



THE SPIRITUAL FORMATION OF ECCLESIAL LEADERS: A CALL TO BUILD THE KINGDOM FROM WITHIN

Michelle Gonzalez Segundo

The purpose of this article is to examine the flourishing of ecclesial leaders through six spiritual and formative disciplines: (a) prayer, (b) Bible study, (c) solitude, (d) fasting, (e) meditation and self-reflection, and (f) communal fellowship. Although spiritual disciplines are not the ultimate end of ecclesial leadership, their intentional practice orients leaders toward maturity in Christ (Nouwen, 2010) and cultivates flourishing not only in their leadership but also in their identity as followers and worshipers of Christ. Amid increasing reports of pastoral burnout, moral failure, leadership fatigue, and spiritual fragmentation, the urgency of leader flourishing has become a critical concern within ecclesial contexts. While existing scholarship addresses spiritual disciplines and leadership formation independently, less attention has been given to synthesizing these disciplines as an integrated framework for sustained ecclesial flourishing. This article addresses that gap by examining theological, spiritual formation, and leadership literature to identify how these six disciplines collectively contribute to personal transformation and communal renewal. Spiritual transformation is not pursued for personal gain, even though its fruit (Gal. 5:22–23) results in an abundant life in Christ. Rather, transformation and flourishing form believers into Christ's likeness for the sake of community and the glory of God (2 Cor. 3:18; Scorgie et al., 2016; Tang, 2014). Renewal, therefore, should be a normative experience within congregational life, beginning with ecclesial leaders who model and prioritize spiritual disciplines as a reflection of Christ's character and nature (Maglio, 2017). By synthesizing the literature across these six formative disciplines, I argue that ecclesial leader flourishing is both a spiritual imperative and a communal necessity.

Keywords: spiritual formation, spiritual disciplines, ecclesial leadership, pastoral burnout, soul care, spiritual leadership, discipleship, human flourishing, sanctification

INTRODUCTION

The call to ecclesial leadership is not one of fame, fortune, or notoriety but requires a certain type of death to all notions of self-identity, self-indulgence, and self-ambition. Bonhoeffer (1959) asserted that “when Christ calls a man, He bids him ‘come and die’” (p. 89). If Christ Himself endured suffering and death on the Cross to fulfill the Father’s redemptive purpose, how much more will ecclesial leaders be required to endure the formative and sanctifying process of dying to self (Rom. 6:1–11) so that God’s purposes might be fulfilled in and through them and that He alone would be glorified? Christ chose complete surrender as He agonized in the garden of Gethsemane, praying, “Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done” (*English Standard Version*, 2001, Luke 22:42). This surrender is not abstract theology; it is embodied formation. The literature on spiritual formation suggests that such dying to self is cultivated through the intentional practices of (a) prayer, (b) Scripture engagement, (c) solitude, (d) fasting, (e) meditation and self-reflection, and (f) communal fellowship, training the leader’s will toward obedience and Christlikeness. These disciplines function not as ends in themselves but as formative means through which sanctification is lived rather than merely professed.

The sanctifying process is often painful; yet it is through this cruciform formation that the ecclesial leader dies yet lives. He withers, yet flourishes. Emerging scholarship increasingly links sustained engagement in spiritual disciplines with spiritual vitality, moral resilience, and vocational endurance, suggesting that leader flourishing is not accidental but intentionally formed. Thus, the paradox stands: the path of surrender becomes the pathway to flourishing. The spiritual formation process cannot be reduced to personal performance or external measurements of achievement apart from the Spirit, lest it become a list of spiritual chores (Serrano, 2015), externalistic laws (Foster, 1989), or pragmatic methods of ecclesial leadership development that neglect the inner work of the Spirit. Rather, spiritual formation is a disciplined, humbled, and obedient way of living—an intentional participation in the life of Christ, motivated by agape love that challenges and transforms the heart to imitate Him (Scorgie et al., 2016). Ecclesial leaders are called to embody the gospel as God conforms them to the image of His Son (Rom. 8:29). Such conformity requires intentional engagement in spiritual disciplines practiced of, in, and by the Spirit.

