Christian Spiritual Direction for Korean Protestant Women: Focusing on God-images

by

Joon Bum Chun

A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Regis College and the Pastoral Department of the Toronto School of Theology In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Ministry awarded by Regis College and the University of Toronto

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Abstract

This thesis explores how the practice of Christian spiritual direction of Korean Protestant women affects the way they experience, understand, and imagine God, and the implications of these God-images for other aspects of their life. It is a multiple case study involving five cases of Korean Protestant women who experienced Christian spiritual direction with me as spiritual director. The directees were encouraged to think about and articulate their images of God and to explore how those images were affecting their relationship with God and other facets of their life. Through the analysis of the research data, I was able to test and to validate my assumptions.

In this process, the directees came to appreciate more deeply their real images of God as opposed to their professed images of God, which acted to deepen their experience of God. Through this process of discernment, their relationship with God evolved positively. Also, their confidence in God’s love for them increased and their self-relationships transformed positively, including enhanced self-acceptance, self-care, and self-esteem. This also positively affected their attitudes towards others.
Autobiographical Statement

I was born in South Korea. I have been a Christian ever since I was born, and my spiritual life has mainly been formed in the Reformed tradition, particularly, in the Presbyterian Church. When I was in the 12th grade, I felt called by God to become a pastor. So I entered a Presbyterian seminary after graduating high school.

In the years when I was studying for my M. Div. (from 1998 to 2001), I was introduced for the first time to a new area of Christian spirituality by professor Hae-Yong You, who had come to my seminary after studying Christian spirituality. I had an opportunity to learn about Christian spirituality and spiritual direction from this professor. I became increasingly interested in them and finally decided this would be my focus at the Toronto School of Theology.

I came to Canada to study Christian spirituality and spiritual direction in December of 2002. My interest led me to several relevant and excellent courses which enabled me to broaden and deepen my understanding of spirituality. I further sought experiential knowledge rather than limiting myself to theoretical knowledge through receiving spiritual direction for myself and attending silent directed retreats: several 8-day retreats and the 40-day retreat (at Loyola House in May of 2006). I experienced great benefit from them, not only for my own spiritual growth but also in supporting others in their spiritual journeys. I became convinced that spiritual direction would help Korean Protestants who are striving for spiritual growth. Out of my own faith journey, my desire and concrete efforts to become a spiritual director emerged.
I began in earnest to practice the ministry of spiritual direction right after my experience of a 40-day retreat at Loyola House in May of 2006. Since then, I have been giving spiritual direction to Korean Protestants who are interested in spirituality and want spiritual direction. In order to be trained properly, I participated in the Summer Practicum in Spiritual Direction of Loyola House during the summer of 2007 and received the certificate of that program. I also finished the Diploma in Spiritual Direction program of Regis College in 2010. Regarding my experience of giving spiritual direction, I have been meeting one or two directees every week for 5 years. Since January of 2008, I have also participated in 5- or 8-day retreats at Loyola House as a guest director, directing mainly Korean Protestants; I have done four retreats to date. In addition, I have worked as a staff member of Jubilee Institute for Spiritual Formation, which was established in Toronto in September of 2010 to further develop Korean Protestants’ spirituality with a variety of Christian spiritual traditions. In this spiritual center, I have provided spiritual direction and taught prayer and spirituality. So far, I have directed about 50 directees in retreat or ongoing settings. I have conducted over 500 sessions of spiritual direction.
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I acknowledge the staff of the Jubilee Institute for Spiritual Formation for helping me find the participants. I thank Mark Ward, a good friend from the Collaborative Learning Group, for all his assistance. I particularly want to thank Kathleen McAlpin for her friendship and her gentle, supportive, and insightful guidance all the way through this study. I also thank Michael Stoeber, my thesis director, for all his supportive guidance and his critical and insightful comments on my thesis.

Last and most importantly, I thank my family. I am grateful to my parents for their prayer and financial support. I am deeply grateful to my wife Grace for her loving support and encouragement. Special thanks to my sons Daniel and Isaac for their smiles and prayers for me.
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Introduction

A. The Background and Context of the Research Thesis

During the last few decades, some Korean ministers and scholars have begun to study and to experience personally a variety of Christian spiritual traditions that have previously been unknown to Korean Protestants. They began to introduce those traditions—including theologies, spiritualities, and spiritual practices—to the Korean Protestant Church and to explore their theological and pastoral implications for the Korean Protestant context. They began to produce a literature showing how various Christian spiritual traditions can complement Korean Protestant spirituality in theory and in practice. Examples include: Lectio Divina, Centering Prayer, and Ignatian prayer methods, such as Gospel Contemplation, Examen, and silent retreats. Many of these Korean ministers and scholars have also experienced Christian spiritual direction, one of the growing spiritual practices in North American Christianity. I myself am involved in this growing trend.

In the years when I was studying for my M. Div. (from 1998 to 2001), I was introduced for the first time to an area of Christian spirituality by professor Hae-Yong You, who had come to my seminary after studying Christian spirituality. I had an opportunity to learn about Christian spirituality and spiritual direction from this professor. I became increasingly interested and finally decided this would be my focus at the Toronto School of Theology.
I came to Canada to study Christian spirituality and spiritual direction in December of 2002. My interest led me to several relevant and excellent courses which enabled me to broaden and deepen my understanding of spirituality. Further, rather than limiting myself to theoretical knowledge, I sought experiential knowledge through receiving spiritual direction for myself and attending silent directed retreats: several 8-day retreats and the 40-day retreat (at Loyola House in May of 2006). I experienced great benefit from these, not only for my own spiritual growth but also in supporting others in their spiritual journeys. I became convinced that spiritual direction would help Korean Protestants who are striving for spiritual growth. Out of my own faith journey my desire and concrete efforts to become a spiritual director emerged.

I began in earnest to practice the ministry of spiritual direction right after my experience of a 40-day Spiritual Exercises retreat at Loyola House in May of 2006. Since then, I have been giving spiritual direction to Korean Protestants who are interested in spirituality and want spiritual direction. In order to be trained properly, I participated in the Summer Practicum in Spiritual Direction at Loyola House during the summer of 2007 and received the certificate of that program. I also finished the Diploma in Spiritual Direction program of Regis College in 2010. Regarding my experience of giving spiritual direction, I have been meeting one or two directees every week for 5 years. Since January of 2008, I have also participated in 5- or 8-day retreats at Loyola House as a guest director, directing mainly Korean Protestants; I have done four retreats to date. In addition, I have worked as a staff member of Jubilee Institute for Spiritual Formation,
which was established in Toronto in September of 2010 to further develop Korean
Protestants’ spirituality with a variety of Christian spiritual traditions. In this spiritual
center, I have provided spiritual direction and taught prayer and spirituality. So far, I have
directed about 55 directees in retreat or ongoing settings. I have conducted over 500
sessions of spiritual direction.¹

My research interest is in the area of the ministry of spiritual direction for Korean
Protestants. I will focus on spiritual direction for Korean Protestant women in my D.Min.
research project. Most of my experience of giving spiritual direction has been with
Korean Protestant women: 45 out of 55 directees have been women. This is probably
because in the Korean Protestant church, most people who are enthusiastic about and
interested in prayer are women. Most participants in the programs that have been offered
by me or by the Jubilee Institute for Spiritual Formation—such as regular prayer
meetings, silent directed retreats, spiritual direction, seminars on spirituality and prayer,
etc.—have been women.

Through my years of experience in spiritual direction with Korean Protestant
women, I have become interested in their unique spirituality and in learning appropriate
approaches to spiritual direction for them. I have become convinced that spiritual
direction can be of great help for their spiritual growth. Some woman have been

¹ Along with the ministry of spiritual direction, I am employed in another ministry at Young-Nak
Korean Presbyterian Church of Toronto as an assistant pastor (part-time). I am in charge of the Young Adult
Ministry in our church, which has approximately 100 students. I have administrative and educational
responsibility for this ministry. In addition, I have taught Christian spirituality and prayer to adult church
members in several official programs and small prayer meetings. This research is related to my ministry of
spiritual direction.
emotionally and spiritually injured under the oppression of Korean patriarchal, androcentric society. In such cases spiritual direction has provided opportunities for them to heal their wounded spirituality. Many of them have been pleased that in spiritual direction, they can be heard in a supportive, non-judgmental way. They find it helpful when I as their spiritual director affirm their own experience, assist them in discovering their own voices and desires, and encourage them to make their own decisions rather than just following the guidance of their leaders or ministers. Some women at first think of spiritual direction as being checked or tested or ordered by a male ordained minister. However, as they come to understand the aim and process of spiritual direction, they appreciate my approach and my effort to remain a spiritual companion, not a “director” for them even though that is the word we often use to describe the role, and I am a male ordained minister. In sum, I have witnessed through my experience of providing spiritual direction to Korean Protestant women that they benefit from spiritual direction in terms of their spiritual growth.

