... His love and God's guidance showed me amazing grace.....He was the witness to me and changed my views on Christians. God can make anything possible.

Comments and Coding: Recalling influenced by his former boss, he found witness of someone who could integrate faith with business and work. (Realization of his influence of his former boss as God's witness of integration of faith and work)

I am very close to my boss and take care of 200 employees. I witnessed God's power in the world through my boss integrating business and faith. It is discernment. I discern a clear message that God always turns impossible to possible.

Comments and Coding: Witnessed the power of God through his boss; discerned God's plan turning impossible to possible (Witnessed and discerned God's power in his former boss).

It was a surprise as being invited as a deacon. I was puzzled and seek discernment of God. In silence, I listened a voice: "Do it for me." God turned impossible to possible if under His will.

Comments and Coding: He was surprised to be invited as deacon. He then discerned the decision through silence and listening (Discernment of God's voice in accepting deacon position).

I observed God's will with more clarity when I looked back. Then I discerned the priority of my life.

Comments and Coding: When looking back, he saw God's plan with clarity. He also discerned his life priority (Linking up the past now and observed with clarity. Then he could discern priority of life).

I found I lacked theology to serve the church. God opened the way through training and teaching and serving the church, seminary school and workplace through teamwork, management and leadership.

Comments & Coding: Even felt lacking to serve, he found God had prepared his experience and past to serve the church. He had revealed God's direction (Discernment of God's way).

Frankly speaking, the most important thing was the courage to lead and start new things, new concept, new idea, new environment..... It may involve higher risk. Then I meditated my long-term vision "Management Thought Leader" in Asia, China, HK.

Comments and Coding: When thinking about issues of courage to lead and innovate, he meditated to find his long-term vision to develop management thought leader in Asia, China, Hong Kong. (His professional background with his long-term vision to management helped him in church service).

4th Interview

In reflecting last eight weeks, this journey provided a map for reviewing my first half of life connecting to shadows of confusion, despair to family, death experience. Now, I believed that life is not belonging to me. Renewal of life is to letting go to God_____.

Comments and Coding: The last 8 weeks had provided a map for reviewing first half of life connecting to shadows of confusion, despair, family and death experience. He realized the letting go to allow God to renew life (Connecting to shadows to reviewing first half of life and renewing life for second half).

I found the change from despair to hope, confusion to joy, death to new life. This ability to transform came from hope and it is key and critical.

Comments and Coding: The shift from despair to hope, confusion to joy, death to life came from the transformation with hope (Transformation from the power of hope).

Participant B

1st interview

Connecting to most important things daily life..... Taste and feel daily discovery and surroundings people.

Comments and Coding: During meditation, connecting to most important things in daily life; tasting, feeling and discovering surroundings. (Connecting self and others in daily life)

Thinking not only last 2 weeks and also in the past – feel the nature, weather.....raining or sunny – feel very joyful.

Comments and Coding: going beyond prescribed two weeks meditation, feeling nature and also feeling happy; (from reflecting on self to feeling of nature simultaneously, and feeling joy).

Relax, enjoy the process – insight, more ideas coming up – having neglected and disconnected with other people, Including not saying thanks, not being good.....coming up in silence..... That day, discover something not caring for others – not so good

Comments and Coding: with more insight; noticed past wrong doing of neglecting others, not thankful, realized it not being good; discover lack of concern for others. (Disconnected and neglecting others and discovery of self-centeredness)

Stillness – not using brain – coming from the heart.....

Using heart – feel others feeling. No judgement call, no measurement.....

Comments and Coding: Stillness connects heart; heart and feeling without judgement; want to feel other people's feeling. (Feeling deeper level of contact with heart and feeling)

Deeper taste in daily life including studying, eating. Instead of mere action and reaction mode.

Comments and Coding: Instead of mechanical type of action-reaction mode of living, starting to have deeper taste in daily life (Changing to have ability to taste life deeper)

Now more attentive to people due to reflection, their emotion and feeling. Attentive to self emotion, other emotion and response. Strong internal emotion or movement during reflection

Comments and Coding: Due to reflection, become be more attentive to people, emotion and reflection. strong internal movement and emotions. (Liking up with self becoming more attentive to people and self, including strong internal emotion)

God – everywhere..... God grace in culture and traditions. Source of energy and power – coming from all people's goodness and want to be better.

Comments and Coding: Recognizing God is everywhere; God grace in culture and traditions and people's goodness (From returning to God and find God in culture and tradition)

How to expand our spiritual space – will power. Not living in small ego...

Sacred space – connect to God – transcendence

Comments and Coding: Want to expand spiritual space, not to be egocentric;. Sacred space through connecting with God , the way to transcendence (Clear identification of how to connecting to God and leading to transcendence).

Sense of awakening in life, new meaning, inner meaning

Comments and Coding: awakened living and new life meaning (Awakening life and discernment)

Difficult practice in busy life. Link up yoga and exercise and mindful breathing.....feel the body in yoga – return to self through body to self. Do it naturally and images appear when relax and attentive and enjoy

Comments and Coding: Combine yoga and mindful breathing together; relax, enjoy, attentive (Different intercultural spiritual practice)

find self not respecting all things – find out in calligraphy

Comments and Coding: calligraphy as means to discover self; calligraphy connect self discovery (Means of Spiritual practice)

2nd interview

Went to Chinese cultural camp.. ..Find it very full and clear about something.

Returning to self – to the needs of self – the feeling of inner heart and original self/heart.

Comments and Coding: Chinese culture and “heart” meditation; going back to “original heart” (a Buddhist concept); No need to seek external needs, self’s original heart and inner heart are sufficient. (Intercultural experience and understanding of meditation)

Learn that Chinese culture helps me how to be a good person with ideal and moral character.....learn and action. This is a method and not just talking.... After I realized, I will practice. This is a process.

Comments and Coding: Further confirmation of intercultural perspective of meditation and reflection; Chinese culture and practice in life. (Intercultural understanding of spirituality)

I started to realize about how I deal with a person or I know I can take care of others. It is process. e.g. Last Monday – took a taxi with friend and he shared about his mom sickness and his son's troubles. In the past, I will just care but it is different now. I know something coming from my inner heart and energized to take some action for him. It is not from my brain.

Comments and Coding: Realized how to take care of others; a process of awareness of self and how to care for others (Feeling to be caring for others in a process; Awareness that it was from his inner heart)

It is not just an action and reaction but care and compassion from the heart. I got the feeling and will do something deeper. It is different from the past which was reaction. In the past, it was more superficial. I realized that I have connectedness to this friend. I can do more and care more.

Comments and Coding: Changed from action & reaction to caring and compassion from the heart; deeper feeling of connectedness to friends. (Change from passive to active care for others from the heart, and connectedness to others)

I realized and felt need to transcend myself— desire to transcend and change

Transcend – firstly realize what I can do. E.g. company 25th anniversary – I am not a sociable person. I realize this opportunity I can mix around and understand others more. I then stayed and interacted with them.....I see myself and others more – this is a transcending experience.

Comments and Coding: Desire to transcend himself and change by taking initiative to mix and interact with people. (Taking proactive change to mix and interact with people. Later affirmed that this is a transcending experience)

3rd interview

My will power and long-term plan direction – commit to Chinese culture and leave legacy of Chinese culture.... Discover myself that not determined to make important life direction and hesitated to change.

Comments and Coding: Recognition of his long term plan direction and commitment to Chinese culture and brought out his life direction of committing to Chinese culture. But also discovered his lack of determination to make important decisions (Recognition of life long direction but also lack determination to make decisions to change)

My will power – to face midlife struggle and conflict for midlife

Comments and Coding: Awareness of midlife struggle and conflicts; Tried to have will power to deal with it (Awareness of midlife crisis and will power to deal with it)

Using music like classic Chinese music to connect to inner self – I enter into the deeper inner heart – it is a spiritual approach and entering into the state of mind in stillness

Comments and Code: Classic Chinese music connects to deeper inner heart - spiritual approach entering stillness mind; effective meditation and breathing practice with classic music (Using Chinese music to connect inner self and deep inner heart: alternative approach to the spiritual practice model used in research)

Calling is a process – it is a calling for me to start queries of life

Comments and Code: Discovery that calling is a process - for him to start querying life including this research helps him linking up all relevant dots (The experience of meditation and reflection was now understood as a process of knowing his calling through queries of life issues)

When I have this internal touch, struggle and emotions – it is a calling of my inner heart.

Comments and Coding: Emphasis that calling of inner heart – this internal touch, struggle, emotions; he described this process as a calling of his inner heart (Awareness and insights of internal touch, struggle and emotions in his inner heart)

4th interview

When I am using head – I am only living as a mechanic. I should be walking in God and learning how to live with God. It includes Chinese culture.

Code: Awareness of difference between using head and walking in God and to live with God. Once again he placed this new insight in Chinese cultural context. (Differentiation between

mechanical and rational life from spiritual life with God, also placed in Chinese cultural context; differentiation and discernment)

Sensitivity to connecting my own self and with others – including relationship with wife and including relationship with nature – new recognition and understanding – one in nature.