This article examines scholarship at the intersection of spiritual formation, ecclesial or pastoral leadership, and human flourishing. Sources were identified through theological and leadership databases, including peer-reviewed journals and foundational texts in spiritual formation and discipleship. Inclusion criteria centered on works addressing spiritual disciplines within ministry contexts, leader formation, and the relationship between interior spiritual practices and outward leadership outcomes. The literature is organized around three interrelated dimensions: internal flourishing (the leader’s inner life and sanctification), external flourishing (vocational endurance and influence), and corporate flourishing (congregational renewal and communal impact). Building the kingdom of God, therefore, begins internally before it manifests externally. Internal flourishing precedes and sustains external ministry effectiveness (Foster, 1989; Teo, 2017; Willard, 1998). This review contends that the intentional practice of six

spiritual disciplines forms the crucible through which ecclesial leaders are spiritually renewed, personally sustained, and communally fruitful.

REVIEW OF PERTINENT LITERATURE

The Nature of Spiritual Formation

Christ exemplified the Father's glory in all He did, and as joint heirs (Rom. 8:17), believers—namely, ecclesial leaders—are likewise called to reflect His glory (Bock, 2008; Martin, 2002) as they come into alignment with the character and pattern of Christ (2 Pet. 3:18; Scorgie et al., 2016). It is important to distinguish the process of spiritual formation, otherwise known as sanctification, from justification. In justification, sin is pardoned (1 John 1:9); in sanctification, sin is progressively subdued (2 Cor. 5:17; Vos, 2002). Justification is a one-time event accomplished through Christ's redemptive work (Rom. 3:24; Col. 1:21–22). Sanctification, however, is an ongoing process whereby the Holy Spirit empowers believers to yield to God's purposes, subdue sin, and live renewed lives that witness to others (Matt. 5:16) and ultimately please God (Hoekema, 1989; Tang, 2014; Vos, 2002).

The sinner's justification does not instantaneously translate into maturity; rather, sanctification unfolds as believers continually submit to the Spirit's shaping work. Through daily yielding and inward sharpening, the fruit of the Spirit emerges (Gal. 5:22–23), forming believers into the likeness of Christ (Phil. 2:5). Within this review, flourishing refers to the multidimensional transformation of the ecclesial leader's interior life through ongoing sanctification by the Spirit. This transformation manifests in spiritual maturity, interior wholeness, moral and emotional resilience, and sustainable ministry influence. It is both formational and missional, shaping the leader's interior life while sustaining faithful and enduring outward ministry. Flourishing encompasses spiritual maturity, interior wholeness, moral and emotional resilience, vocational faithfulness, and sustainable ministry influence. It is not merely personal well-being nor ministerial success; rather, it is the holistic vitality that results when a leader's inner life is rightly ordered before God and continually formed by the Spirit. This internal sharpening and yielding produces internal flourishing, from which the ecclesial leader serves the Lord and congregation from a spiritually healthy place. Such vitality naturally extends outward, influencing and inspiring congregations toward holiness, fulfillment, and mission in and through Christ.

The nature of spiritual formation lies within the context of Christian spirituality (Scorgie et al., 2016) and is a complex, multilayered, lifelong process in which believers, including ecclesial leaders, respond to the grace of God as He shapes them into the likeness of Christ through the active work of the Holy Spirit for the sake of the community of faith and those yet to believe (Greenman & Kalantzis, 2015; Scorgie et al., 2016). Rather than compartmentalized into a Sunday morning time frame, the ecclesial leader's formation encompasses both private and public dimensions of life, calling for ongoing surrender to the transforming presence of God that fosters spiritual maturity and Christlikeness (Barton et al., 2014; Scorgie et al., 2016; Serrano, 2017).

Transformation is ultimately the work of God, who completes what He begins (Phil. 1:6), yet it invites intentional participation from the believer. Such participation does not initiate transformation but cooperates with the Spirit's sanctifying work. As leaders yield themselves to God's refining grace, they become vessels through whom spiritual formation can be cultivated in others (Barton, 2009; Scorgie et al., 2016). The psalmist David, though imperfect many times over, was described as a man after God's own heart (1 Sam. 13:14) because of his posture of repentance and dependence, pleading, "Create in me a clean heart, O God" (Ps. 51:10). As Sweet (2010) noted, leaders cannot effectively call others to transformation if they have not first allowed God to transform them. Spiritual formation, therefore, reflects a dynamic interplay: the Spirit causes growth (1 Cor. 3:6), while believers position themselves in receptivity to that growth through obedience and surrender. Even seasons of crisis may serve as instruments through which the Spirit deepens maturity, merging natural development and spiritual refinement toward Christlikeness (Scorgie et al., 2016).