In this research, I want to test my own anecdotal observations about Korean Protestant women’s spirituality, and my assumptions about how Korean Protestant women experience and are affected by spiritual direction, and my ideas about how to provide spiritual direction for them. This study will offer me academically credible understanding and interpretation of these issues. Furthermore, I hope that it will enable other spiritual directors to learn how to assist Korean Protestant women more effectively in spiritual direction.
I do not think that the ministry of spiritual direction is the only alternative for the Korean Protestant Church of the future; it is just one of the ministries available to the church. However, I believe that this ministry is very important in light of the present and future need for spiritual care and growth in our churches. I deeply desire to establish for Korean Christians a spirituality centre that provides retreats and spiritual direction and that trains spiritual directors. I also need to learn how to adapt the ministry of spiritual direction to our church setting. I want to contribute to the spiritual growth of Korean Protestants through introducing and promulgating the ministry of spiritual direction among them. I want this research to contribute to this goal.

**B. The Research Question**

It is my intention to study how Korean Protestant women experience and are affected by Christian spiritual direction. My research question is as follows: how does the practice of Christian spiritual direction of Korean Protestant women affect the way they experience, understand, and imagine God, and what are some of the implications of this God image for other aspects of their life?

In my research, all of the participants are first generation Korean Protestant women who have experienced the immigrant context in North America. Among them are those who have settled in North America and lived as immigrants for a while. On the other hand, there are those who are still active in Korea and live in Canada for several months during a year; these people live both in the Korean context and in the immigrant
context. Considering not only this complicated immigrant situation but also the limits of the research, I will not consider such an immigrant context as a significant variable in this research, so I do not include the word, “immigrant” in the thesis statement. However, the data collected will include some information about the participants’ experience in Canada. I want to focus on how Korean Protestant women experience and are affected by Christian spiritual direction, which had previously been unfamiliar to them. I am interested in Korean Protestant women’s experience of Christian spiritual direction regardless of their denomination. Their denomination background may affect their God-images and how they experience spiritual direction, and I may be able to uncover some of these correspondences in the stage of data analysis in my research. Korean Protestant women, whatever their denomination, have rarely experienced Christian spiritual direction before. I want to focus on how their experience of Christian spiritual direction affects their God images and hence their spiritual development. Also, spiritual direction is usually practiced either in a retreat setting or in a non-retreat or ongoing—usually monthly experience of spiritual direction—setting. Even though spiritual direction is offered in these different settings, the nature and process of spiritual direction are almost the same. In this research, I will be contacting these women in non-retreat settings.

Spiritual direction is “help with the development of one’s relationship with the Lord.”2 In this help, one’s God-image is quite significant, because one’s specific God-

image informs one’s experience of or relationship with the holy. Exploring a directee’s God-image is one of the basic concerns in spiritual direction. Furthermore, how one perceives God will influence not only one’s relationship with God, but also how one sees oneself and others, that is, one’s relationship with self and others; in addition, our God-image affects our relationship with the earth. This research focuses on how the experiences of Christian spiritual direction for some Korean Protestant women affect not only their God-image, but also certain other dimensions of their life.

The reason my research selects God-image among the many issues related to spiritual direction is both to narrow its scope and to avoid making spiritual direction in this research unnecessarily artificial. Considering the nature and process of spiritual direction, a director should not have any agenda about what is to be shared by his/her directees; the director must not force them to talk about one specific topic. However, to help them explore their God-image as it emerges in their sharing of life and prayer experience is a crucial task for the spiritual director because the issue of God-image is so fundamental in spiritual direction. In addition, God-image tends to become an initial focus for new directees. Therefore, focusing on God-image can appropriately narrow the scope of my study without distorting the nature of spiritual direction.

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In order to explore the research question of how the practice of Christian spiritual direction of Korean Protestant women affects the way they experience, understand and imagine God, and what some of the implications of this God image for other aspects of their life are, I will do a multiple or collective case study. I will research five cases of Korean Protestant women who have experienced Christian spiritual direction with me as spiritual director. In Chapter One, I will present the theoretical frameworks operative in this study. These will include a critical analysis of the context in which Korean Protestant women live, my theology of the ministry of Christian spiritual direction, particularly for women, and a theme of God-image in spiritual direction which is significantly involved in this study. In Chapter Two, I will indicate the research methodology employed in this study and the detailed research process using this methodology: for instance, data collection, data analysis, interpretation, and evaluative procedures. Chapters Three and Four will contain the critical analysis of five multiple cases, that is, the participants’ experiences of Christian spiritual direction; Chapter Three will basically deal with “within-case analysis” in which each case is analyzed separately; in addition to the “within-case analysis,” Chapter Four will present “cross-case analysis” in which similarities and differences between multiple cases are discussed. In Conclusion, I will present conclusions drawn from the analysis of data. I will also present some implications for spiritual direction for Korean Protestant women and suggest methods for spiritual directors to help them.
Chapter One

Korean Protestant Women and Christian Spiritual Direction

Introduction

In our day, many people are living in multi-cultural societies, especially in North America. In our churches today, therefore, pastoral care often takes place between persons of different cultures and backgrounds. In the area of spiritual direction, this is commonly the case. As a result, understanding another culture is becoming a compelling task for many spiritual directors. In this research on spiritual direction for Korean Protestant women, the crucial nature of understanding the cultural background of these women has become clear. Non-Koreans who give spiritual direction to Korean Protestant women will encounter cultural differences and any significant level of ignorance of the cultural background of their directees will hinder the efficacy of spiritual direction.

However, understanding the cultural background of Korean Protestant women is required

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1 In a context of cross-cultural spiritual direction, understanding another culture may not actually be a prerequisite for spiritual direction. Spiritual direction is possible even if a director does not have much knowledge about a directee’s cultural background; this is because all persons share much in common. Susan Rakoczy, who writes on spiritual direction in cross-cultural perspective, maintains that every person is in some aspect “like all others.” She refers to Bernard Lonergan’s transcendental method, which affirms persons as beings with the capacity for self-transcendence. According to Lonergan, this capacity can be actualized religiously by the experience of being in love with God. In the transcendental method, the search for the ultimate, known and experienced as God in religious language is common to all; in other words, religious experience is transcultural. In this respect, Rakoczy asserts that cross-cultural spiritual direction is possible in spite of cultural differences between the director and the directee. However, it should be also noted that Rakoczy discusses two other dimensions of cross-cultural spiritual direction as well: we are also “like some others” and “like no other.” Because as human beings we are distinctively “like some others,” that is to say, we have been shaped in a certain cultural background, understanding the cultural background of the director and the directee is no doubt important for the best spiritual direction. See Susan Rakoczy, “Unity, Diversity, and Uniqueness: Foundations of Cross-Cultural Spiritual Direction,” in Common Journey, Different Paths: Spiritual Direction in Cross-Cultural Perspective, ed. Susan Rakoczy (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1992), 9-23.
not only for North American directors but also for Korean spiritual directors, particularly men. Even though they share the same culture with Korean female directees, male and female experience of that culture is radically different. Furthermore, even Korean women may be too immersed in their culture to critically discern its influence on the spirituality of possible directees. For these reasons, understanding the cultural context in which Korean Protestant women are located is essential for anyone directing them. The goal of this chapter is to clarify key aspects of the culture within which Korean Protestant women are located and to explore appropriate spiritual direction for them.

This chapter will consist of three parts. In the first part, I will situate Korean Protestant women’s spirituality in the Korean Confucian context. Among many different cultural influences within which Korean people are embedded, I will focus on Korean Confucianism in particular because it is the dominant cultural influence that informs Korean ways of life. I will not describe Korean Confucianism extensively here. I will limit the scope of this description to the Way of Harmony, a significant doctrine of Confucianism and the hierarchical relation-making system in Korean Confucianism sustaining harmony in society. Then I will describe Korean women’s experience of subordination and devaluation in the hierarchical and patriarchal system. I will also point

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1 In my thesis, I will study first generation Korean Protestant women who live in North America. These interviews might include their experience of living in North America as immigrants. However, I will not consider such immigrant context as a significant variable in this research, not only because of the limits of the research but also because I assume that Korean women in Korea and first generation Korean women in North America have much in common in terms of their cultural and religious context; first generation Korean immigrants usually attend Korean churches in North America which are quite similar to those in South Korea. Rather, I will focus on Confucianism as a significant cultural influence on Korean people both in South Korea and North America.
out that they experience this same injustice and suffering in the Protestant church as well. Then I will present some negative aspects of Korean women’s spirituality formed in the Korean Confucian context.

In the second, I will articulate my theology of the ministry of Christian spiritual direction, especially for women. I will discuss Christian spiritual direction as a pastoral approach to healing and transforming Korean Protestant women’s spirituality. This discussion will begin with a working definition of Christian spirituality in my research. Then I will explore a contemporary understanding of Christian spiritual direction. Finally, I will present some feminist perspectives on Christian spiritual direction.

In the third, I will discuss “God-images” as a significant theme of Christian spiritual direction. I understand that an essential role of a spiritual director is to assist his/her directees in exploring and transforming their images of God. I will present some feminist perspectives on the theme of God-images in Christian spiritual direction and explore appropriate ways of spiritual direction to help women transform their God-images.

**A. Situating Korean Protestant Women’s Spirituality in the Korean Confucian Context**

1. **Korean Confucian Culture as the Way of Harmony and Hierarchical Relation-Making**

   Confucianism, an ancient Chinese religion and philosophy, officially controlled Korean society and culture for over five centuries during the Chosun Dynasty
Berthrong and Berthrong state that Confucianism in the Chosun Dynasty was a “whole way of life”: “It was an ideology; it was rituals and social customs; it was an education curriculum; it did have spiritual dimensions; it did have strong philosophic opinions.”