Comments and Coding: Discovery of need to be connect to self and others, including nature; new recognition and understanding especially with nature. (Discovery of need of connecting himself to others and nature)

More spiritual practice and it is a continuous process....life long practice is needed... nurturing heart to make it stronger, from fear to less fear, process not ending

Comments and Coding: Discovery that spiritual practice as a continuous process nurturing heart and overcoming fear. (New insights and discernment)

Core – walking with God and union with Holy Spirit. Original heart – touching, authentic heart, sensitivity, compassion.....needs awareness

Comments and Coding: Identified the core – walking with God and union with Holy Spirit; emphasis on sensitivity and “original heart”, an interfaith or intercultural concept. (Clear understanding of the core of future life; using Chinese cultural concept of original heart to describe his faith)

Second phase of life – my wish is to contribute not only my wish list.

My work – any growth and transcendence at workplace of my colleagues. My focus is totally different than other leaders. This is the real meaning of job. I need to learn what I learnt and apply in work.

Comments and Code: Clear concept of second phase of life now; wish to contribute and not just daily wish list in work; wish for growth and transcendence at workplace of my colleagues as real meaning of job. (Decision on second phase of life; bringing up concept of transcendence

Participant C

1st Interview

Verbatim, comments and coding

First week – very worrying, very darkness, why I was worried, angry....I was facing myself....these special work of Holy Spirit which I had not experienced before

Comments and Coding: Starting to examine self and facing herself with worries and anger; believed it was the special work of Holy Spirit. (Self examination and linking up with inner self and to God in the early stage)

I was nursing team head....a lot of work and accomplished work according to the schedule and task list..... In the past – I could achieve the goal in a team. Why cannot do it now even small things.

Comments and Coding: Linking up and connecting her own professional background. (Placing her reflection in her profession context)

Why so much worries in these years. In the past, more happy and what was the reason?.....Fear – not all things can be controlled by self. Why something not working well? Why helper could not do it? Why husband not doing it?

Comments and Coding: Asking lots of question related to midlife worries, fear of out of control, and self doubts (Process of self examination with clear self-doubts)

Facing – difficulties – emotional difficulties.

In the past – not so strong to escape from it. Last week, have strong desire and drive to jump out of the difficulties..... Facing with self, ignoring others – if let go of my standard, more comfortable

Comments and Coding: Process of reflection moved to a stage of facing emotional difficulties and awareness of strong desire to escape and jump out of difficulties. (Moving into contact with inner self and emotion, facing difficulties and with self; awareness to change)

Following spirituality book - Nehemiah gospel – the king asked him to back to Jerusalem to rebuild the walls..... Real awakening – God answers me – reminds me not to use my own eyes to see but God's perspective to see.

Comments and Coding: From Bible reading to get inspiration and brought out experience of “real awakening” with God answering her to see from His eyes. (Process of reflection and insights from Bible to experience of awakening)

In the past – I was alone and that is why I was counting on myself and being alone. That night practising songs with choir, I have to count on others in practising songs. God told me I was not alone and no need to counting on myself. From loneliness to support from church

Comments and Coding: Linking up self with others. Awakening from being alone to team work and support from church. (Growing awareness to issues related to self and others)

Prayer for me two times – I felt lighter after praying. Felt the Holy Spirit working — relaxed first time.....work of the holy spirit - spiritual movement

Comments and Coding: At this early stage, already sought help from Holy Spirit; felt relaxed and transformed (Early connecting to Holy Spirit and relaxed)

*Second time prayer – the pain of kneel disappeared – I thanked God but still very rational.....
Feeling it may not be His plan and will to heal. Pastor said if we are willing, God is willing too.
Maybe different teaching and theology, affect me to think. Jesus said follow his plan.*

Comments and Coding: Continued to seek help from God for healing of knee pain; thankful for God's healing power; yet still felt rational (Faith in seeking God's help and His healing power)

Second week responded first week question. Second week response of God – amazing. Gospel helped me and words like swords very strong. It was wonderful.... I was a nurse and rational and knew my pain lasted for 10 years. It was chronic pain.

Comments and Coding: Felt amazed that first week's question was answered in the second week in God's response; Gospel inspired– wonderful (Amazing connection to God early in practice)

What do you recognize shadows? It made me so unhappy. Connecting to past, reflection – felt border line case after birth and maternity. Not addressing it as busy taking care of baby. More conflicts with husband about taking care of daughter, relationship with in-laws. Depression not yet treated. Moving a lot many time.

Comments and Coding: Efforts to recognize shadows and connect the past made her unhappy. Awareness of earlier depression and not cured; doubtful relationship and busy life; past burden

and pain not treated well; shadows and not taking care of self. (Connecting the past and shadows which brought awareness of midlife crisis)

I visualized a circle and felt strongly something was boiling. Something was moving and wanting to come out. It was like some bubbles boiling in a calm lake, wanting to burst out. I felt excited, with the expectations that something will be coming out. This excitement maybe my inner spiritual movement

Image of a circle – I felt strongly I was to come out from that circle. Some strong feeling....going back to nurse, theology study or others things from God... Discerning choices and directions of life - nursing, theology study....

Felt strongly in the workshop – coming out from the circle – life direction – theology, work.....Discerning God's choice..

Comments and Coding: Very vivid image of a circle with boiling water wanting to come out; strong expectation that something will come out. Discerning choices and directions of life. (A special phase of reflection with vivid images; bringing out awareness and discernment of choices in life and God's choice)

2nd Interview

Facing the Wall - brick wall - paint a picture - there is a sign HOME and a phone on the wall.

After seeing the wall, home and phone - all the past was gone - I just return to the home of loving God. Transcendence. Thinking - we can have meditation at any time - we can see beauty of all things - transcendence

Comments and Coding: Image emerged during meditation: facing wall image, and sign of "HOME" and phone home on the wall. All the past was gone - return to love of God and home; experiencing healing and past hurts gone through returning to love of God. (Meditation brought out images; process of gaining new insights of connection with God and wiped out past wounds. Feeling and urge of transcendence: seeing beauty of all things)

I trusted more will be coming. It is a real awakening. God answered me through Gospels and hymn.....It is a journey of mystery revealed by God. When connecting with unforgettable people, it is a touch of love and transforming us.

Comments and Coding: Another experience of "real awakening", connecting with unforgettable people and with God's touch of love, transformation happened. (Awakening, connection unforgettable people and with God's love brought transformation)

3rd Interview

Thinking of my father – what is my life direction – my heart deep gladness meets with the world's greatest needs. Jesus healing many sick people all around the world and the doctor compassion to the girl – Calling. Connecting with Father Kwan's calling message - life direction - deepest gladness meets with world's greatest needs. Jesus healing many sick around the world and doctor compassion to girl is Calling

Comments and Coding: When meditating her late father, she turned the attention to her life direction. By connecting with Fr. Kwan's teaching of calling, she further gained insight of connecting with Jesus's healing the sick and compassion as her calling (A process of

discernment of calling from meditation of her father, then connecting to Fr. Kwan's teaching and Jesus' healing work)

4th Interview

I know all the time about God loves me no matter what (rationally I know and in my head) from all the past. I got no deep experience. In this journey – real heart journey – willing, accepting, because of my experiencing Him. In the past – superficial – a lot of doing – still happy to serve. But this happiness is because of others recognition rather than God's recognition. Now – feeling God still loves me to serve but at this stage – I may need to rest, stillness, reconstruct life change and renewal

Comments and Coding: Clear differentiation that in the past, rational knowledge of serving , a lot of doing. Now, in this spiritual practice, it was a heart journey really experiencing God, gaining God's recognition. Insight and decision to rest, be still and reconstruct life change and renewal. (Clear differentiation between past and present spiritual practice, between rational/doing and heart, people-centered or God recognition, with a view for the future to rest, be still and reconstruct life change and renewal)

Following the research protocol and spiritual practice. In the past, found easily frustrated and lack of energy. Now feeling more peaceful and it seems God knows my prayers. He reminds me to connect to Him – the vine and branch In this spiritual (research) journey – very special when getting close to God – like phoning Him – He gives me guidance, teaching, healing, constellation.....

Comments and Coding: Confirmed her experience in this spiritual practice to be able to feel peaceful and be connection with God, like talking over phone with God - God's guidance, teaching, healing, constellation. (Process of feeling her own peace and affirming the need to connect to God, and then guided by God in the constellation of transformation)

Reconstruct life – life needs some changes. Heart renews and refresh – life needs transformation and mindset changes rather than doing a lot or even services (or things that recognized by others)
Need more self understanding, more understanding of God....listen to God's calling and waiting.
Transformation as heart renews and knows more about God's will

Comments and Coding: Clear understanding that she needed to reconstruct life, with heart renewed and refreshed. "Life needs transformation and mindset changes". Not by doing, but need more self-understanding, understanding of God and listen to God's calling. Her definition of transformation "as heart renews and knows more about God's will". (A very condensed description of the process of self understanding, understanding of God, listening to His calling and renewing the heart by knowing God's will)

BLOSSOM – "blossom" in concert, thinking 3 pictures

One night I watched a concern and last song "Awakening" – when we face shadow, it is ok when we count on God and silent. Sun will rise and awaken

Second picture during meditation and prayer – rose flower blossom. I was amazed that there is BLOSSOM in second phase of life. I was happy as it can be BLOSSOM even at this age and stage

Third picture: From worm to something as cocoon and explode to become a butterfly – it is transformation...Just waiting, dwelling in His love, silence....

Timing to be blossom to be butterfly – where and what to be – not so eager to think about it

Comments and Coding: Very vivid images of three pictures: flowers blossomed and cocoon exploded into butterflies. Process of transformation with waiting, dwelling in God's love.

Needed waiting and timing. Not so eager about where and what to do. (Meditation brought about three special images of transformation, insight and discernment of timing and waiting for God's love and will)

Participant D

1st interview

Meditation: in café – noon time waiting for secondary school students. See if I can teach bible and life education to students in future....