Disciplines of Spiritual Formation. There is no particular model program or one-time approach to spiritual growth (Pagitt, 2004); however, spiritual formation is a lifelong process of learning, discovery, obedience, surrender, and sharpening that is an accumulation of convictions (Willimon, 2016) that are not immediately acquired in complete form upon receiving salvation but is merely the start of a refining journey that takes place while in relationship with the Holy Spirit as well as alongside a community of like-minded believers (McNicol, 2010; Pagitt, 2004; Teo, 2017; Thrall &).

The spiritual formative process cannot merely be deduced by the leader being informed but rather transformed by Christ and conformed into His image by intentionally seeking not to find salvation as justification is through Christ alone and not by the ecclesial leader's works but seeks and strives to become more like Christ and deepen his relationship with God (Crisp, 2020). Once justified, the believer must now actively participate of his own free will and his effort in conjunction with the working of the Holy Spirit in his progressive sanctification (Barrick, 2010) that will complete the believer's holiness as he intentionally cleanses himself for the work and glory of God (1 Cor. 7:1) by implementing certain spiritual disciplines (Foster, 1989; Willard, 1998) that will not only produce personal growth in the ecclesial leader and, by default, his followers, but will also keep the ecclesial leader from burnout, financial and relational strain, and moral failure producing the outcome of longevity of ministry and finishing his God-given task well (2 Tim. 4:7, 8; Teo, 2018).

Foster (1989) categorized three forms of spiritual discipline for the ecclesial leader as (a) inward disciplines that include meditation, prayer, fasting, and study; (b) outward disciplines that include simplicity, solitude, submission, and service; and (c) corporate disciplines that include confession, worship, guidance, and celebration. Maglio (2017) defined spiritual formation in the context of (a) historical church disciplines that include teaching, fellowship, worship, and prayer; (b) contemporary church disciplines that include solitude, contemplation, service, and confession; and (c) personal self-spiritual care disciplines that include awareness of God, spiritual hunger,

community, recognition of the supernatural, community, and mentoring relationships. Hands and Fehr (1993) proposed three formative practices of (a) spiritual renewal practices of bible study, prayer, fasting, meditation, solitude, and reflection; (b) rest-taking practices of non-ministry activities, or just the absence of non-ministry activities that will renew the leader's depleted inner-life and emotional vitality, and (c) support system practices of social support groups with fellow peers, apart from church-related small groups that will help to prevent isolation, loneliness, and emotional burnout (Hands & Fehr, 1993; Spaite, 1999) that will simultaneously allow the ecclesial leader to be vulnerable, mutually edified, and have a sense of belonging (Gilbert, 1987).

Taken together, these models reveal significant overlap despite their differing categorizations. Across frameworks, recurring themes include prayer, Scripture engagement, solitude, communal practices, and intentional rhythms of reflection and renewal. While Foster (1989) emphasizes structural categories of inward, outward, and corporate disciplines, Maglio (2017) highlights historical and personal spiritual care practices, and Hands and Fehr (1993) foreground renewal, rest, and relational support as safeguards against depletion. Though articulated differently, each model affirms that sustained spiritual vitality requires both interior attentiveness to God and relational engagement within community.

This article narrows its focus to six disciplines—Bible study, prayer, solitude, fasting, meditation and self-reflection, and communal fellowship—because these practices consistently appear across the literature as foundational means through which sanctification is cultivated and leader vitality sustained. These disciplines collectively address both interior formation and communal accountability, aligning with the multidimensional understanding of flourishing advanced in this study. By concentrating on these six recurring practices, the review of literature seeks to synthesize rather than duplicate existing models, highlighting those disciplines most directly connected in the literature to spiritual maturity, resilience, and sustainable ministry faithfulness.