Interestingly, according to Yao, the Chosun Dynasty made great efforts to make Korea a more Confucian nation and more loyal to Confucianism than its homeland, China. Korean culture was indoctrinated with Confucianism; Confucianism has had an influence more far-reaching on the minds and life of people in South Korea than any other religion or philosophy. Such Confucian influence prevails even in contemporary Korea.

Among Confucian doctrines, the Way of Harmony is central. The theme of harmony penetrates all levels and dimensions of Confucian discourse; the harmonious relationship is discussed and explored from many points of view.

Yao gives a good description:

In terms of metaphysics, a harmonious relation between Heaven and humans refers to harmony between spirit and material, between form and matter, between mind and body, and between the one (the universal) and the many (the particular). In a religious sense, it indicates a continual process between this life and the life hereafter, between the divine and the secular, and between heavenly principles and human behaviour.... From the perspective of politics, it effects the unity

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5 Yao, 169-89.
between the ruled and the ruling, between the government and the mandate to govern, and inspires the people to correct disorder and chaos in order to attain to peace and harmony.  

Most of all, the Confucian emphasis on harmony has the practical function of compromising opposition and solving conflict in human relationships and sustaining the order of the society. According to Confucianism, conflict arises in personal relations when one is dominantly self-centered, merely looking after one’s own interests and satisfying one’s own desires. To the contrary, “harmony is the result of an appropriate accommodation of one’s own needs to the requirements of others.” This way of harmony can be attained by cultivating one’s own character and extending one’s cultivated virtue to others. In fact, most of the Confucian practices of self-cultivation are about human relationships, and their goal is to attain harmony and order in the world, particularly in human relationships.

According to KangHack Lee, this Confucian emphasis on harmony in relationships has strongly influenced the construction of Korean selves and Korean ways of relation-making. According to Lee, some North American psychologists such as Markus, Mullally, and Kitayama claim that Korean selves are “interdependent and

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6 Ibid., 173.
7 Ibid., 178.
8 Ibid., 179.
9 Ibid.
11 Ibid.
collective” as the result of the long influence of Confucianism. Koreans live as relational parts of a greater whole. They show a strong other- and family-centeredness. They also have a tendency toward “deemphasizing the self and adjusting oneself to the immediate situation in which one is a part.”12 In this collective culture, people’s life-satisfaction and self-esteem are likely to be achieved in terms of how well they can maintain good interpersonal relationships with others.13 In Confucian culture, Korean selves are highly relational.

Five key relationships in Korean Confucianism are father-son, emperor-subject, husband-wife, elder-younger, and friend-friend. The representative rules of achieving harmony in these relationships are called the “Three Bonds” (sam gang) and the “Five Relationships” (o ryun), which are described in the Confucian classics such as the Han bi za (Han fei tzu or Han fei zi) and Mencius.14 The Three Bonds describe the three relationships between king and minister, father and son, and husband and wife; the Five Relationships add two more relationships to the Three Bonds: between old and young and between friends.15 These rules ask people to maintain right relationships and practice virtue in the five different relationships in order to bring peace and order to life and the world.

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13 Lee, 165.
14 Ibid., 178-79.
15 Ibid.
In these two rules of relationship, three significant principles can be discovered: hierarchy, age, and gender. These principles have governed the relationships of people in Confucian society. First, a respect for hierarchy is essential in all aspects of relationships. This emphasis is especially clear in the rules for the relationships between a ruler and ministers, and between a father and family members; family members must obey the father, the head of the family; the ministers must serve the ruler. Second, gender is a key hierarchical factor in the relationships between male and female. As shown in the Three Bonds and the Five Relationships, a husband rules his wife. Importantly, this dominance extends to most relationships between men and women. Teachings on gender difference and roles such as Sam jong ji do (Three Virtues of Obedience) and Nam jon yeo bi (Men High Women Low) are good examples. “Sam jong ji do means that women should follow after three men through their lives: father, husband, and son. Nam jon yeo bi demands that more respect be paid to men than women because according to the Confucian rules of relationships man is high and woman is low from birth.” Finally, age is another crucial factor in Confucian culture for ordering human relationships. The Five Relationships emphasize “precedence of the old over the young” and this principle governs all relationships with the aged. This helps us understand why Koreans tend to attempt to discover the age of a person when they first


17 Lee, 181.

18 Ibid., 182.
meet: knowing their ages makes it easy to decide what kinds of relationship they should form between themselves.\textsuperscript{19}

The Way of Harmony that Confucianism pursues is attractive inasmuch as it encourages people to overcome self-centeredness and make great efforts in the cultivation of the self to achieve harmony in the world. On the other hand, feminist scholars such as Angela Son criticize the Confucian harmony as an ideal and its emphasis on the cultivation of the self as both the goal and process of Confucian life because it can apply only to those who are at the top of hierarchy, \textit{yangban} (aristocrat men).\textsuperscript{20} In fact, the three principles of hierarchy, gender, and age reveal the Confucian assumption that there is an innately hierarchical order in the world. In this system, both women and \textit{sangnom} (servant class men) cannot be regarded as respectable, “normal” human beings. These low-grade persons function only to maintain the hierarchical social system, in which only \textit{yangban} appropriate and enjoy order, peace, and harmony. The powerful effect of these Confucian rules of relationship remains today in Korean men’s and women’s minds and behavior.\textsuperscript{21}

\section*{2. Korean Protestant Women’s Suffering in the Korean Confucian Context}

On what level can Korean women be placed in the hierarchical order of Confucian relationships? What is the experience of Korean women in the Confucian

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., 185.
\textsuperscript{20} Son, 329.
\textsuperscript{21} Lee, 186.
context? According to western theologian Elizabeth Johnson, “patriarchy is a form of social organization in which power is always in the hand of the dominant man or men, with others ranked below in a graded series of subordinations reaching down to the least powerful who form a large base.”\(^{22}\) In this respect, Confucianism can be regarded as one of those patriarchal systems which have been dominant in the history of humanity. As in other patriarchal systems, in the relation-making system of Korean Confucianism Korean women are placed on the lowest level of the hierarchy since women can never be fathers of families, while young sons in the family or male slaves could possibly become heads of their own households.\(^{23}\) Consequently, in Korean Confucian culture, women are considered minors by nature and males are seen as inherently superior to females. It is not difficult to imagine how much Korean women have suffered from injustice in Korean Confucian culture. I will describe their experience as subordination and devaluation.

\hspace{1cm} \textbf{a. Subordination and Devaluation as Korean Women’s Experience in Patriarchal Confucian Culture}

In patriarchal Korean Confucianism—with its stress on a rigid vertical order of human relationships based on age, sex, and inherited social class—Korean women experience what Johnson calls, being “on the margin.” Being “on the margin” signifies being less, being overlooked, not having as much importance.”\(^{24}\) Women are


\(^{24}\) Johnson, 22.
systematically devalued in order to preserve the status quo in which men govern women. They experience overwhelming suffering and injustice in every dimension of their lives.

In Korean Confucian families, women are regarded as lifelong minors subordinate to men; they are treated as if they exist in order to assist and support men. An ideal woman in the family is passive, quiet, and chaste.25 Before marriage, she obeys her father. After marriage, she is expected to become an obedient daughter-in-law, submissive wife, and sacrificial mother. Education for women focuses on the formation of feminine virtues and domestic skills in order to make it possible to play these roles adequately. Young women are taught home management, self-discipline, courtesy to their husband’s family, and how to rear and educate children.26 In fact, “women’s definition of selfhood under the influence of Confucianism is OBEDIENCE in all directions of relationships.”27

In Confucianism, Korean women are likely to be deprived of their identity and rights. During the Chosun Dynasty, they were deprived of the simple but important possession of names, by which they could be called, identified, or recorded; “Without a name, women were only identified by their positions relative to men and thus lost their own sense of identity as individual persons.”28 They were called “so-and so’s daughter,” “so-and so’s wife,” or “so-and so’s mother”; in other words, they were identified only in

26 Ibid., 50-51.
27 Son, 328.
28 Kim, 55.
relation to men in their families. This is often the case in contemporary Korea although women have their own name. In this cultural context, women’s human rights have been severely restricted. For example, in Confucianism, women have not been allowed to participate in ancestor worship, the major ritual of Confucianism. By being excluded from this essential ritual—in which the identity of the family’s lineage and a sense of belonging to the family are strengthened—their marginality is reinforced.  

Another example that shows how women’s rights were violated is the principle of *chil gu ji ak* (Seven Eligible Grounds for Divorce) in Korean Confucianism. “Among the seven rules are disobeying parents-in-law, being talkative, failing to give birth to a son and being jealous of the husband’s concubine. If a married woman violated one of these rules, her husband could divorce her.” Because being divorced meant losing legal status in society, women had little choice but make great efforts to follow these unjust rules.

In this male-dominated Confucianism, very few women have been given leadership positions. It is an established norm that virtuous women would have no political ambition, would even have no exceptional abilities, and would always follow the lead of men in their families.  