Comments and Coding: Connecting to daily experience of work, meeting a client at café.

(Connecting self in daily life experience)

Imagine feel more connected to God – intimate with God – finding God from all the struggles to stillness and silence and very immediate.... Silence and connect with the experience and transition well

Comments and Coding: With former training in spirituality, smoothly practiced silence and connecting self, daily experience and God. (Smooth connecting self and God due to past training)

This morning – Jesus cleaning our feet – struggle with work leaving – echo with the Jesus struggling and it is ok to have struggle.

Comments and Coding: At the beginning of spiritual practice, already had Gospel prayer and meditation and linked up with Jesus' experience to face struggle in life. (Associating God early in the spiritual practice)

Meditation in a café. Waiter asked me to sit anywhere. Another one asked me to sit another place.....

Comments and Coding: Meditation in a busy café in between work. Showed flexibility and adaptability. (Spiritual practice in busy daily life)

Strong connection to Jesus. Jesus as role model appears. Meditate his experience. E.g. more stress and pressure – journal, mom, work, ministry.....many things. Think of Jesus more work and surrounded by people and 12 disciples.....crowds, enemies.....

Comments and Coding: Meditating on Jesus’ experience with stress and pressure, bringing it back to her own struggle in life. Emphasis on “strong connection to Jesus”.

(Clear strong connection to God)

The companion with my sick mom was very sacred. I was meditating Jesus walking with mom and being with her. I asked God to be with her at every sacred moment. The companionship with God made me feel supportive and sacredness.

Comments and Coding: Meditating on mom’s walking with Jesus, asking for sacred moment of companionship with Jesus and gained His support. (Connecting to God to create sacredness and support)

Pang let me know spirituality from external to internal. Help me not to just focus on myself as we need to then connect with external and the world. This is very important paradigm shift – why I want to be spiritual director as I am connected with others.

Comments and Coding: Reflecting on guidance from theology teacher and learning to serve others in the world. (Connecting to others confirming understanding of serving the world)

Life is conflicting – loving me and hurting me together are happening at same time

God bless and curse. Everything has a timing (like Ecclesiastes). Discovery - I saw some general rules of life – it is the reality – God creates the world with light and darkness. I saw more clearly. Both good and bad exist at the same time. Realized something new

Comments and Coding: A deeper understanding of rules of the world, positive and negative existing at the same time. Everything has a timing. She “saw more clearly” and “realized something new”. (Deeper understanding of God’s creation to see more clearly rules of life, process of discernment in realizing something new)

New understanding of God – His transcendence, my identity. Discover all are related to vocation and calling. Related to God’s vocation, my identity and calling
80% connecting to my calling & vocation. Maybe always thinking of calling and a lot of perspectives on calling.

Comments and Coding: Concentration on meditating relationship between God’s transcendence and her identity. Close related to her calling and vocation. (Connecting to God and her vocation)

First half of life – rules, social norms, other expectations, constraints – like 10 commandments.
Second phase of life – alternatives, open, more wide....self owned and source of my own life and energy.

Comments and Coding: very clear understanding and judgment on first and second half of life and future direction. (Connecting self and God in process of discernment of future life)

2nd Interview

I came from a stable ordinary family with sufficient love from my parents and my personality was affected by them. In failure and success, my husband was always there for me. I also gained spirituality knowledge from Mr. Yuen and Mr. Pang. They were my role models especially their courage to start an institution to serve others.

Comments and Coding: Had positive support from family and spiritual resources from colleagues. Connecting with them was positive. (Positive connection with significant others).

Jesus was in my suffering and led me to leave all the burden and hurt. He just led me to leave the past and closed the chapter without return..... This encountering of Jesus enlightened me so much but also broadened my spiritual space and insight. I realized that we could let go and just follow the plan of God.

Comments and Coding: Strong faith in Jesus' help in career change. Just follow God. (Connecting to God with positive hope for future).

Pang let me know spirituality from external to internal. Help me not to just focus on myself as we need to then connect with external and the world. This is very important paradigm shift – why I want to be spiritual director as I am connected with others.

Comments and Coding: Reflecting on guidance from theology teacher and learning to serve others in the world. (Connecting to others confirming understanding of serving the world).

Life is conflicting – loving me and hurting me together are happening at same time.

God bless and curse. Everything has a timing (like Ecclestial). Discovery - I saw some general rules of life – it is the reality – God creates the world with light and darkness. I saw more clearly. Both good and bad exist at the same time. Realized something new.

Comments and Coding: A deeper understanding of rules of the world, positive and negative existing at the same time. Everything has a timing. She “saw more clearly” and “realized something new”. (Connecting self, to others and God; from experience to new understanding of life, process of discernment clear and distinguished).

The letter to father – feeling of regret. I prayed for the death of dad and prayed for God holding him up.....In the letter, hope God will receive dad through my prayer.

I believed both Christian and non-Christian still loved by God I then told myself this image about his loneliness and his lying – it was passed already – it is like Jesus – He has resurrected and we have one home in future. We can reunite again.

Comments and Coding: Meditating on relationship with late father and brought out her faith in God’s resurrecting power. (Connecting to others and God affirming her faith).

Blaming me by boss and Mr Wu had very bad impression on me...He said I do not need to resign and he then transfer me to other position – Collison Point Prison.... Now 3 years – I found the one hurting me was the one who blessed me.... Felt very mixed feeling.....In these 3 years - less pressure, saved more money, more stabilized than HO, I can complete my paper and I can apply 2 months to complete my first draft of doctorate degree paper.....In last 6 months – my life has changed. Like Jesus facing Judas – he pushed him to cross and vocation – it seems so similar..... If not due to this suffering – never have meditation, resignation – seriously searching

for vocation, spirituality, HKPES – to serve professionals, knowing workplace counsellor, workshop....accepting their values and reading vocation.....

Comments and Coding: Being mistreated by boss and had paradigm shift that it was a blessing in disguise. Comparing to betrayal of Jesus by Judas. New understanding of challenges in workplace. (Connecting to others and shadows; new understanding and discernment).

Biggest Discovery -- Greatest discovery – wanted to let go of the past burden

e.g. like father's loneliness lying on the bed, the colleagues at workplace.

It passed already. Whenever I wrote my journal, I need to say goodbye of the past burden.

Comments and Coding: Clear understanding of the ‘biggest’ “greatest” discovery during the process of discernment: let go of past and present burden. Through writing of journal, bidding goodbye to past burden. (Connecting self, others and God in process of discernment and transformation).

3rd Interview

New understanding of God – His transcendence, my identity. Discover all are related to vocation and calling. Related to God's vocation, my identity and calling.

80% connecting to my calling & vocation. Maybe always thinking of calling and a lot of perspectives on calling.

Comments and Coding: Concentration on meditating relationship between God's transcendence and her identity. Close related to her calling and vocation. (Connecting to God and her vocation).

Reflection on Mark 2:21-22: Analogy – new cloth should not put on old cloth. New wine not put into old wine. Very shocking – about Old and New. Just shared about new start and direction at Gratia college – this verses mentioned about old and new too.

My Heart was being touched and shocked.....New idea needs to put on new accommodation or vase.... I got new idea, new vocation and want to put into new context.

Comments and Coding: Gospel meditation with strong feeling and shock at discovery of paradigm of Old and New for her life direction. (Connecting to God through Gospel bringing new understanding in process of discernment).

Mark 3: 13 – 19. Chosen 12 disciples – sent them to the world.....

I was touched and cried as reading in MTR (subway) although it was only simple words and gospel. I was touched and paused staring at the words. I was immersed in the scripture and key words – “presence, sent, preaching.....Human development and growth are different. My target is all different and unique.

Comments and Coding: Fully absorbed in scriptural meditation even traveling on busy subway. Touched by the insights gained. (Connecting to God in busy life as process of discernment).

In Mark gospel, I came across the gospel about physical to spiritual healing. I associated with God who accepted and forgave my sins. I found cleansing was an internal interior healing, releasing the past, being accepted and forgiven. This purification is the most powerful cleansing.

Comments and Coding: Inspiration from Gospel in looking at issues in life: sins and forgiveness. Internal and interior cleansing and healing in releasing past shadows. (Connecting to God with new understanding in process of discernment of cleansing and healing).

First half of life – rules, social norms, other expectations, constraints – like 10 commandments.

Second phase of life – alternatives, open, more wide....self owned and source of my own life and energy.

Comments and Coding: very clear understanding and judgment on first and second half of life and future direction. (Connecting self and God in process of discernment of future life).

My search of Spiritual direction – mainly in Catholic world.....Protestant church – gap

Timing and some matters to be settled.

Comments and Coding: Reflection on the difference in Catholic and Protestant communities in spirituality education or practice. (New understanding of gaps in spiritual search in Protestant community versus Catholic one).

4th Interview

I shared in retreat with friends and also see my road and way. Shared my experience with cohorts. Friends did show interests in my research, my connected with God. I shared in two days and all shared they are struck. My testimony witnessed to them

Comments and Coding: Sharing research experience with friends showing her confidence. (Process of connecting with God, gaining new insights and transformation taken in form of sharing with friends)

Transformation meaning - I see Jesus transformation on Sept 12

Gospel - quiet he storm and use words to create, to heal.....not even needs to touch

Five loaves of bread two fishes - blessing many...Words can bring out transformation. I want to use your (God's) words to transform. Want to take Bible hermeneutics - words to bring transformation.