The Praxis of Spiritual Formation

Internal spiritual formation is comprised of suffering and endurance as part of the formative process of being made into the likeness of Christ. The author of Hebrews 12 explained that Christ Himself suffered the Cross, endured hostility, and despised shame (Heb. 12: 2) but now sits at the right hand of the Father (Heb. 12: 2). The inward forming process involves a relationship between the ecclesial leader and God, Himself, as it is only He who can truly transform the heart of a person. The Holy Spirit works in and through all things (Col. 1:17), including believers' hearts to continuously mature them into the likeness of Christ (Scorgie et al., 2016), causing them to flourish in and through Christ. Ecclesial leaders must guard their hearts against doubt and fear lest they become hopeless and helpless under the power of sin from which they have been redeemed and allow the Holy Spirit to reassure them, comfort them, and challenge them to produce His fruit (Gal. 5:22, 23), which is the measure of believers being reformed into the image and likeness of Christ. Although following inward spiritual disciplines seems basic, they are foundational to the core of the ecclesial leader's intimate

relationship with God, growth, development, and personal transformation into spiritual maturity and Christ's likeness.

Spiritual formation is not merely conceptual but practiced. The literature demonstrates that sustained transformation occurs through intentional disciplines that shape the leader's inner life and support enduring faithfulness. Accordingly, I now examine six formative disciplines, considering their biblical foundations, their role in sanctification, and their contribution to multidimensional leader flourishing.

Flourishing Discipline 1: Bible Study. An ecclesial leader's theology shapes his values and convictions, serving as a powerful influence in his conduct and decision-making process (Ps. 119:105), the way he does ministry, serves his congregation, and equips them (Geiger & Peck, 2016; Willimon, 2016). Therefore, theological depth and understanding are paramount for effectively navigating the complexities of leading a contemporary ecclesial organization (Teo, 2018), a depth cultivated through disciplined engagement with Scripture, which remains the authority for faith and practice (2 Tim. 2:15; Maglio, 2017; Serrano, 2017). The ecclesial leader committed to daily Scripture reading and memorization guards his heart against temptation (Ps. 119:11) as the Holy Spirit illuminates truth for his life and for those he shepherds.

While devotional Bible reading nurtures spiritual intimacy and consistency, disciplined Bible study involves careful interpretation, theological reflection, and engagement with the broader witness of Scripture. The distinction is significant for ecclesial leaders, whose responsibility to teach and shepherd requires more than familiarity—it requires faithful understanding. As the Ethiopian eunuch acknowledged, “How can I, unless someone guides me?” (Acts 8:31), underscoring the necessity of interpretive depth and theological clarity. Accordingly, the literature affirms that flourishing leaders engage Scripture both devotionally and exegetically, utilizing sound hermeneutical practices and trusted theological resources to ensure faithful proclamation and wise leadership.

Across the literature, scholars consistently affirm that sustained engagement with Scripture strengthens theological clarity, moral discernment, and leadership stability. Scripture-informed leaders demonstrate greater ethical consistency, wiser decision-making under pressure, and increased resilience in seasons of ministry strain (Geiger & Peck, 2016; Teo, 2018; Willimon, 2016). While approaches to biblical study may differ in emphasis—devotional, exegetical, or pastoral—the consensus remains that Scripture functions not merely as informational content but as formative authority, shaping the interior life of the leader in ways that support long-term vocational endurance and spiritual integrity.

Flourishing Discipline 2: Prayer. As the ecclesial leader continually converses with God through prayer, he cultivates a deep and meaningful relationship with God while receiving guidance, direction, and clarity for the future—not only for his own life but also for his congregation (Maglio, 2017). One commonly utilized pastoral framework for structuring prayer is the A.C.T.S. model—adoration, confession, thanksgiving, and

supplication (Hybels, 1998). While not presented in the literature as a comprehensive spiritual formation theory, this acrostic serves as an accessible and formative rhythm that integrates worship, repentance, gratitude, and petition into the leader's daily communion with God. Such structured patterns of prayer reinforce humility, self-examination, and dependence upon divine guidance.

Christ Himself modeled intentional solitude and communion with the Father (Luke 5:16). His prayer life consoled Him (Matt. 14:1–13; Luke 22:39–44), prepared Him (Luke 4:1–2), guided His decisions (Luke 6:12–13), and restored Him after ministry exertion (Mark 6:30–32). The literature consistently affirms that sustained prayer practices cultivate discernment, relational sensitivity, and moral attentiveness in spiritual leaders. Leaders who prioritize prayer demonstrate greater humility, improved decision quality, and increased resilience in seasons of ministry strain (Maglio, 2017; Ortberg, 2014; Teo, 2018). Though Christ was without sin, fallen humanity contends daily with sin's presence, necessitating continual renewal. Ortberg (2014) describes this inner life as a spiritual battle, underscoring the necessity of intentional soul care. Just as God breathed life into humanity (Gen. 2:7), ecclesial leaders require the renewing breath of God through the Spirit's ongoing work (Rom. 8:11). Prayer, therefore, functions not merely as a devotional expression but as a formative practice that sustains interior vitality and safeguards long-term ministry faithfulness.