In other words, women’s virtues are not to cultivate their women-selves but to keep family life in harmony, to create the milieu for their husbands to cultivate their selves; women’s roles are assigned to benefit men and their lives.

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29 Ibid., 49.
30 Lee, 183.
31 Yao, 183.
32 Son, 329.
way of Confucian thinking devalues women’s worth and abilities. It is still influential in contemporary society, where many women work outside the home and even take leadership roles at work. Leadership roles for women are often unwelcome in the minds of not only Korean men but also Korean women.\textsuperscript{33}

We have seen Korean women’s experience of marginality and subordination in Korean Confucian society. It should be noted that oppression and injustice toward women in Korean Confucianism are systematically rationalized and supported by Korean men, the dominant group in society. According to Jean Baker Miller, subordinate groups are defined by dominant groups as innately inferior, defective, or incompetent and their psychological characteristics as submissive, passive, docile, dependent, unable to think, etc. in order to benefit the dominant groups.\textsuperscript{34} In Korean society, if a woman asserts her own intelligence and independence and goes beyond her own subordinate boundary, she will experience shaming, and labeled as “different,” “unusual,” or “abnormal.”\textsuperscript{35} In this systematic maneuver, the dominants’ control over subordinates is justified and “permanent inequality” is experienced in the society.\textsuperscript{36} Miller’s analysis of the dynamic between dominant and subordinate groups in terms of permanent inequality is indeed an accurate description of the dynamic between Korean men and women.\textsuperscript{37}

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{33} Ibid., 325.
\bibitem{35} Son, 327.
\bibitem{36} Miller, 6-9.
\bibitem{37} Son, 327.
\end{thebibliography}
oppression, and inequality that Korean women have experienced in the Confucian culture have detrimental effects on every dimension of their lives.

**b. Subordination and Devaluation as Korean Women’s Experience in the Patriarchal Protestant Church**

How then does the Korean Protestant church speak of Korean women’s suffering in Korean Confucian culture? What is the experience of Korean Protestant women in the church? According to feminist theologians, Christianity has supported and strengthened the patriarchal sexist social structure in western society. The Scripture has often been used to justify the hierarchical relationship between men, the dominant group, and women, the subordinate group.\(^{38}\) As Elizabeth Johnson points out, such religious patriarchy is one of the strongest forms of patriarchal structure, for it understands itself to be divinely established; “Consequently, the power of the ruling men is said by them to be delegated by God (invariably spoken about in male terms) and exercised by divine mandate.”\(^{39}\) Confucianism is also a form of religious patriarchy, for it considers its patriarchal philosophy and social system as inherently given. As Protestant Christianity began to be introduced to Koreans in the late nineteen century, Christianity, a Western form of religious patriarchy, encountered Confucianism, its Eastern form.\(^{40}\)

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\(^{38}\) Son, 328.

\(^{39}\) Johnson, 23.

\(^{40}\) I will focus only on the Korean Protestant context in this paper.
Most Protestant missionaries who came to Korea were from the United States and Canada. The majority of these held fundamentalist views and they introduced a politically conservative form of Christianity. Therefore, social justice issues never were typical themes of Korean Protestant Christianity, which remained strongly focused on the faith of the individual.\footnote{Meehyun Chung, “Introducing Korean Feminist Theology,” in \textit{Breaking Silence: Theology from Asian Women’s Perspective}, ed. Meehyun Chung, 77-89 (Kashmere Gate: ISPCK/EATWOT, 2006), 78.} Although Korean women, in reading the Bible, found the liberating message that men and women are equal in God’s eyes, Christianity did not bring liberation from the dominance of men in society.\footnote{Ibid.} In fact, the conjunction of patriarchal Christianity with Confucianism in its indigenization process has contributed to the subjection of women even in the church. In other words, Christianity strengthened the patriarchal tendency of Korean Confucianism.\footnote{Simone Sunghae Kim, “A Korean Feminist Perspective on God Representation,” \textit{Pastoral Psychology} 55 (2006): 39.} The Korean Protestant church has been informed largely by Confucian and Christian patriarchal notions of gender hierarchy which have systematically justified the devaluation and subordination of women. Simone Sunghae Kim depicts this Korean religious context as follows: “Korean Christian women are doubly attacked, exploited, and victimized. It is as though Korean culture and the church conspire together to oppress, exploit, dehumanize, and even dismiss Korean Christian women all together.”\footnote{Ibid.}
Such dehumanizing of Korean women in the Protestant Korean Church has produced detrimental injustice. In general, women’s roles and status in Korean churches have been influenced by Confucian thought and practice. Women’s leadership and authority have not been welcomed and the roles they are allowed to play are usually as assistants to men.\textsuperscript{45} Largely, men have leadership and the right to make significant decisions, even though the majority of active church members are women.\textsuperscript{46} As “invisible helpers behind the scene,” Korean Protestant women are “mainly relegated to kitchen-related services in the church, which means that churchwomen repeat the daily routines of housework when they go to church on Sundays.”\textsuperscript{47}

The issue of women’s ordination in the Korean Protestant church reveals how difficult it is to change the structure of male dominance in the Korean Confucian context. Even though some minor denominations allowed women’s ordination quite early—for example, in the Methodist Church in 1955 and in the most progressive Presbyterian Church (PROK), the so-called “Kijang” Church in 1977—the other major denominations ignored and rejected this move for a long time. Finally in 1995, after much discussion, the position of minister became accessible to women in the Presbyterian Church of Korea (PCK), one of the largest denominations in Korea (the so-called “Tonghab” Church); however, in another major Presbyterian denomination, the so-called “Habdong” Church,

\textsuperscript{45} Grace Jisun Kim, 72.
\textsuperscript{46} Lee, 188-89.
\textsuperscript{47} Grace Jisun Kim, 72.
women’s ordination is still not allowed. In 2006, Meehyun Chung wrote, “there are about 430 female pastors, 988 female elders in the Methodist Church, 560 female pastors, 260 female elders in PCK, 169 female pastors, 252 female elders in PROK in Korea, but still a very few are on leading positions in the church.” In fact, only 3% of the Korean church leadership are women.\textsuperscript{48} It should be noted also that, in practice, female ministers are not on an equal footing with their male colleagues as of yet.

In addition, Korean Protestant churches have tended to exacerbate the suffering Korean women experience in Confucian families. Even though Korean women’s eager participation in church activities has been a temporary way of “coping with and seeking liberation from domestic or marital distress and suffering,” Korean churches have contributed to the justification of their suffering in the name of God.\textsuperscript{49} Korean pastors often “cite biblical texts to persuade women to obey their husbands and parents-in-law and to endure the domestic hardships for the sake of peace and harmony.”\textsuperscript{50} Interestingly, such use of the Bible sounds similar to Confucian prescriptions for women in familial relationships. Regardless of how much they suffer sexual, physical, and psychological abuse from their husbands, Korean women have been taught by their churches not to divorce and to continue to endure in order to keep peace in their family for these

\textsuperscript{48} Meehyun Chung, 81.

\textsuperscript{49} Lee, 189-90.

\textsuperscript{50} Ibid., 190.
commands are from God. In the patriarchal Korean church, Korean women have suffered in many different ways.

3. Negative Dimensions in the Spirituality of Korean Protestant Women

Korean women’s experience of subordination and devaluation both in Korean Confucian society and the Korean Protestant church definitely influences their spirituality in terms of their relationship with God, self, and others. First, as a consequence, Korean Protestant women in the Korean Confucian context may have negative images of God and have much difficulty in developing intimate relationships with God. The exclusive use of male language for God in the Korean Protestant church may hinder their spiritual growth. Sunghae Kim claims that from the beginning of Korean Christianity, the male symbol of God from Western Christianity fit well with the patriarchal emphasis in Korean Confucian culture. As a result, in the Korean Protestant context, the language of God has been exclusively male. “Hananim Abuji,” a Korean word for God predominantly used in the Korean Church, is a good example. “Hananim” means God; “Hana” means one, and therefore, “Hananim” connotes Christian monotheism; and “Abuji” means father. Since words in the Korean language are not usually gender specific, Hananim (God) can be either or both male and female. However, in the Korean Protestant context, “Abuji” meaning “father,” is often attached and suffixed to the gender neutral Hananim (God) and Hananim-Abuji (God-Father) and Hananim

51 Refer to the next section for my working definition of Christian spirituality.

52 Simone Sunghae Kim, 39.
(God) are used interchangeably. In other words, Korean Protestants impose a male figure onto their God, and thus turn God into male, as they call God Hananim-Abuji.\textsuperscript{53}

Such a dominant use of masculine language for God is detrimental to the spirituality of Korean Protestant women in different ways. To begin with, the patriarchal religious system and the oppression and exploitation that Korean Protestant women experience are easily justified by this exclusive use of masculine God-language. As Mary Daly succinctly states, “when God is male, the male is God.”\textsuperscript{54} In this male-oriented religious system, there is no doubt that it will be difficult for women to believe deeply in their own sacredness, their power, and their capacity to image the divine.\textsuperscript{55} In terms of their images of God, Korean Protestant women are likely to feel that God is not on their side and does not care for and protect them. They may have oppressive and unjust images of God. In addition, the image of father as a patriarch in Confucianism—which is generally authoritative and distant—can overlap with the image of God.\textsuperscript{56} Consequently, images of God as father may make intimacy with God problematic for Korean Protestant women. If a woman’s real father is earnestly authoritarian, she is likely to have much difficulty in having an intimate relationship with Hananim-Abuji in the Korean Protestant context. In sum, Korean Protestant women may have negative images of God in their

\textsuperscript{53} Ibid., 37-38.