Comments and Coding: Very attracted to Gospel meditation and prayer. Reflection and insight to look at transformation through God's words, in taking up Bible hermeneutics. (Connecting to God with clear concept of transformation)

Reflection - can be bi-weekly to see a pattern. Need to see this as life long journey. More flexible to see. Not counting on quantity and health but in God. Feel God will not matter if we do not have daily practice. In fact, I have all meditation in all things.

Comments and Coding: Recognized spiritual practice as a life long journey, daily practice in order to see meditate in all things. (Process of discernment and transformation to see need of daily practice and life long practice)

Participant E

Ist interview

These people appeared before meditation. Something coming up – how much trust I have. E.g.

Tony.. Fear coming up when I am involved. Will it work?

Inadequate – many people felt I am inadequate. My boss discouraged me and comments made me I am not doing good enough. ...When I felt I was inadequate – God's message came and gave me constellation.

Comments and Coding: Reflection on relationships with male friends and awareness of limitations and fear of involvement. Discouraged by boss for being inadequate but supported by God (Connecting self and others revealing basic issues in life)

God's response in another thing – at work – image of Jesus as example. Taught me how to do when being blamed. No need to seek for justice in injustice. God will protect even if the beloved treated unfairly. He will do me the justice at right time. In unfairness feeling of God's support came.

Comments and Coding: Had use Jesus' example of putting up with injustice to face challenges of injustice. (Connecting to God in facing daily life challenges)

Tony, I did not know him very much. He said I was the one he is praying for. This is my discernment stage. When coming to commitment stage, will it work. Human being is not reliable....Deep inside me, I cannot trust people. Some good friends – became fell away suddenly and did not know why. I just observed and did not go to find out. This is my character.

Comments and Coding: When meditating on past shadows, she mentioning that she was in her discernment stage. Awareness of character: not trusting people and seeing them unreliable.

(Meditating self and past shadows, noticed the process of discernment)

Why shadow not affecting me – spiritual practice and relationship with God – made me in a constant state of joy consistently. I felt inner joy and this is the result of spiritual practice.

Therefore, I am not affected by external. I got sunshine inside me and this is provided by God.

Comments and Coding: Believed that not affected by shadows because of spiritual practice and relationship with God. Constant joy. (With spiritual practice and relationship with God, she overcame shadow and had constant joy)

I just accepted the shadows – insecurity. Special meaning – no special meaning – I am very easy going. People comes and goes. I experienced relationship comes and goes. My state of mind – take it easy – I just responded if it comes. I felt at the end only God and me. All family and relationship will disappear finally.

Meaning of relationship– like in my life in a train – they comes and goes and do not know when to drop the train. Of course, they will make some changes in my life.

Comments and Coding: Acceptance of shadows, taking it easy. Relationships come and go.

Only God and her remain at the end. (Connecting to God and let all relationships and shadow go)

Church 22nd anniversary – photo showed me already in leadership building the church. Sister shared growth in my small group.... The repetition and remembered – God's calling in my life – fulfilled the role to build the church.

Comments and Coding: God's calling to serve and help build the church. Sense of fulfillment.
(God's calling to build a local church)

2nd interview

I know I have insufficiency in life. He is also important in my life.... I looked at them (sister and father) differently. I looked at them a new person, from God's perspective. They are being saved and forgiven. They are different and not the sister and father any more.

Comments and Coding: Connecting to significant ones revealed her shadows of family lacking in love, especially her late father not responsible. But she forgave him especially when he was converted. He recognized insufficiency and her father was important. (Connecting to others revealing family shadow; valued her father's conversion as a reason of forgiveness)

Discovered I look like I am very rational at one aspect, on the other hand I am very rich in emotions. Otherwise I will not attract others.

This reflected inside me I am filled with emotions. I pushed myself very rational. I was trained to be very rational.

Comments and Coding: Connecting and clearer understand of personality dilemma: rational and emotional. But wanted to be rational first. (Connecting self and clear self understanding)

Whole picture – human relationship, expectation of church as leaders, morality of leaders and role model, I cannot just follow my heart. In church, the view of community. Bible did say I can act but not affecting others. My role in other people – they may not accept it and their faith may be affected. The role model changed suddenly and faith changed.....

Suppression of choice and self? What God wants me as not to be joyful?

I should not say I have 100% understanding of God fully. With my limited understanding and my mindset of interpreting God from church teaching made me like that....

How I know it is from God. These 2 criteria is key. God wants to stop me if it is not for me. If it is for my joy, God will give me.

Comments and Coding: Strong commitment to be a role model in church and cannot act according to own will. Question of suppressing choice and self for fear of harming image of church community. Follow Bible not to affect others. Interpreting God as “not 100% understanding of God fully”. (Confidence in God with belief of good if not full understanding of God. Conditioned by expectation of others in church. Awareness of suppression her own choice and self)

This practice trains me to keep reflecting the important people and things in my daily life and the blessings of God and how God is involved in my life. When I have a more conscious mind to do so, I find more blessings of God In each and every day

Comments and Coding: Spiritual practice training to reflect on important people and things confirmed God’s involvement in life. To have a more conscious mind to find God’s blessings everyday. (Connecting to others and God in conscious mind to find God every day)

3rd interview

Discovered God had made my Dreams coming true in my life –Years ago - Dreaming of thinking about one year no paid job to study theology and leave mom – God has realized my dream – it is more suitable for me that I do not need to leave my full time job.....

Comments and Coding: Recognized the discovery that God had made her dream come true. (Found out God has answered her dreams come true)

At church – I have been serving as deacon, study group, bible study, small group, Sunday school, youth group.....

He uses all my gifts 100%....Discovery that my mission accomplished and fulfilled and completed on earth. Felt very satisfied His will be done. Thanks God He has used me fully and it is an honor.

Comments and Coding: A list of services at church; affirming that God has used all her gifts, her mission accomplished and fulfilled. (Connecting to God with strong belief that her life was fulfilled with God using her gifts fully)

At church – I have been serving as deacon, study group, bible study, small group, Sunday school, youth group.....

He uses all my gifts 100%....Discovery that my mission accomplished and fulfilled and completed on earth. Felt very satisfied His will be done. Thanks God He has used me fully and it is an honor.

Comments and Coding: A list of services at church; affirming that God has used all her gifts, her mission accomplished and fulfilled. (Trusting o God with strong belief that her life was fulfilled with God using her gifts fully)

Although not big transformation – something changed in me. Devotion and spiritual discipline. I enjoyed very much 15 mins meditation in the morning. I know God is pleased as He loves me even I am tired

Comments and Coding: Awareness of small transformation, with devotion and spiritual discipline in morning meditation. (Spiritual practice as a small change, not big transformation)

Needs to discern God's wisdom - I am facing important relationship – need Discernment and wisdom. Like Tony, I need discernment and is he God's plan and preparation. Need a lot of discernment – walking with God and his wisdom.

Comments and Coding: Recognition of personal desire for relationship with Tony, a boyfriend who was a Muslim. Seeking wisdom and discernment from God. (Faith in God and seeking discernment over relationship desire)

This spiritual practice – not very different from the past practice

However, more evening practice but difficult sometimes. Journaling replacing mindfulness. I am very used to count the blessings – very used to write down the journal and God's message in devotion.

Daily thanksgiving praying – meditation and praying are very familiar exercises in daily life

Comments and Coding: Reflection on spiritual practice. Journaling replacing mindfulness. Used to write down God's messages. Seeing meditation and praying similar. (Counting blessings of God through journaling and replacing mindfulness by journaling)

We will not know if it is from God or from Satan – only when we develop or nurture the sensitivity – like couple and close relationship

More clear to know if it is from God or it is from self or from the world – we can discern the difference when we are close to god

Discernment – needs very close relationship with God.

Comments and Coding: Reflection on process of discernment and getting close to God. (In process of discernment, needed to be close to God)

4th interview

I am learning to the little voice and whispering of God. In the spiritual exercise, I am more sensitive to God's little voice..... Discernment is very personal and it is from God. I am clear it is from God and confident about the incident and message.

Comments and Coding: Connecting self and to God by more sensitive to God's little voice. A personal experience which she was clear and confident. (Process of discernment is personal and from God)

Transformation – a gradual process. In it, there must have changes like my mindset.

Process is a transformation process gradually. I am feeling MORE closer with God.

In spiritual exercise, God addresses all things to my needs. The passages echoed accurately my mind, my thought – this close dialogue closely connected with my situation and circumstances.

Comments and Coding: Describing very clearly her understanding of transformation as a process feeling more closer to God. Certain that God's messages have echoed in her mind. (Clear description of transformation and certain she got God's messages)

This is a good model for us to meditate and silent especially for those who did not having any spiritual practice and time with God. This helps us to focus on time with God.

Comments and Coding: Confirmed usefulness of meditation and silent in the model helping focus on God. (Positive assessment of spiritual model)

What I explained – in first half of life, counting on our will and less depend on God.

Now approaching to this direction and learning to let the decision passing to God

My direction – learning to let God decides. Midlife – how long will it be in the days left. Try to focus on what God wants me to do.

All these listening to God – God has already given me the ability of discernment.

Comments and Coding: Clear judgment and results of discernment about difference between first and second half of life. Focus on God. (Clear discernment and transformation)

Life may be miraculous and unexpected. God works in wonderful way. His way of working not our way. His way is higher than our way. He will use His way to finish his plan. I am waiting for the wonderful work....