Flourishing Discipline 3: Fasting. The ecclesial leader's dying to self often involves intentional denial of personal desires, most commonly through abstaining from food or drink, and at times refraining from habitual comforts or distractions that compete for attention and affection (Matt. 4:4). In certain biblical contexts, temporary abstinence within marriage for focused prayer is also acknowledged (1 Cor. 7:5), underscoring that fasting is not merely dietary but dispositional—reordering desires toward God. Such practices are never ends in themselves nor acts of merit but voluntary expressions of dependence upon the Spirit.

Fasting has deep roots in both Old and New Testament practice. The Day of Atonement (Lev. 23:27–32) required communal self-denial as an expression of repentance and reverence before God, highlighting fasting's corporate and covenantal dimensions. Likewise, Christ's forty days in the wilderness (Matt. 4:1–11) demonstrated that fasting does not remove temptation but strengthens spiritual resolve in the face of it. By directing attention away from bodily appetite and toward spiritual reliance, fasting reinforces the primacy of the kingdom of God in the leader's life (Willard, 1998; Col. 3:2). Contemporary research has also observed physiological and psychosocial benefits associated with structured fasting practices, including improved metabolic markers and enhanced self-regulation (Trabelsi et al., 2022). While such findings are not the theological foundation of fasting, they suggest that embodied disciplines may support holistic well-being alongside spiritual attentiveness.

Through disciplined self-denial, ecclesial leaders cultivate self-mastery, humility, and spiritual attentiveness, diminishing the dominance of impulsive desires and strengthening interior resilience. The literature suggests that such embodied disciplines

contribute to moral stability, clarity of purpose, and sustained ministry faithfulness, thereby supporting multidimensional flourishing.

Flourishing Discipline 4: Solitude. Prioritizing spiritual attentiveness often requires the ecclesial leader to establish intentional rhythms of solitude (Willard, 1988). Solitude is not a rejection of community but a temporary withdrawal from noise, responsibility, and relational demands to cultivate deeper communion with God. When practiced as a rhythm rather than an escape, solitude protects the leader's interior life from fragmentation and distraction. Many biblical leaders, including Abraham (Heb. 11:8), Elijah (1 Kings 19:3), Moses (Ex. 2:11), and Jonah (Jonah 1:3), experienced seasons of withdrawal that became formative moments of rest, renewal, discipline, direction, and preparation. Christ Himself frequently withdrew from both disciples and crowds to pray and rest, later inviting His disciples into similar rhythms (Mark 6:31; Luke 5:16).

Though solitude may appear counterintuitive for leaders called to shepherd their flocks (1 Pet. 5:2), the literature consistently frames it as a necessary boundary that sustains relational ministry rather than undermines it. Solitude fosters interior renewal, freedom of the soul (Matt. 6:6; McGinn, 2006), and attentiveness to the voice of God (John 10:27), ultimately strengthening faith and resilience (Isa. 30:15; Maglio, 2017). When practiced appropriately, solitude equips ecclesial leaders to re-enter community with greater clarity, patience, and spiritual vitality, contributing to long-term flourishing.

Flourishing Discipline 5: Meditation and Self-Reflection. Engaging matters of the Spirit from a place of depth requires the ecclesial leader to resist "frothy experiences and shallow teaching" (Foster, 1989, p. 3) and instead respond to the deep call of God (Ps. 42:7), recognizing that God is present (Josh. 1:9; Jer. 29:13; James 4:8), actively speaking (Jer. 33:3; John 10:27; Heb. 4:12), and intent on transforming His people into Christ's likeness (Rom. 8:29; Eph. 4:24). Meditation, in this sense, is not emptying the mind but attentively filling it with truth, allowing Scripture and the Spirit to shape the leader's interior life for God's glory and the good of those he serves (Matt. 5:16).