\textsuperscript{54} Mary Daly, \textit{Beyond God the Father} (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973), 19.


\textsuperscript{56} Lee, 250.
patriarchal Korean Protestant context, which can prove a major obstacle to their spiritual growth.

Second, many Korean Protestant women seem to have great difficulty developing a healthy relationship with their self. According to Son, the subordination of women imposed by Confucian society impedes the development of the self in women. The lack of the development of the self among women causes low self-esteem and a pervasive sense of shame. Interestingly enough, such an inadequately developed sense of self-worth also generates grandiosity—which, she says, is indeed the other face of low self-esteem and is often attributed to women. When grandiosity in women fails to boost their self-esteem by evoking an affirming response from others, their self-esteem is further damaged. As a result, the intensity of grandiosity is again heightened in order to compensate for the damage to the self-esteem. “It is this vicious circle that entraps a person whose self is arrested in development.” Due to insufficient self-esteem, Korean Protestant women tend not to affirm and love themselves for who they are.

Furthermore, Korean women’s experiences of subordination and devaluation in the patriarchal Protestant church cause them to have difficulty in fully recognizing and accepting themselves as God’s beloved children. Sunghae Kim’s own experience describes this difficulty well:

57 Son, 326.

58 This is an unrealistic sense of superiority, a sustained view of oneself as better than others that causes the narcissist to view others with disdain or as inferior.

59 Ibid., 331.
Growing up in the Reformed Christian tradition, I often felt that my ontological self was somewhat defective, inferior, and not complete, especially in comparison to male persons.... I am referring to the feelings of being flawed by simply being who I am as a female person. I felt my personhood as female gender was invalidated.

It seemed as though God was silent in all this while he was loving, caring, and actively present in all other areas of my life. It was like a conspiracy between God and the gigantic and powerful system of the Reformed Christian tradition, which I was a part of, to make me, a female person, feel small, less human, invisible, and even dismissed. I saw a gap between the God I knew in my heart and from the Bible, and the God who seemed to have sided with the church and male persons (including male Christians).60

Korean Protestant women’s feelings of being ontologically defective as females and being unworthy to be loved by God can be a big obstacle to the development of their loving relationship with the self and with God. They may be unable to recognize what their uncertain feelings of shame or unworthiness mean. In addition, they tend to attribute these negative feelings to their own immaturity or fault, even though such feelings may signify their sufferings from injustice and oppression in the Korean patriarchal society and church. They also tend to fail to recognize their own needs, to care for themselves, to express their own desires, and so forth. In sum, Korean Protestant women tend to be unable to develop their own sense of self-worth and their identity as God’s beloved children under the influence of the two patriarchal systems of Confucianism and Protestant Christianity and therefore, their spirituality has been severely restricted.

Finally, Korean Protestant women’s failure in developing a good relationship with God and the self may result in failing to develop a loving relationship with others.

60 Simone Sunghae Kim, 35.
According to James M. Bowler, shame (or low self-esteem) causes troubles in the area of interpersonal relationships. Shame makes us respond to others in overly defensive ways, in other words, build walls around ourselves to hide our shame.\textsuperscript{61} Withdrawal, attacking our self, attacking others, and avoidance are four major strategies of our defense mechanism.\textsuperscript{62} This psychological explanation makes sense from the perspective of spirituality. It seems natural that if we do not love ourselves and do not have confidence in being loved by God, we cannot properly love others. Such brokenness and disharmony in relationships are not what either Christian spirituality or Confucianism aims to achieve.\textsuperscript{63} Korean women’s experience of subordination and devaluation both in Korean Confucian society and the Korean Protestant church has severely damaged their spirituality in terms of developing a loving relationship with God, self, and others.

**B. Toward a New Pastoral Practice for the Positive Development of Korean Protestant Women’s Spirituality**

Spiritual direction is a form of Christian soul care that goes back to the earliest days of the church.\textsuperscript{64} Even though it has never really disappeared in the history of


\textsuperscript{63} Son, 334.

\textsuperscript{64} David G. Benner, *Sacred Companions: The Gift of Spiritual Friendship and Direction* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 15. According to Kenneth Leech, the first known example of spiritual direction within the Christian tradition on any sizable scale can be seen in the Desert Fathers and Mothers in the fourth and fifth centuries; see Leech, *Soul Friend*, 37.
Christianity, large sectors of the Christian church have forgotten their own heritage. However, during recent decades, the tradition of spiritual direction has begun to be recovered. While Catholics have been leaders in the development, large numbers of Protestants have become involved in this religious trend.

Spiritual direction is still an unknown ministry for the majority of Korean Protestants. However, in the past 20 years or so, there have been a growing number of Korean Protestants who have experienced spiritual direction and have introduced it to the Korean Protestant church. Although spiritual direction is just one of the ministries available to the church, I believe that it can be very helpful in promoting spiritual growth for many Korean Protestants. From my seven years’ experience of offering spiritual direction to Korean Protestant women, I have become convinced that spiritual direction can contribute significantly to the positive development of their spirituality, so often damaged in the Korean patriarchal context. In this section, I will present my theology of Christian spiritual direction. This will include a working definition of Christian spirituality and Christian spiritual direction and some feminist perspectives on Christian spiritual direction.

1. Defining Christian Spirituality

Definitions of spirituality are numerous. Among them, Sandra M. Schneiders’ definition is helpful. She defines a generic term, “spirituality” as “the experience of

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65 Benner, 15.
consciously striving to integrate one's life in terms not of isolation and self-absorption but of self-transcendence toward the ultimate value one perceives.”

In a Christian sense, “ultimate value” refers to God. So she defines a more specific term, “Christian spirituality” as “that particular actualization of the capacity for self-transcendence that is constituted by the substantial gift of the Holy Spirit establishing a life-giving relationship with God in Christ within the believing community.”

In other words, “Christian spirituality is trinitarian, christological, and ecclesial religious experience.”

Elizabeth Dreyer’s definition of Christian spirituality is similar to Schneiders’ but describes more clearly many different dimensions of the self-transcending movement in a Christian sense: “Christian spirituality is the daily, communal, lived expression of one’s ultimate beliefs characterized by openness to the self-transcending love of God, self, neighbor, and world through Jesus Christ and in the power of the Spirit.”

Christian spirituality is not only concerned with religious experience itself but also with living it out in everyday life. Therefore, Christian spirituality involves one’s relationship with God, self, others, and the world. As I refer to Christian spirituality in my research, I am concerned about how a Christian has and develops a loving relationship with God, self, and others and the world.

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66 Sandra M. Schneiders, “Theology and Spirituality: Strangers, Rivals, or Partners?” Horizons 13/2 (Fall 1986), 266.

67 Ibid.

68 Ibid.

2. Defining Christian Spiritual Direction

William A. Barry and William J. Connolly who wrote *The Practice of Spiritual Direction*, an influential book about Christian spiritual direction, define it as “help given by one Christian [a director] to another [a directee] which enables that person to pay attention to God’s personal communication to him or her, to respond to this personally communicating God, to grow in intimacy with this God, and to live out the consequences of the relationship.”70 In other words, it aims to assist the directee in discovering what the spirit of God is doing or desires to do in the world and in his/her own circumstances and following this will of God in his/her daily life.71 Elizabeth Liebert’s definition has commonalities in form, content, and aim: “Christian spiritual direction, then, is an interpersonal helping relationship, rooted in the church’s ministry of pastoral care. In this relationship, one Christian [a director] assists another [a directee] to discover and live out in the context of the Christian community his or her deepest values and life goals in response to God’s initiative and the biblical mandate.”72 However, this definition also highlights spiritual direction as rooted in Christian tradition and as practiced in the context of Christian community. She also distinguishes spiritual direction from spiritual guidance, referring to the latter as “all the pastoral responses which have been called


'care of souls’ ... insofar as these pastoral functions raise our awareness of God’s call and our appropriate responses.” She defines spiritual direction as “a more specific, individualized form of spiritual guidance.”73 Agreeing with Liebert’s distinction between spiritual guidance and spiritual direction, Gerald May puts emphasis on the formality of a spiritual direction setting: “When spiritual guidance occurs in a formal, one-to-one relationship with another individual, it can be called spiritual direction.”74 As I refer to Christian spiritual direction in this research, I mean a one-on-one formal relationship between one Christian, the director, with another Christian, the directee, which aims to assist the directee to deepen his/her relationship with God, to discern God’s will in his/her own circumstances, and to live out the consequences of the relationship in his/her everyday life.75

The term “spiritual direction” itself can lead to some misunderstanding. The word “spiritual” connotes the ethereal or other-worldly, which may make one think that spiritual direction is restricted only to what we ordinarily think of as “spiritual” or “holy.”76 However, spiritual direction is and must, in fact, be grounded in everyday human experience. Elizabeth Liebert maintains that “spiritual” must be used to the effect

73 Ibid., 1.

74 Gerald G. May, M.D., Care of Mind, Care of Spirit: A Psychiatrist Explores Spiritual Direction (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1982), 8.