Originally I may find a definite answer. Now I changed my mind – it is a process not fixed definition and answer.... *I always wanted to find a blue print in the past.*

Now I have changed I am in the process. Through people & incidents – God will bring me to the place where he wants me to go.

Comments and Coding: Transformation as a slow process no sudden big changes. Life is miraculous and unexpected with God's wonderful work. (Transformation as God plans)

Find God and find life in life. *Only when we are willing and stop to taste all the past – willing to spend time with God – we discover God and we find God.*

Comments and Coding: “Find God and find life in life”. Spend more time with God and find God. (Summary view of spiritual exercises as a way to find God in life)

Participant F

1st Interview

Third Shadow – 2-3 years ago – relationship issue – facing lost in life.

Big step – Looking for transformation. Looking back I made a mistake. Headless chicken mother, helpless, lukewarm relationship with husband. Thinking of UK's happy life.

Comments and Coding: Clear memories of shadows, feeling loss in life as a headless chicken, helpless and unhappy. Recognized this is a big step for transformation. (Examining past experience and shadow and will power to transform)

Feeling peaceful – when in peace, feeling connected and looking at inner self. Shadows came up – come to terms with no. of shadows in my life (Silent.....emotional).....

When facing bad emotion – feel heart burnt or do I have terminal illness or hidden bombs.

Menopause – goodbye to youthfulness – say goodbye to glamour. Let go of the youth. This is second shadow.

Third Shadow – 2-3 years ago – relationship issue – facing lost in life.

These dragged on and I could not quit my job easily. It is because of my impulsive and selfishness. This is a real shadow and guilty....

Code: Clear signs of midlife crisis. In returning to her past experience and felt connected with her own self, 4 clear pictures of shadows emerged, including fear of terminal disease, menopause, lost of life, and impulsiveness and selfishness (Sense of connecting and Linking up with self with clear negative images)

Even the world is very confused – raining – working, husband accident, no holiday, no refund.....confusion and chaotic, children on summer holiday, being mom and dad – I was not very confused. Family got a lot of needs. Not enough time to complete work and paperwork.

Connecting to children – parenting – less temper and slow down.

Calmness in chaotic confused world; change - from confusion to calmness.

Code: With spiritual practice, began to transcend confusion in the external world. In process of contacting her inner self, she noticed change from confusion to calmness. (Feeling connected to significant others bringing out physical effects of spiritual practice of inner calmness)

Internal movement – First 2 weeks – very good chance to make tidy of myself. Realize my condition, my emotions, likes and dislikes.....Important finding – Discovered and connected to my empathy to others very shallow. Felt I did not know in the past emotional connection. I was very cool. I need to work on it.

Code: Realizing inner emotion and discovery of personality issue including insufficient empathy, unable to emotionally connected. During sensing her inner self that he was cool (Linking up her own self with discovery of personality issue)

In summer – realized first time in life. In the past, results.....changed to be a mom, house wife, cooking. This is self-initiated. I felt good and lack of pressure.

This is a transcendence. I am willing to take one more step for the love one. E.g. driving my husband, taking care of children, growing a hamster.....

Code: Realization for the first time to change to new roles in family. To do something extra for loved ones. Early experience of transcendence (Self initiated changes and transcendence at early stage of spiritual practice)

Letting go – I do not insist my way of doing or thinking on the others.

I have to observe what other people likes and try to join them. Connect and enjoy other likings. I stopped denouncing others. E.g. I hated games and now not restricting.

Code: Realization of need to let go, more open minded. Feeling connected and enjoyed other likings. (Changing from close-mindedness to open-minded; began to connect and enjoy other things)

My mom life style enjoying TV – opens my eyes. I want to connect more with children. There is a voice inside me asking me to change – for a while. Since I forgave myself – since I got ADHD.....

Comments and Coding: Eye-opening experience when recalling her mom's life style, wanting to be more connected to children. An inner voice telling her to forgive herself as managing her shadow. (Tracing back to memory of her mother and feeling urge to connect more with her own children)

although a lot of works – sleep joyfully and peacefully. Thy will be done – in sleeping. Never felt that peace before. At the moment – no worry, peaceful, presence with God and God in me.

Feeling of Peace – inner heart – thy will be done

Most important – not thinking of future. Transformation: Find myself and learn to be more patient – e.g. waiting for green light, make appointment, waiting for weeks and not immediate.

Comments and Coding: Linking up personal inner peace with God and in God found peace.

Change of behavior from impulsiveness to patience. (Inner movement of peace in faith and changing of behavior from impulsive to patience; early transcendence/transformation)

When I am quiet – find the needs....Clear mind – better organization and matching. More grace and less struggles. Drill my patience and discernment.

I have ability to make free decision but limit myself. Faith and confidence to wait for Holy Spirit.

Let the Spirit leads me. It is one of the process .

Comments and Coding: Meditation and silence brought clear-mindedness, feeling more grace.

Drilling of patience and discernment and free decision. Faith in waiting for Holy Spirit.

Understand that it was a process.

Life cannot be busy. Allow space and time. Prepare the heart and not so busy

Best time – not driving and walking to MTR in 10 mins through the park

Meditate – in MTR – write my journal. Leaving work – in MTR – scanning the daily incidents in solitude. In my world – can manage it. Or in car driving – meditating music. Before leaving the car – find sacred space and journaling. I am in the mode of solitude, do not want to talk. What made me tick and joy?

Comments and Coding: Important and clear changes in daily spiritual practice. Walking and meditation in MTR and writing journal. Driving with meditative music and before leaving car, meditated and journaling. (Behavioral changes and transformation in daily life spiritual practice)

2nd Interview

I then had a lot of unhappy experience in my past 20 years and many feelings

I do not have many outlets. I do not want to think and want to escape as I am afraid to break the current relationship. I can count a lot of negativity. I know I escaped to un-raftle the relationship with my husband. I got my Discernment –I was so torn last 2 weeks My emotions and feeling were bad. I was torn very much in last 2 weeks

Cannot be peaceful last 2 weeks.

Comments and coding: Recalling and examining unhappy relationship with husband, lots of negativity, wanted to escape. Got discernment in realizing the inner confused feeling and was emotionally torn. (Through examining unhappy relationship and negative feelings involved, began to find out something new, discernment of torn emotions.)

A discernment, discovery that his wounds and he had not deal with it

I found I was workaholic and other relationship. I need attention and love.I was being affected and hurt. I found and started to compassionate with his difficulties.

I should not be so hard on him.....I was meditating and connecting him – he is almost 60s and made the adoption decision at 50s. I was more understanding and feeling more about him and thinking of him on his behalf..... When I understood more about him, I felt more at ease.....New eyes to see my relationship with husband.

Comments and Coding: In process of meditation and connecting to her husband, felt the discernment of looking at him with compassionate and more understanding. Connecting.

(meditating and connecting with husband creating more positive emotion and feeling; new eyes to see relationship and felt more at ease)

3rd interview

Thinking – we all got distracted and interrupted.....always thinking of meditation.....at sleep and praying.....God always surrounded me. Seems like it is at pier.....I feel like there is rope linking the safety bubble and the ship.

I know I am safe as I am connected to the boat. I know I will be safe and he is always there. I felt peaceful even in crisis.

Comments and Coding: Rich experience of meditation, belief of being surrounded by God, linking up with him like a rope linking the ship to the safety bubble. Felt safe to be connected to boat and peaceful even in crisis. (Spiritual meaning of meditation and linking up with God and connected to the boat and the safety bubble. Spiritually peaceful in crisis)

Connecting to God – through self understanding, relationship with husband and anger – Got new perspectives through these incidents – discernment about her husband's own hurts and burden – his past not yet dealt with. I have sympathy and empathy with him. I felt Holy Spirit and discernment.I can see my husband pain and weakness – it is from Jesus's compassion and love for the pain.

Comments and Coding: Connecting to God through self understanding, relationship with husband and emotion. Getting new perspectives to discern about husband's issues. Felt Holy

Spirit and discernment. (Connecting to God through self reflection and using new perspectives to discern husband's burden and touched by Holy Spirit for discernment)

Changed my mindset – my full time job becomes my part time job

I got freedom and flexibility. I can take care of home affairs and I do not need to work at office..... I have adjusted this is part-time job and I can explore other things. In future – I like to do voluntary work and now can be time to groom up myself and contribute myself..... Mindset change – it is transformation. I reduce the anxiety.

Comments and Coding: Change of my mindset to view present full time job as part-time.

Became free and flexible. Mindset change as transformation reducing pressure. (Mindset change as transformation, becoming free and flexible and reducing pressure)

Discernment and vocation to be. When I was listening – what I called to do – at this moment, to be the mom to 2 kids..... Calling – trying to be a better mom

Get a new perspective to see old things – transformation.

Comments and Coding: Long meditation and reflection on deeper and new perspective of understanding her husband. Process of discernment to listen to calling to be a better mom.

Transformation as ability to use new perspective to see old things. (Calling and discernment a process of seeing old things from new perspective, also as transformation)

4th interview

I come to the turning point of the journey after meeting dark shadow of my life

Thankful to speak up when open up the dark shadow. When opening to dark shadow, I can see notably difference of me and Richard, upbringing, experience of life, his woundedness and insecurity. That is why misalignment in raising kids and marriage.... Hope it is beginning of healing process.