Scholars of spiritual formation emphasize that meditation facilitates the movement of truth from intellect to heart, where lasting sanctifying transformation occurs (Merton, 1960; Rom. 12:2). While the theological grounding of meditation remains primary in this article, research has also observed physiological benefits associated with contemplative practices, including decreased stress markers and increased bodily calm (Benson et al., 1974). Such findings do not serve as the foundation for meditation's value but provide supportive evidence that embodied attentiveness to God may contribute to reduced stress and enhanced endurance. Through sustained meditation and intentional self-reflection, ecclesial leaders cultivate mental clarity, spiritual attentiveness, and emotional steadiness. These outcomes reinforce the multidimensional flourishing described in this review of the literature, strengthening the leader's capacity for discernment, resilience, and faithful longevity in ministry.

External Spiritual Formation. Spiritual formation is not for personal gain or self-improvement, though the believer is daily being transformed into Christ's likeness (2 Cor. 3:18). Rather, spiritual formation reveals the glory of God, shining as light in the world's darkness so that others might come to know the Father (Matt. 5:16; Scorgie et al., 2016). Sanctification begins immediately following justification and requires the believer's ongoing cooperation, faithfulness, and obedience, in contrast to justification, which rests solely upon Christ's redemptive work (Eph. 1:7; Lightner, 1994; Packer, 1985). Scorgie et al. (2016) describe spiritual formation as a disciplined, yet grace-empowered process motivated by love (1 Cor. 13:13) and gratitude (Ps. 69:30) that ultimately becomes missional as believers love their neighbors as themselves (Mark 12:31).

The believer's transformation is neither isolated nor compartmentalized (Scorgie et al., 2016). Rather, the light of Christ permeates every sphere of life (John 1:5), including workplace leadership, family relationships, and daily interactions. For ecclesial leaders, external flourishing manifests in ethical decision-making, wise conflict navigation, relational health, discipleship effectiveness, and the cultivation of a spiritually vibrant congregational culture. Leaders whose interior lives are ordered by the Spirit lead with humility, integrity, and resilience, fostering communities marked by unity, mission, and spiritual vitality. In this way, internal formation becomes visible in outward leadership practice, inviting others into the life of the kingdom.

Corporate Spiritual Formation. Humanity is created for community, and Scorgie et al. (2016) assert that no one journeys through spiritual formation in isolation from others, who together provide support, accountability, and connection with the long tradition of the communion of saints" (p. 453). The communal dimension of spiritual transformation is vital to the ecclesial leader's growth, for he or she is but one member of a larger body formed by the Spirit (1 Cor. 12:27). Spiritual formation flourishes most fully within communities of faith, namely local congregations, which deepen individual commitment to a shared spiritual identity and connect believers to the broader global church (Reed, 2011).

As ecclesial leaders themselves undergo transformation, they gather others into a shared journey of Christlikeness that moves from (a) person to (b) community to (c) mission, ultimately extending beyond the local congregation to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8; Reed, 2011). Within this corporate context, communal practices foster accountability, mutual encouragement, shared discernment, and moral safeguarding, which are elements essential to sustained leadership health. Leaders embedded in authentic spiritual community are less susceptible to isolation, ethical compromise, and burnout, as communal bonds reinforce resilience and spiritual vigilance. Thus, corporate formation strengthens multidimensional flourishing by anchoring the leader within a network of grace, correction, and collective mission.

Flourishing Discipline 6: Communal Fellowship. The benefit of belonging to a community of believers lies in the supportive relationships that guard against an unhealthy and self-critical preoccupation with personal spiritual growth that may

inadvertently neglect God's active involvement in the sanctification process (Scorgie et al., 2016). The communal dimension of spiritual formation also extends outward, as believers are called to shine the light of Christ into a dark world (Matt. 5:16). Spiritual formation is not only the process of the individual being conformed to Christ's likeness but also the calling "to become with others a communal people of God, and to become an agent for God's redemptive purposes" (John 13:34; Tang, 2014, para. 12).