75 In the contemporary ministry of spiritual direction, one-to-one spiritual direction is not the only form. Many different forms of group spiritual direction have been attempted. However, I will limit the scope of the research to one-to-one, formal, structured form of Christian spiritual direction. For further study of group spiritual direction, see Rose Mary Dougherty’s book called Group Spiritual Direction: Community for Discernment (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1995).

76 Liebert, 9.
that it alerts us to look for the deepest dimension of human experience—out of our everyday life experience—and to pay attention to the presence and action of the Holy Spirit in our experience.\(^{77}\)

The other word “direction” is much more problematic. It has definitely authoritarian and “directive” nuances. As a result, spiritual direction can be misunderstood as a ministry in which a director leads a directee to a certain direction or shows the path of God’s ways to the directee. The word “direction” must be used rather to refer to the seeker’s (the directee’s) orientation; “‘direction’ is the goal of [the] interpersonal relationship [of spiritual direction], not its means. Spiritual direction facilitates the seeker’s process of finding her or his own direction, path, process and integrity in dynamic relationship to the person and call of God.”\(^{78}\) In a similar but slightly different sense, “direction” may refer to the direction in which the Holy Spirit is leading.\(^{79}\) In this respect, not only the directee but also the director seek the forward direction of the Spirit, who is the only real director in spiritual direction, revealed in the directee’s life experience. The human spiritual director is, in fact, an empathetic companion in the process.\(^{80}\)

This reinterpreted meaning of the term *spiritual direction* gives us a clearer understanding of the nature of spiritual direction. In addition, it enables us to distinguish

\(^{77}\) Ibid.

\(^{78}\) Ibid.

\(^{79}\) Rakoczy, 9.

\(^{80}\) Ibid., 22.
it from its closest relatives such as pastoral counseling, mentoring, and discipling even though they share some aspects in common with it. First, in spiritual direction, the primary focus is on God.\textsuperscript{81} This implies that the relationship between the Spirit and a directee is much more important than the relationship between the directee and his or her human director. Even though God’s presence is also accepted and acknowledged in the other forms of pastoral care, it is usually in the background as a kind of underlying principle.\textsuperscript{82} However, spiritual direction definitely aims to foster the direct relationship between the directee and God; in order to assist this process, the human director makes primary effort to pay attention to God’s presence and direction as frequently as possible during spiritual direction sessions.\textsuperscript{83} In this respect, spiritual direction is indeed prayer rather than a conversation between two people because it is a conversation between two people and God.\textsuperscript{84} Second, the directee’s prayer and experience of God are the main material of spiritual direction. This does not mean that his/her life experience is not to be discussed; life issues can be spoken and dealt with in spiritual direction. However, spiritual direction’s primary goal is not to solve life problems. Rather, spiritual direction encourages the directee to be more prayerfully attentive to God’s presence and to develop a more intimate relationship with God in the midst of life experience. Finally, the roles of


\textsuperscript{82} May, 115.

\textsuperscript{83} Ibid., 116.

\textsuperscript{84} Benner, 105.
spiritual directors are relatively secondary and unnoticeable in comparison with those of pastoral counselors, mentors, etc. Spiritual directors usually do not give answers, give advice, teach, or tell their directees what to do in their relationship with God or when making life choices. Appropriate spiritual directors would say, “I surrender myself to God for your sake. I will listen with one ear to the Holy Spirit and with the other to your description of your prayer and relationship with God. I will support you in prayer as you describe and discern your experiences with God and [I will] respond to you out of my ongoing prayer and reflection.” In sum, in terms of the centrality of prayer and the relationship with God in spiritual direction, it is different from pastoral counseling, mentoring, disciplining, preaching, moral guidance, and so forth.

As I introduce the ministry of Christian spiritual direction to Korean Protestants, I am aware of the problematic nuances of the term spiritual direction. As Kanghack Lee points out, the Korean translation of direction, that is, ji-do, usually reminds Koreans of the situation of education and the authoritative and educative relationship between teacher and student or trainer and trainee. However, as many writers and practitioners of Christian spiritual direction do, I prefer using the term spiritual direction than adopting

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86 Ibid., 28-29.

87 David G. Benner gives us detailed explanation of what spiritual direction is not in his book. See Benner, 89-97.

88 Lee, 18.
alternative terms such as spiritual friendship and spiritual companionship. It is not only because I want to acknowledge continuity with the long tradition spanning the church’s history but also because spiritual direction—only if it is used in the reinterpreted sense that we have seen above—can be a more appropriate term than others. In this research, I will use the term *spiritual direction*.

3. Some Feminist Perspectives on Christian Spiritual Direction

Christian spiritual direction aims to assist directees in developing their relationship with God. For this purpose, their spiritual director carefully listens to their description of their prayer and experience of God and responds to them out of prayerful reflection. This process takes place in any spiritual direction context. However, considering that Korean Protestant women’s spirituality is likely to be damaged in the patriarchal system built on Korean Confucianism and Protestantism, spiritual directors for them, whether they are male or female, must have a feminist sensibility in practicing the ministry of spiritual direction. They need to be convinced that God desires the full spirituality (or humanity) of women as well as of men and therefore, need to work to heal the destructive influence of the patriarchal system on women. Spiritual direction with

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89 Gerald May suggests that spiritual friendship can be seen as synonymous with spiritual direction in order to avoid the authoritarian connotations of *direction*. However, he also asks us to be careful that the term spiritual friendship may cause misunderstanding of its nature. Because this term highlights mutuality too much, there is a danger of turning spiritual direction into a “spiritual conversation” in which there is little accountability, direct confrontation, or precision in discernment. In addition, spiritual direction can be distracted due to the lack of structure in spiritual guidance that the term spiritual friendship may cause. See May, 10.
feminist sensitivity can provide a safe space for the development and restoration of women’s spirituality by diluting the oppressive influence of the patriarchal system.

In this section, I will present five significant points that feminist spiritual direction generally emphasizes: 1) honoring women’s experience; 2) helping women get in touch with and express their feelings; 3) helping women befriend their desires; 4) helping women recognize the patriarchal context in which their spirituality is damaged; and 5) providing a reconstructed Christian tradition to support women’s spirituality.

First, spiritual direction for women must start with honoring their own experience. In the ministry of spiritual direction, a directee’s own experience is key material. Spiritual direction focuses on the individual’s experience—not only religious but also everyday experience—and aims at discovering and fostering his/her relationship with God in the midst of the experience. Therefore, affirming and attending to a directee’s unique experience is central to any spiritual direction context.  

However, in spiritual direction for women, the task of affirming their experience is even more crucial. According to Sandra M. Schneiders, in male-dominated society, women’s spirituality has been shaped and evaluated mainly based on masculine experience; she calls this the “masculinizing” of Christian religious experience. As a result, women’s experience has been generally marginalized and considered unimportant,

90 Fischer, 6.
immature, and unworthy. They have been socialized into ignoring or distrusting their own experience. Therefore, a director’s primary task in spiritual direction for women is to help them find their own voices and trust their own experiences so that their stories can be told. For this, the director needs to take their actual, reported experience as an authoritative starting point or source of spiritual direction.\textsuperscript{92} Their director must have “belief in the authority of women’s experience, confidence that [they] are engaged in a new encounter with the divine through that experience, and the conviction that it is a norm for the truthfulness of the tradition.”\textsuperscript{93} Such affirmation from the director gives them permission to be, to discover, and to reveal their true selves.\textsuperscript{94} In spiritual direction, women can overcome the deadening silence in their lives, affirm their own voices, and rediscover their personal authority and personal power.\textsuperscript{95} As they come to trust more deeply in their own experience, they become able to transform their relationship to themselves and God.

Second, spiritual direction can help female directees recognize and express the actual feelings they are experiencing. In male-dominated society, women have been socialized to discount or repress their own feelings.\textsuperscript{96} They may avoid expressing their

\textsuperscript{92} Fischer, 6.

\textsuperscript{93} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{94} Margaret Guenther, \textit{Holy Listening: The Art of Spiritual Direction} (Boston: Cowley Publications, 1992), 126.