Comments and Coding: Awareness of turning point of the spiritual practice especially opening up to dark shadows. New understanding of difference between herself and her husband. Belief that it was a healing process. (Reflecting on dark shadows and gained new understanding of dark shadows and difference between herself and husband. A healing process)

My mind has been unfilling in the inner motivation to get rid of unnecessary – window browsing, web browsing, day dreaming...more focus in what is essential in life. This is daily life awakening – asking myself what is my time and priority.

Comments and Coding: Inner motivation to get rid of unnecessary activities. Focus on essentials in life. Daily life awakening. (Awareness of inner motivation to focus on essentials in life. Daily life awakening)

Discover I have new attitude to preserve my peace of mind – I heard a small voice reminding me through silence..... many changes in small things

When I empty my basket, I pour out the unnecessary things and I remember the important things – like books I need to read, owing someone, enough clothes and no need to buy.... Wait and See – more patience to wait.

I find myself I enjoy the peace of the journey and discernment coming out – that I have experienced this discernment – I know it needs conditions to be silence and empty..... When emptying, I can be more peaceful in dealing with crisis and calm.

Comments and Coding: Discovery new attitude to preserve peace of mind, in silence and emptying, more patient to wait. Many changes in small things. Enjoy peace of the journey and discernment pouring out. (Discovery peace of mind in spiritual journey in silence, emptying and discernment pouring out)

Appendix Two: Second Cycle of Codes

From Verbatim, Coding to Categories

Participant A

1st Interview

1.15 facing self through incidents, people and feeling. (In touch with self and others)

1.16 especially listening to God. This process was very special. (Listening to God as a process)

1.17 with strong feeling when I meditated.... not acting as a Christian. I could not face myself. (feeling and facing self with strong feeling)

1.18 interacted with people easily but hiding myself in my loneliness. (interacting with others but hiding self)

1.19 I took the initiative and slowed down to greet the security guard. (Take action to meet others)

1.20 stirred up my feelings. I went to an island alone and enjoyed the process and experiencing something different. I tasted and felt that life is controlled by God. (Experience self and tasting God in process)

1.21 I felt mindful breathing helped me to stop thinking. Breathing gave me full attention..... Every time finish breathing, I was awake and alive – Mindful breathing. (mindful breathing)

1.22 When connecting with nature, it was grace, energy, spirit, thanks and happiness with small things. (Feeling and connecting with nature)

1.23 Realized all happy and rich life indeed surrounding me. All things are blessings. (All things are blessings; find God in all things)

1.24 Everyday mindful breathing, looking back, reflect feeling....listening to God. This

process was very special. (mindful breathing; finding God in process)

1.25 *Being alone praying in an island connected my internal flow of emotions.*(connecting self with emotions)

1.26 *I faced with my own weakness when being alone.* (facing self)

1.27 *I preferred only short or shallow relationship with people as I got a lot of fear of being too close* (facing self and shadows)

1.28 *I discovered my six shadows. These 6 shadows had hindered my joy and freedom. I could acknowledge it and start to understand its impact. I need to embrace my shadow, face and dialogue with little inner child. I was like a crying child in my mother's arm and seeking for deep love.* (struggling with shadows)

1.15 *tidy up the shadows.... The best way to deal with the shadows was to love fully. Love fully meant to love myself, love all those people surrounding me.* (tidying up shadows and others through love)

1.16 *I seldom experienced it but feeling just came out when connecting to self in silence. The past traumatic childhood appeared in the spiritual practice.* (connecting self and shadow of childhood)

2nd Interview

2.1 *It is clear message for discernment. God had turned me to forgive.* (discernment to forgive)

2.1 *I got enlightenment and it is clearly from the Holy Spirit. It helped me to understand.* (enlightenment from Holy Spirit)

2.3 *the biggest hurting experience was the separation after co-inhabitate. My broken family made me no confidence in marriage.* (hurting shadows)

2.4 When meditating, I got the strong and vigorous feeling when remembering of my grandmother. I cried seriously when remembering my grandmother during meditation..... I felt a touch of deep love like God. These memories had stirred up a strong feeling of being loved and protected in my suffering. (relating to significant others with emotion and then connecting God)

3rd Interview

3.1 I observed how a Christian integrated his faith with business.....I witnessed God's power in the world through my boss integrating business and faith. It is discernment. I discern a clear message that God always turns impossible to possible. (Integration of profession and faith in discernment)

3.2 I was puzzled and seek discernment of God. In silence, I listened a voice: “Do it for me.” God turned impossible to possible if under His will. (Discernment as a small voice)

3.3 I observed God’s will with more clarity when I looked back. Then I discerned the priority of my life. (discernment of priority of life)

3.4 God opened the way through training and teaching and serving the church, seminary school and workplace through teamwork, management and leadership.... Then I meditated my long-term vision “Management Thought Leader” in Asia, China, HK. (God helping through business and profession)

4th Interview

4.1 I know the here and now time to relate to people is important. I pray for God at anytime anywhere and want to connect with God. (Connecting God here and now)

4.2 *In reflecting last eight weeks, this journey provided a map for reviewing my first half of life connecting to shadows of confusion, despair to family, death experience.*

Now, I believed that life is not belonging to me. Renewal of life is to letting go to God. (review and find insights; connecting self, shadows and death)

4.3 *I found the change from despair to hope, confusion to joy, death to new life. This ability to transform came from hope and it is key and critical.* (Change to new life and transformation from hope)

4.4 *Over 8 weeks, I got deep feeling and discovery. The importance of attentiveness and focus like attentive to walk, eat, teach, train.....and enjoying in all things.... Discovered the integration of my passion, strength and opportunities.* (Discovery of integration of self and opportunities)

4.5 *My deepest urge inside me was moving to ask ultimate goal. In the process, I am eager to dialogue with God.* (Process of dialogue with God)

4.6 *How to find “Shanghai Tang” (a Cantonese pop song) from passivity..... I interpret it as my Calling – Free Men and Shanghai Tang integration.Shanghai Tang is coming from composer, actor, lyrics, director..... I also need a team to breakthrough* (insights through Cantonese pop song seeing need for team work)

From Codes to Categories

Participant B

1st Interview

1.1 *Connecting to most important things daily life..... Taste and feel daily discovery and surroundings people.* (Connecting important things in daily life; Daily discovery)

1.2 *feel the nature, weather.....raining or sunny – feel very joyful.* (feel nature)

- 1.3 Relax, enjoy the process – insight, more ideas coming up – having neglected and disconnected with other people (Process; neglected and disconnected with others)
- 1.4 Using heart – feel others feeling (feeling others’ feelings through heart)
- 1.5 Deeper taste in daily life including studying, eating. Instead of mere action and reaction mode. (Meditation and deep tasting in daily life)
- 1.6 Attentive to self emotion, other emotion and response. Strong internal emotion or movement during reflection. (Attentive to self and others with strong internal emotion or movement)
- 1.7 Due to ignoring self-negative feeling, do not know how to feel other’s negative feeling..
(From self negative feeling to consider feelings for others)
- 1.8 God – everywhere..... God grace in culture and traditions. Source of energy and power – coming from all people’s goodness and want to be better. (God’s grace in culture and traditions; Chinese concept of all people’s goodness)
- 1.9 How to expand our spiritual space – will power. Not living in small ego...Sacred space – connect to God – transcendence (Spiritual space; Connect to God as Transcendence)
- 1.10 Sense of awakening in life, new meaning, inner meaning (Awakening life gives new inner meaning, awakening)
- 1.11 Difficult practice in busy life. Link up yoga and exercise and mindful breathing... (busy life adopting yoga: intercultural and interfaith practice)
- 1.12 find self not respecting all things – find out in calligraphy (using calligraphy for meditation; intercultural practice)
- 1.13

2nd Interview

2.1 *Went to Chinese cultural camp.. ..Find it very full and clear about something.*

Returning to self – to the needs of self – the feeling of inner heart and original self/heart.

(Integrate Chinese culture: “return to self...feeling of inner heart and original self/heart) were Chinese concepts)

2.2 *Chinese culture helps me how to be a good person with ideal and moral character.....learn and action...This is a process.* (Intercultural view of spiritual practice as a process)

2.3 *I know I can take care of others. It is process.....I know something coming from my inner heart and energized to take some action for him.* (A process to take action to care for others from inner heart)

2.4 *It is not just an action and reaction but care and compassion from the heart.... I realized that I have connectedness to this friend.* (Action of care and compassion from heart; connectedness to friend)

2.5 *I realized and felt need to transcend myself -- desire to transcend and change.... I then stayed and interacted with them..... this is a transcending experience.* (Desire to transcend and change brought out action to interact with other, resulting in a transcending experience)

3rd Interview

3.1 *commit to Chinese culture and leave legacy of Chinese culture* (Intercultural commitment)

3.2 *Using music like classic Chinese music to connect to inner self – I enter into the deeper inner heart* (Intercultural approach to connect inner self)

3.3 Calling is a process – it is a calling for me to start queries of life (Calling as a process; calling of life direction)

3.4 When I have this internal touch, struggle and emotions – it is a calling of my inner heart.....
I have desire in my inner heart (Calling from inner heart)

4th Interview

4.1 I should be walking in God and learning how to live with God. It includes Chinese culture.
(Intercultural and interfaith with live with God and Chinese culture) 4.2 Sensitivity to connecting my own self and with others – including relationship with wife and including relationship with nature – new recognition and understanding – one in nature. (summary view of new recognition and understanding of connecting self, relationship with others, nature)

4.3 Core – walking with God and union with Holy Spirit. Original heart – touching, authentic heart (Intercultural insight of walking with God and an “original and authentic heart”, a Chinese concept)

4.4 Second phase of lifeMy work – any growth and transcendence at workplace of my colleagues (Growth and transcendence in workplace)

Participant C

From Verbatim, Coding to Categories

1st Interview

1.1 .. Facing with self, ignoring others – if let go of my standard, more comfortable

(Examined inner self and realized need to let go.)