Vondey (2008) describes global ecclesiology as an ecumenical expression of divine hospitality, wherein believers participate in God's welcoming presence and extend that hospitality to others. Just as God invites humanity into His household of faith where forgiveness, reconciliation, and transformation occur, ecclesial leaders are called to reflect that invitation by cultivating communities marked by grace, unity, and shared mission. While inward disciplines such as prayer, fasting, and meditation cultivate the leader's interior life, and external formation shapes visible leadership practice, communal fellowship ensures that spiritual growth is neither isolated nor self-referential. Fellowship anchors the leader within accountability, shared discernment, and collective mission, making it essential rather than optional for multidimensional flourishing. In this way, communal fellowship completes the movement from personal transformation to corporate witness, reinforcing the internal, external, and corporate dimensions of ecclesial leader formation.

DISCUSSION

The literature presents a variety of internal, external, and corporate spiritual disciplines for ecclesial leaders, ranging from prayer, worship, confession, meditation, and solitude to Bible reading, Scripture memorization, fasting, and communal fellowship. These practices overlap and intertwine rather than exist as isolated processes, and all are animated by the presence and activity of the Holy Spirit (Reed, 2011; Tang, 2014). However, Peterson (1989) cautions ecclesial leaders not to confuse their flourishing or visible ministry productivity with the inner workings of the Spirit. Such confusion often arises when leaders become consumed with ministry busyness, inadvertently abandoning their primary calling to glorify God and worship Him as children in a relationship with the Father. Although ecclesial leaders are vessels used by God in fulfilling His mission (1 Cor. 4:7), they are called to lead others to Christ rather than to themselves. Salvation is found in Christ alone (John 14:6), and the more ecclesial leaders reflect His likeness, the more His light pierces the darkness of the world and the hearts of men (John 1:5).

While some scholarship addresses burnout or moral failure as the result of doing too little, Peterson (1989) exposes the equally dangerous temptation of doing too much in the name of God's work. This overextension is often rooted in vanity—the desire to appear indispensable or significant—manifested in unchecked busyness and the surrender of healthy boundaries. In contrast, spiritual disciplines are not burdens to be managed but gifts of grace that cultivate rest, renewal, and multidimensional flourishing. When embraced as freedom rather than obligation, these practices enable ecclesial

leaders to serve from a place of health, clarity, discernment, love, joy, and Spirit-empowered strength.

CONCLUSION

The missional vision of spiritual formation ultimately aligns with Christ's command to make disciples (Matt. 28:18–20), integrating love for God and love for neighbor (Mark 12:30–31; Scorgie et al., 2016). Ecclesial leaders are called not merely to proclaim Christ but to embody His character in their leadership, so that their words, decisions, and relational engagement reflect His likeness (Bowers, 2017). As Tang (2014) notes, God's redemptive purpose unfolds through His people, and the sanctifying work of the Spirit prepares leaders to participate faithfully in that mission.

The literature reviewed consistently demonstrates that sustained engagement in spiritual disciplines cultivates multidimensional flourishing—strengthening spiritual maturity, moral resilience, relational health, and ministry sustainability. When ecclesial leaders prioritize Scripture, prayer, fasting, solitude, meditation, and communal fellowship as responsive participation in the Spirit's work, they are better equipped to navigate leadership pressures, guard against burnout and ethical compromise, and foster spiritually vibrant congregational cultures.

Thus, spiritual formation is neither self-focused improvement nor mere ministerial productivity. It is the Spirit-shaped transformation of the leader's interior life that overflows into faithful discipleship, sustainable ministry practice, and enduring kingdom witness. In this way, ecclesial leaders flourish not for personal prominence but for the glory of God and the strengthening of His church.

About the Author

Michelle Gonzalez Segundo is a doctoral candidate in Organizational Leadership at Regent University's School of Business and Leadership, with a concentration in Ecclesial Leadership. She serves as the operations manager for a faith-based nonprofit organization supporting foster and adoptive children and vulnerable families in Texas. Grounded in three decades of multi-faceted ministry and leadership development, Michelle brings a hands-on, "boots-on-the-ground" approach to mobilizing teams, strengthening organizational culture, and engaging communities for gospel-centered impact. Her experience includes developing anti-human trafficking initiatives with the U.S. Agency for International Development and mentoring incarcerated and at-risk youth through whole-person rehabilitation programs within the juvenile justice system. Her work reflects a deep commitment to equipping leaders and serving vulnerable populations through the integration of faith, leadership, and organizational practice. She can be reached at michelle@globenetleadership.com.

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