\textsuperscript{96} Fischer, 8.
real thoughts and feelings because they see these as unimportant or inadequate. They may even have difficulty noticing and getting in touch with their real interior reactions because these are easily repressed into an unconscious realm. Especially if they encounter “negative” emotions such as anger, hatred, or distrust toward God, they may find it very difficult to deal with them in prayer and spiritual direction. Such expression of negative emotion has been seen as undesirable, particularly for women, in the Christian tradition. They tend to fear that somehow there will be terrible divine retribution when they express negative emotion.\textsuperscript{97} Korean women may have much more difficulty in experiencing and expressing their negative feelings because according to Confucian rules of decorum, such attitude toward a higher entity in a hierarchical order—in this case, God—are considered as impolite and expressing anger and hatred toward others is a sign of immaturity in terms of sustaining harmony in relationships.\textsuperscript{98}

Naturally, it is to be expected that women in spiritual direction will present themselves as “tentative and indirect, almost to the point of playing guessing games.”\textsuperscript{99} Their director may be tempted to dismiss them as not serious or immature, particularly if the director is unaware of the characteristics of women’s language.\textsuperscript{100} However, their director must understand that their real feelings, positive or negative, are important signs pointing to their true selves. Getting in touch with, expressing, and dealing with their

\textsuperscript{97} Guenther, 123.
\textsuperscript{98} Lee, 252.
\textsuperscript{99} Guenther, 123.
\textsuperscript{100} Ibid.
actual emotions in prayer can lead them to a more integrated life and spiritual growth. Also, the director needs to help them remember that revealing their feelings and thoughts honestly is what God, the one who desires a more intimate relationship with us, really wants; for if we cannot express our true selves in our prayer, the relationship can easily become dry and irrelevant and distant. As the director can accompany women with much patience in exploring and expressing their own feelings in prayer, they will be able to encounter God who has compassion and love for them, to be healed and transformed by God’s love, and to move toward a more intimate relationship with God.

Third, the director for females also needs to help them befriend and express their desires in prayer—although such help is essential in any spiritual direction context. Christians, in general, have been conditioned to be suspicious of desires, considering them as “trap doors leading to selfishness and subjective whim.” This negative approach to desire was also true of Korean Confucianism. In Korean Confucianism, desire, especially sexual desire, has been traditionally considered as leading people to evil. Therefore, Confucians have tried to sternly control their desires in the practice of self-cultivation. In addition, “in a Confucian society emphasizing harmonious relationships, the virtue of humility understood as not paying attention to one’s own desires was a necessity.” In both in Korean Confucianism and traditional Christianity,

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102 Lee, 253.
103 Ibid.
expressing desires is generally considered as inappropriate but it is also considered true that women’s desires are disregarded and repressed more than those of men.

However, desire is essential in prayer because all prayer begins with desire; “Prayers find their first motivations in desire. We pray for what we want.”

In addition, as William Barry maintains, the growth in prayer involves the ability to heighten awareness of what one really wants in life and how one really feels in God’s presence. Of course, our desires should be sorted out and discerned in our prayer; in other words, our authentic and true desire for an encounter with God needs to be discovered and pursued in the discernment process. However, this goal of prayer can be reached only if we begin with desires that we have at the moment, whatever they may be. Therefore, one critical task in spiritual direction is to assist people in befriending and expressing their desires.

As a director helps female directees with this process of befriending desires in spiritual direction, s/he needs to carefully listen to what they really want. Because they have been socialized to disregard and repress their desires, they are likely to have difficulty recognizing their real desires. They may misunderstand their “conditioned desires,” a set of externally generated “oughts” that they feel they “should”—even if they

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don’t really—want, as their real desires.¹⁰⁶ For example, they may tell their director (or pray to God) that they want to forgive those who treated them unjustly even though they actually want to be angry at them or to be taken care of first. They may say that they want to become humble even though they really want to achieve a sense of self-worth. Therefore, the spiritual director must help them scrupulously avoid “shoulds” and “oughts.” There is one exception: the director can say that they should follow their real desires rather than their conditioned desires.¹⁰⁷ They should be reminded that expressing desire is not a sin but what God really wants them to do. The director must help them name and disclose their unacknowledged, hidden, but authentic desires and affirm these desires as authoritative and creative.

Fourth, the spiritual director for women should assist them in recognizing the social, political, and religious context of patriarchy in which their humanity and spirituality are restricted. Spiritual direction has traditionally focused on personal rather than social or political issues.¹⁰⁸ However, a feminist perspective calls for a major shift in this focus; it affirms the intrinsically social nature of spirituality.¹⁰⁹ In other words, feminist spiritual direction makes an effort to critically discern the influence of the social or political context where one’s spirituality is located and to disclose and resist injustice.

¹⁰⁷ Guenther, 135.
¹⁰⁸ Fischer, 14.
¹⁰⁹ Ibid.
and oppression within it.\textsuperscript{110} In this sense, spiritual direction can be regarded as prophetic ministry.\textsuperscript{111}

In spiritual direction for women, it is not unusual to hear of their unnecessary struggles due to their insufficient understanding of the social dimension on spirituality. Kathleen Fischer gives us good examples:

A number of the women I see in spiritual direction begin their description of an experience with phrases such as, “Something must be the matter with me” or “I don’t know what’s wrong with me,” and then go on to talk about a conflict they are experiencing. The rest of the account may relate to any area—prayer, ministry, relationships, or family life: “Something must be the matter with me; I can’t seem to get along with this parish team.” Or, “I don’t know what is wrong with me; I just don’t enjoy reading scripture the way I used to.” With such phrases these women express their belief that the problem lies somehow within them. Other women come to spiritual direction torn by the conflicting demands they feel in trying to be a good wife, a good mother, and at the same time fill well a role as teacher, scientist or artist, if they have chosen a profession. They blame themselves for their inadequacy instead of seeing their situation as the result of the conflicting demands placed upon women in our society....\textsuperscript{112}

According to my own experience in offering spiritual direction for Korean Protestant women, I often find that they tend to attribute the negative feelings such as anger and shame to their own spiritual immaturity or fault, even though such feelings may signify their sufferings from injustice and oppression in the Korean patriarchal society and church. Feminist spiritual direction can help women stop blaming themselves, and instead, help them gain new insight into their struggles in light of the reality of

\begin{footnotes}
\item[110] Feminist perspectives are not only limited to women’s liberation. They are concerned about all the situations where human beings are suffering from oppression and injustice due to any discrimination based on gender, race, or class.
\item[111] Lonsdale, 336.
\item[112] Fischer, 16.
\end{footnotes}
oppression. They can come to understand that the problems they regard as personal concerns are actually systematically caused and can only be fully solved through reforming the patriarchal system. Furthermore, their spiritual director can encourage them to grieve and lift up in prayer their loss and suffering in this oppressive context.

Finally, the spiritual director for women needs to provide a reconstructed Christian tradition to support women’s spirituality. According to feminist perspectives, the Christian tradition itself contains many oppressive aspects for women. Therefore, these cause harmful effects on women’s spirituality. One good example is traditional Christian teaching about virtues and sins. In the Christian tradition, virtues such as self-denial, self-sacrifice, and love, as well as sins such as pride and selfishness, have been considered to be central. However, feminist theologians maintain that these teachings are based solely on men’s religious experience. In other words, pride, self-assertion, aggression, and disobedience are typically “male” sins and self-sacrifice and love can be signs of maturity for men who overcome their typical sins. On the contrary, women must have a different list of their own typical sins based on their experience of being marginalized and oppressed in patriarchal societies: lack of a clear sense of self, too much self-abnegation, weak submissiveness, fear, timidity, diffuseness, and so forth. As Norvene Vest points out, pride, which is thinking of oneself as the center of the world, is

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113 Ibid.


115 Fischer, Women at the Well, 8.
not likely to be the sin for marginal people like women. For women, the main barrier to spiritual wholeness is more usually something like self-effacement than pride.\textsuperscript{116} “It is a sin, for at its heart is a denial of God’s love and the goodness of God’s creation.”\textsuperscript{117} After all, the traditional teaching of religious development, which is not based on women’s experience, has caused them to judge their natural attempts to achieve a sense of self, self-worth, or identity as selfish or sinful, to pursue self-denial to the way they are prevented from having a self, and in effect, to be conformed to a male-approved role.\textsuperscript{118} In sum, if such a reconstructed teaching for women on Christian virtues and sins can be provided in spiritual direction, female directees may reinterpret their spirituality positively and move toward a healing process.

Feminist spiritual direction also criticizes the Christian tradition for using exclusively male God-language.\textsuperscript{119} Such use of God-language makes us imagine and experience God as male although God is not male.\textsuperscript{120} As a result, women are prevented from believing deeply in their own sacredness, their power, and their capacity to image the divine.\textsuperscript{121} The masculinity of God and Jesus has excluded women from full

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{117}{Guenther, 130.}
\footnote{118}{Joann W. Conn, introduction to \textit{Women’s Spirituality}, 4.}
\footnote{119}{Fischer, \textit{Women at the Well}, 53.}
\footnote{121}{Fischer, \textit{Women at the Well}, 54.}
\end{footnotes}
participation in the life of the Church. According to Kathleen Fischer, praying with scripture itself can be problematic for women since in so many texts women are missing, marginalized, or oppressed. Particularly, when hearing of women’s experience of imaginative prayer, their director would see their struggles because most language, imagery, and symbols used for women’s religious imagination are still androcentric: for example, the Father, King, Lord, and even Jesus. In this respect, Fischer names the transformation of religious imagination as one of the key components of feminist spiritual direction. So directors for women must be aware of the oppressive elements for women in traditional God-language and scripture. They also need to be supportive in exploring new images of God and integrating them into women’s spiritual lives. Feminist spiritual direction must be a safe place in which women’s religious imagination can be transformed, so that they can develop their own intimate relationship with their “new” experience of God.