1.2 .. Real awakening – God answers me – reminds me not to use my own eyes to see but God's perspective to see.

(Seeking “real awakening” from God)

1.3 The pain of kneel disappeared – I thanked God but still very rational.....

(Sought healing from God yet stayed rational)

*1.4 What do you recognize shadows? It made me so unhappy. Connecting to past, reflection –
..... Depression not yet treated.*

(Connecting to past shadow; awareness of earlier depression and not cured;)

*1.5 I visualized a circle and felt strongly something was boiling.... It was like some bubbles
boiling in a calm lake, wanting to burst out.....Discerning choices and directions of life –*

(Vivid images to bring out discernment of life choices.)

2nd Interview

2.1 *Facing the Wall ...there is a sign HOME and a phone on the wall.I just return to the home of loving God. Transcendence. ...meditation at any time - we can see beauty of all things - transcendence*

(Image emerged wall image, and sign of "HOME" and phone home on the wall. Images of God as transcendence)

2.2 *I trusted more will be coming. It is a real awakening. God answered me through Gospels and hymn.....It is a journey of mystery revealed by God. When connecting with unforgettable people, it is a touch of love and transforming us.*

(Awakening, connection unforgettable people and with God's love brought transformation)

3rd Interview

3.1 *Last job in terminal patients service – I found more mature and understanding to people; God's message - sensitivity, maturity, people as my strength*

(Getting messages from God)

3.2 *My personality – know more about myself like a mirror; e.g. when interacting with patients or youth – I experienced my life again. I did think about my future my ageing. Will I be like that?*

(From examining and reflecting on self interacting with others in her profession)

3.3 *Thinking of my father – what is my life direction – my heart deep gladness meets with the world's greatest needs. Calling: Connecting with Father Kwan's calling message*

(Connecting late father, Calling insights from Fr. Kwan.)

4th Interview

4.1 *started to stay silence watching the trees. I watched over the trees and suddenly thinking about God's words. I am the vine and you are the branch.*

(Meditating nature and then linking up with God)

4.2 *God did answer my prayers and different from the past. In the past – before the research, easily frustrated and lack of energy, not feeling peaceful and seems God knows my prayers. Now is changed. More peaceful with God.*

(Changes in life after spiritual practice: Identified as God answering her prayers)

4.3 *In this journey – real heart journey – willing, accepting, because of my experiencing Him..... reconstruct life change and renewal*

(Clear differentiation of new life, experiencing God and made life change and renewal).

4.4 *Now feeling more peaceful and it seems God knows my prayers. He reminds me to connect to Him –In this spiritual (research) journey – very special when getting close to God – like phoning Him –*

(Connecting to God bringing peace; close to Him like phoning Him. Change and transformation)

4.5 Reconstruct life –. Heart renews and refresh – life needs transformation and mindset changeslisten to God's calling and waiting. Transformation as heart renews and knows more about God's will

(Clear understanding of transformation as heart renewed and refreshed. God's calling)

4.6 *Thinking 3 images: a song in concert called "Awakening".....*

rose flower blossom. I was amazed that there is BLOSSOM in second phase of life.Third picture: From worm to something as cocoon and explode to become a butterfly – it is transformation....Just waiting, dwelling in His love, silence....

(Vivid images. Transformation with waiting, dwelling in God's love.)

Participant D

From Verbatim, Coding to Categories

1st Interview

1.1 Meditation: in café – noon time waiting for secondary school students. (Meditation practice in café as a daily experience)

1.2 Imagine feel more connected to God – i finding God from all the struggles to stillness and silence and very immediate.... Silence and connect with the experience and transition well (feeling more connecting to God; silence and Connecting daily experience.)

1.4 Meditation in a café. Waiter asked me to sit anywhere. Another one asked me to sit another place.....

(Meditation in a busy café in between work. spiritual practice in busy daily life)

1.5 Strong connection to Jesus. Jesus as role model appears. Meditate his experience.

(Strong connecting to Jesus; meditate Jesus)

1.6 My shadows are my anger, biased judgement, emotion and lack of self-control. The unfair boss, humiliated environment and demotion at work. It had been a long heavy burden for long time.

(Linking up with self and shadows in negative working environment)

2nd Interview

2.1 This encountering of Jesus enlightened me so much but also broadened my spiritual space and insight. I realized that we could let go and just follow the plan of God.

(Encountering Jesus and enlightened; spiritual space and insight)

2.2 Pang....helped me not to just focus on myself as we need to then connect with external and the world. This is very important paradigm shift – why I want to be spiritual director as I am connected with others.

(Confirmed need to connect to others and outside world.)

2.3 Discovery - I saw some general rules of life –God creates the world with light and darkness. I saw more clearly. Both good and bad exist at the same time. Realized something new

(Discovery and “realized something new” through God.)

3rd Interview

3.1 New understanding of God – His transcendence, my identity. Discover all are related to vocation and calling. Related to God’s vocation, my identity and calling

80% connecting to my calling & vocation.

(New understanding of God; transcendence; new identity; calling)

3.2 Reflection on Mark 2:21-22: Analogy – new cloth should not put on old cloth. New wine not put into old wine. Very shocking – about Old and New...... I got new idea, new vocation and want to put into new context

(New vocation through Gospel meditation)

4th Interview

4.1 I see Jesus transformation on Sept 12 Gospel - quiet he storm and use words to create, to heal.....not even needs to touch...Words can bring out transformation. I want to use your (God's) words to transform.

(transformation through Gospel; God's word for transformation)

4.2 Need to see this as life long journey..... Not counting on quantity and health but in God. Feel God will not matter if we do not have daily practice. In fact, I have all meditation in all things.

(Feel God; daily practice; meditate in all things.)

Participant E

From Verbatim, Coding to Categories

1st Interview

1.1 *No need for mindful breathing and entering into the state. Daily events coming up easily. Many feelings and very easy to come up. Dialogue and reflection – not difficult.*

(no mindful breathing. Meditating daily event. Special mode of spiritual practice)

1.2 *God's response in another thing Taught me how to do when being blamed.He will do me the justice at right time.*

(God's response in daily life)

1.3 *Tony, I did not know him very much. He said I was the one he is praying for. This is my discernment stage.Deep inside me, I cannot trust people.*

(Recalled a friend; a stage of discernment. Mistrust others)

1.5 *Why shadow not affecting me – spiritual practice and relationship with God – made me in a constant state of joy consistently.*

(shadows not effecting; spiritual practice and relationship with God.)

1.6 *I just accepted the shadows – insecurity..... I experienced relationship comes and goes..... I felt at the end only God and me.Meaning of relationship– like in my life in a train – they comes and goes and do not know when to drop the train.*

(Acceptance of shadows. Relationships come and go. Only God at the end.)

1.7 *The repetition and remembered – God's calling in my life – fulfilled the role to build the church.*

(God's calling to serve and help build the church)

1.8 Journal writing – helped a lot regularly writing – will not lose the important moment or even trivial things.

(Journaling as a regular spiritual practice.)

1.9 *My character – has adventurous. It seems I am very stable but very adventurous. Seems insecure but rational and not thinking.*

(Self understanding of personality.)

2nd Interview

2.1 Family was not close and warm and disintegrated.I looked at them (sister and father) differently. I looked at them a new person, from God's perspective. They are being saved and forgiven. They are different and not the sister and father any more.

(family shadow; new perception of others through God)

2.2 *Whole picture – human relationship, expectation of church as leaders, morality of leaders and role model, I cannot just follow my heart. In church, the view of community.... My role in other people –....Suppression of choice and self? What God wants me as not to be joyful?*

(a role model in church; Suppressing choice and self).

2.3 This practice trains me to keep reflecting the important people and things in my daily life and the blessings of God and how God is involved in my life. When I have a more conscious mind to do so, I find more blessings of God In each and every day

(Spiritual practice helped connecting to others, things; God's blessing every day life)

3rd Interview

3.1 Needs to discern God's wisdom - I am facing important relationship – need Discernment and wisdom. Like Tony, I need discernment and is he God's plan and preparation. Need a lot of discernment – walking with God and his wisdom.

(discern God's wisdom; seeking discernment).

3.2 This spiritual practice – not very different from the past practice.. Journaling replacing mindfulness. I am very used to count the blessings –..... meditation and praying are very familiar exercises in daily life

(Journaling replacing mindfulness. meditation in daily life.)

3.3 More clear to know if it is from God or it is from self or from the world – we can discern the difference when we are close to god. Discernment – needs very close relationship with God.

(process of discernment and getting close to God.).

4th Interview

4.1 I am learning to the little voice and whispering of God. In the spiritual exercise, I am more sensitive to God's little voice..... Discernment is very personal and it is from God. I am clear it is from God and confident about the incident and message.

(Little voice from God; Discernment is personal and message from God.)

4.2 Transformation – a gradual process. In it, there must have changes like my mindset. Process is a transformation process gradually. I am feeling MORE closer with God...

(Transformation as a process. Changes of mindset)

4.3 *This is a good model for us to meditate and silent especially for those who did not having any spiritual practice and time with God. This helps us to focus on time with God.*

(Confirmed usefulness of meditation and silence; positive assessment of spiritual model.)

4.4 *My direction – learning to let God decides. Midlife – how long will it be in the days left. Try to focus on what God wants me to do. All these listening to God – God has already given me the ability of discernment.*

(Ability of discernment; listen to God).

4.5 *Transformation – is gradual but not sudden change.....No need to have 360 change. Life may be miraculous and unexpected.*

Originally I may find a definite answer. Now I changed my mind – it is a process not fixed definition and answer....

(Transformation as process; no sudden big changes. Transformation as God plans.)

4.6 *Find God and find life in life. ...willing to spend time with God – we discover God and we find God.*

(“Find God and find life in life”. Discover God).

Participant F

From Verbatim, Codes to Categories

1st Interview

1.1 I felt the shadow. One night – raining and I got very weak and tired when driving home – energy level low and life very low – life will be going – how long do I have. Sometimes, I got grey message and negative about life

(Shadow; Weak self and negative life)

1.2 Third Shadow – 2-3 years ago – relationship issue – facing lost in life.

Big step – Looking for transformation. Looking back I made a mistake. Headless chicken mother, helpless, lukewarm relationship with husband. Thinking of UK's happy life.

(shadows, helpless and unhappy; looking for transformation).

1.3 Feeling peaceful – when in peace, feeling connected and looking at inner self. Shadows came up – come to terms with no. of shadows in my life (Silent.....emotional)..... This is a real shadow and guilty....

(Connecting to self and past shadows; sense of guilt).

1.4 6:45am woke up meditated. Different in the past – no to-do-list. Count His grace in the morning.....More sensitive to body. When tired, sleep more and closed eyes.....In the process, heart became more quiet and still. Not so much disturbed by others and more focused....Swimming with children

(Meditation bringing new experience)

1.5 Family got a lot of needs. Not enough time to complete work and paperwork. Connecting to children – parenting – less temper and slow down.

Calmness in chaotic confused world; change - from confusion to calmness.

(connected to significant others; changes from confusion to calmness).

1.6 Internal movement – First 2 weeks – very good chance to make tidy of myself. Realize my condition, my emotions, likes and dislikes.....Important finding – Discovered and connected to my empathy to others very shallow. Felt I did not know in the past emotional connection.

(Internal movement; discovered and connected to empathy to others and emotion).

1.7 Why emotional disconnected with others?.. I thought about my childhood – mum worked. Father alcoholic. No family life. Went to UK to school. Lack of emotions. Lack of opportunities to open up.

(disconnected to others; childhood shadow.)

1.8 In summer – realized first time in life. In the past, results.....changed to be a mom, house wife, cooking. This is self-initiated. I felt good and lack of pressure.

This is a transcendence. I am willing to take one more step for the love one. E.g. driving my husband, taking care of children, growing a hamster.....

(Realization for the first time, change to new roles in family; transcendence at early stage).

1.9 Letting go – I do not insist my way of doing or thinking on the others.

I have to observe what other people likes and try to join them. Connect and enjoy other likings.

(to let go; connected and enjoyed other likings).

1.10 My mom life style enjoying TV – opens my eyes. I want to connect more with children.

There is a voice inside me asking me to change – for a while. Since I forgave myself.

(Connected to significant others and children; inner voice telling her to change and forgive self).

1.11 At the moment – no worry, peaceful, presence with God and God in me. Feeling of Peace – inner heart – thy will be done.... not thinking of future. Transformation: Find myself and learn to be more patient – e.g. waiting for green light, make appointment, waiting for weeks and not immediate.

(God in me. Transformation. Change of behavior).

1.12 More grace and less struggles. Drill my patience and discernment.

I have ability to make free decision but limit myself. Faith and confidence to wait for Holy Spirit.

Let the Spirit leads me. It is one of the process .

(Drilling of patience and discernment. Led by Holy Spirit as a process.)

1.13 Life cannot be busy. Allow space and time. Prepare the heart and not so busy. Best time – not driving and walking to MTR in 10 mins through the park

Meditate – in MTR – write my journal. Leaving work – in MTR – scanning the daily incidents in solitude. In my world – can manage it. Or in car driving – meditating music. Before leaving the

car – find sacred space and journaling. I am in the mode of solitude, do not want to talk. What made me tick and joy?

(Meditative and spiritual practice in busy daily life. clear changes in daily spiritual practice. meditated and journaling.)

2nd Interview

2.1 I am a workaholic mom for long time and I felt guilty as I did not spend enough time for the kids especially when they are on holiday. When they go to school, I felt better. Otherwise, felt very guilty.

(Felt guilty not spending enough time with children)

2.2 I then had a lot of unhappy experience in my past 20 years and many feelings I do not have many outlets. I do not want to think and want to escape as I am afraid to break the current relationship. I can count a lot of negativity. I know I escaped to un-affle the relationship with my husband. I got my Discernment –I was so torn last 2 weeks My emotions and feeling were bad. I was torn very much in last 2 weeks

Cannot be peaceful last 2 weeks.

(unhappy relationship and negative feelings involved; discernment of torn emotions.)

2.3 At that time, I held up myself – holy spirit was helping me (Pause as ADHD).

I withheld myself. I paused at that moment. I did not say anything to hurt anyone. I was processing and kept quiet. I was processing myself – I may not speak up and not intentional to hurt anyone. I need to change.

(Behavioral change to pause and processing emotion. Process self change)

2.4 A discernment, discovery that his wounds and he had not deal with it

I found I was workaholic and other relationship. I need attention and love.

I should not be so hard on him.....I was meditating and connecting him – he is almost 60s and made the adoption decision at 50s. I was more understanding and feeling more about him and thinking of him on his behalf..... When I understood more about him, I felt more at ease.....New eyes to see my relationship with husband.

(Discernment; meditating and connecting to husband; new eyes to see relationship; changed behavior)

3rd Interview

3.1 Thinking – we all got distracted and interrupted.....always thinking of meditation.....at sleep and praying.....God always surrounded me. Seems like it is at pier.....I feel like there is rope linking the safety buoy and the ship.

I know I am safe as I am connected to the boat. I know I will be safe and he is always there. I felt peaceful even in crisis.

(Spiritual practice; meditation and linking up with God; Image of connected to the boat and the safety buoy.)

3.2 Connecting to God – through self understanding, relationship with husband and anger – Got new perspectives through these incidents – discernment about her husband’s own hurts and burden – his past not yet dealt with. I have sympathy and empathy with him. I felt Holy Spirit and discernment.I can see my husband pain and weakness – it is from Jesus’s compassion and love for the pain.

(Connecting to God through self reflection; to discern husband’s burden; touched by Holy Spirit for discernment)

3.3 Changed my mindset – my full time job becomes my part time job

I got freedom and flexibility. I can take care of home affairs and I do not need to work at office..... I have adjusted this is part-time job and I can explore other things. In future – I like to do voluntary work and now can be time to groom up myself and contribute myself..... Mindset change – it is transformation. I reduce the anxiety.

(Mindset change as transformation; change of perspective and behavior)

3.4 *Husband wants to retire and almost 60. I started and willing to understand him..... I got new eyes to see him and understand him. More compassionate on him. I felt he may be insecure..... When looking at it deeper – I felt he is insecure or maybe he has history of regret.....I can see this angle – this is discernment.....*

Discernment and vocation to be. When I was listening – what I called to do – at this moment, to be the mom to 2 kids..... Calling – trying to be a better mom

Get a new perspective to see old things – transformation.

(New understanding of husband; seeing new angle as discernment; discernment and vocation; calling to be better; New perspective to see old things as transformation)

3.5 Found the spiritual practice – lay down the foundation – and I can deal with all the crisis as got foundation..... I do see this change – when I am close to God

I know what is stillness in all the event.

(spiritual practice as foundation; change of feeling God in crisis)

4th Interview

4.1 I come to the turning point of the journey after meeting dark shadow of my life

Thankful to speak up when open up the dark shadow. When opening to dark shadow, I can see notably difference of me and Richard, upbringing, experience of life, his woundedness and insecurity. That is why misalignment in raising kids and marriage.... Hope it is beginning of healing process.

(Gained new understanding of dark shadows; seeing difference between herself and husband.)

4.2 My mind has been unfilling in the inner motivation to get rid of unnecessary – window browsing, web browsing, day dreaming...more focus in what is essential in life. This is daily life awakening – asking myself what is my time and priority.

(Feeling inner motivation; Daily life awakening)

4.3 Discover I have new attitude to preserve my peace_of mind – I heard a small voice reminding me through silence..... many changes in small things

When I empty my basket, I pour out the unnecessary things and I remember the important things – like books I need to read, owing someone, enough clothes and no need to buy.....I find myself I enjoy the peace of the journey and discernment coming out – that I have experienced this discernment – I know it needs conditions to be silence and empty..... When emptying, I can be more peaceful in dealing with crisis and calm.

(Discovery peace of mind in spiritual journey in silence; ,emptying basket and discernment pouring out)

4.4 I realized whether God wants me to do. I walked in the journey that Holy Spirit walks with me.

(Realized what God want; guided by Holy Spirit God's wish for her)

4.5 In busy life – I know how to get rid of things. I know some directions I enjoy.

Comments and Coding: Clear and simple view as how to live in busy life with directions.

(Know some directions as how to deal with busy life)

4.6 Important progress - doing to being - it is a turning point of spiritual growth by passing through the wall.

(Clear reflection from doing to being; image of passing through the wall)