C. Assisting the Process of Transforming Images of God in Spiritual Direction

We have seen the transformation of religious imagination as an essential task of feminist spiritual direction. Such transformation can happen in spiritual direction as a

124 The Ignatian tradition has developed skills and techniques for employing the imagination in prayer.
125 Sandra Schneiders clarifies the issue of how the maleness of Jesus may influence women’s spirituality in *Women and the Word*.
126 Ibid., 65-68.
spiritual director for women encourages them to recognize their God-image and its influence on their spirituality and to be open to a transformative process of their God-image that God invites them to. A theme of God-image is central in Christian spiritual direction. In this research, I deal with this theme particularly in relationship to Korean Protestant women. In this section, therefore, I want to discuss why one’s God-image is essential in Christian spiritual direction and discuss how to help a transformative process with respect to one’s God-image, particularly from a feminist perspective.

1. God-image as a Significant Theme in Christian Spiritual Direction

Picturing God must precede any speaking about God, for our pictures accompany all our words and they continue long after we fall silent before God. Images—the language of the psyche—are the coin of life; they touch our emotions as well as our thoughts; they reach down into our bodies as well as towards our ideas. They arrive unbidden, startling, after our many years of effort to craft them.127

As Jungian analyst Ann Ulanov states here, our images of God have significant effects on our faith journey. Most of all, they operate fundamentally in our relationships with God, our religious experience. We often experience God as the one we image God to be.128 Ana-Maria Rizzuto’s empirical study, *The Birth of the Living God*, explains how one’s God-image is formed and developed in one’s entire life cycle from birth to death and demonstrates that it can generate one’s belief or unbelief—that is to say, it affects how one relates with God. In addition, she shows that one’s God-image affects one’s view of

128 Au, 106.
self, others and the world. “Consciously or not,” states Au, “our God-images directly affect the way we think, feel and act.” Dennis, Sheila, and Matthew Linn also emphasize the critical effect of God-image on our lives in their powerful claim: “In every aspect of our lives, we become like the God we adore.”

Reflecting on and transforming our images of God are important for our spiritual growth. It is when our images of God change that we change. Considering that spiritual direction aims to help one develop one’s relationship with God, and considering that one’s image of God is so critical to this relationship, it is easy to understand why contemporary spiritual direction practice regards one’s God-image as so important. One of the basic concerns in spiritual direction is indeed to explore a directee’s specific God-images that inform the directee’s experience of or relationship with the holy. Spiritual direction can provide a safe place where a person can be gently directed to examine the God-images that she has had in her life, to examine their effects on her spirituality and to experience, by God’s grace, the transformation of those God-images. Therefore, a spiritual director must understand the significance of God-images in a person’s spirituality and must learn how to assist that person in exploring a transformative process of his or her images of God. This assistance is much more

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129 Ibid., 104.


131 Vest, 187.
significant for women who have developed a distorted relationship with God due to the exclusive use of male God-language.

2. Feminist Perspective on the Transformative Process of God-Image in Christian Spiritual Direction

In assisting a directee’s transformative process of God-image, his or her director needs to understand that people often have working images of God that are quite different from the images they can verbalize. Au names the former an “operative image” (the actual image that influences our thoughts, feelings, and attitudes) and the latter a “professed image” (what we consciously believe and say is our image of God). For instance, women who tend to find it difficult to recognize and express their own feelings, desires, and needs in prayer perhaps have an image of God as one who is distant from and indifferent to them and does not accept them as who they are—although they believe and say that God is good to them. Recognizing one’s functioning image of God which reveals one’s actual relationship with God is the prerequisite to one’s spiritual growth. Therefore, the director must encourage the directee to explore his or her operative God-image hidden underneath his or her professed God-image.

A spiritual director must also discern if women are struggling with masculine or patriarchal God-images such as a father, king, and lord. For example, an image of God as father can be problematic for some women who have suffered in a patriarchal Korean

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132 Ibid.

133 Au, 111-112.
society. It is also true, of course, that for other women, the father God-image may carry positive meanings of “caring, responsible, and powerful.” The spiritual director therefore needs to be flexible in discerning the authenticity of his/her directees’ God-image. In spiritual direction it is assumed that God wants to communicate with us. Spiritual direction ultimately aims at fostering our intimate and unitive relationship with the self-communicating God. Considering this purpose of spiritual direction, appropriate images of God are images that can be helpful for developing one’s relationship with God. On the contrary, the images that are unhelpful for one’s spiritual growth, even though they may be based on the Scriptures, should be rejected. Which image is appropriate can vary with individual directees. Particularly, the spiritual director for women must become free enough to critically examine their God-images, particularly patriarchal ones, and to ask whether these images serve well in their attempt to develop a more intimate relationship with God and live a vibrant life of Christian love. If those images are harmful for the female directees’ spirituality, they must drop those images; they must cease to believe in that God. The director must encourage them to discern their own images of God in this way and develop them in a more helpful way to their spiritual growth.

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134 Sunghae Kim, 42.

135 Feminist spiritual direction does not aim to eliminate all masculine images from women’s spirituality. It does, however, try to identify potential harmful effects of masculine God-images on women’s spirituality.


137 Conn, “Women’s Spirituality: Restriction and Reconstruction,” 16.
Even though female directees may find masculine images of God unhelpful for their spirituality, they may still be reluctant to discard or revise those images. Such images may have shaped their belief systems for so long that they are likely to be identified as God. As a result, they may feel as if they are losing their faith when their God-images are breaking down. In the case of Korean Protestant women who tend to have a fundamentalist view of the Scriptures and to regard a traditional male-oriented theology as “the theology,” transforming God-images is not an easy task. They might think of their attempts to change those images as blasphemous. Therefore, a very careful and discreet approach to change their images of God is typically required for the director.

First of all, the director needs to remind his or her directees of a central affirmation of the Christian tradition on divine incomprehensibility or transcendence. “No human concept, word, or image, all of which originate in experience of created reality, can circumscribe the divine reality, nor can any human construct express with any measure of adequacy the mystery of God, who is ineffable.” Therefore, we must admit that no God-image we have can fully picture our illimitable God and therefore we must always be ready to revise it. Furthermore, the director can encourage the directees not to regard the process of transforming their God-images as necessarily confusing or

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intimidating but to accept it positively as an opportunity to move to another level of “Intimacy” in their relationships with God.\textsuperscript{139}

Secondly, the spiritual director can provide the directees with examples of feminine images of God that can be found in the Scriptures and the tradition. Grace Ji-sun Kim offers the biblical image of “Sophia” (Wisdom) as an alternative feminine image of God for Korean women; the image of Sophia has been already employed by many famous feminist theologians such as Elizabeth Johnson and Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza.\textsuperscript{140} Other very helpful images of God can be found in Sallie McFague’s discussion of God as mother, lover, and friend in Models of God.\textsuperscript{141} Such exploration of new images of God and such reinterpretation of Scripture can enable directees to reconnect with their traditions in new, life-giving ways.\textsuperscript{142} With such help from the director, they can discover a new God-image helpful for their spiritual growth.

Thirdly, the director for women may lead them to new religious imagination. In the practice of spiritual direction, a transformative process of our God-images cannot be easily completed even though a directee recognizes his or her problematic God-images

\textsuperscript{139} Briege O’Hare, “Opening to Love: A Paradigm for Growth in Relationship with God,” Presence: An International Journal of Spiritual Direction, vol. 10, no. 2 (June 2004), 27-36. In this article, O’Hare presents a paradigm of relationship development in the context of faith with three phases: I Certainty, II Searching, and III Intimacy. She emphasizes that we can reach the Intimacy phase if we go through the Searching phase characterized by confusion, doubts, and fear with faith.


\textsuperscript{142} Bisson, 124.
and intends to correct them. Although female directees who find the need to transform their God-images might be offered some alternative images of God, they may find it very difficult to transform their long-held God-images. They will see themselves still caught up with and influenced by them. The actual healing and transformation of their problematic God-images can be achieved when new imagination comes to them by God’s grace. Mary Rose Bumpus explains the significance of imagination in spiritual direction. Divine presence fills our universe fully but is often difficult to apprehend; it is our imagination that can give form to that pervasive divine presence. “The imagination has the capacity to draw us further into the incomprehensible mystery of God.”143 It is indeed in our imagination where God comes to meet us and inspires us with hope for transformation.144 In this respect, the director may encourage the directees to do imaginative work such as Ignatian imaginative prayer (so-called “Gospel Contemplation”). In this prayer, a pray-er puts himself or herself in the scene of a certain Gospel story and proceeds through the story in his or her imagination. S/he experiences the story as s/he is present there with Jesus. The directees may encounter in their imagination a new “God” (God-image) that they have never met before.

Finally, I believe that the director himself or herself acts as a model to convey a certain image of God to his or her directees. Therefore, how the director treats and accepts them in spiritual direction can be a powerful method to aid in the transformation


144 Ibid., 28-31.
of their God-images. The director’s loving and caring presence can reveal God’s love to them. Through continuous encounters with the director who is the living example of God’s love, the directees become better able to picture God who loves them. Therefore, the director himself or herself must keep transforming his or her own distorted God-images and experiencing God’s love in order to become a good model for the directees.

Conclusion

In this chapter on theory, I first explored the cultural context in which Korean Protestant women live. I examined one of the dominant cultures in Korea, Confucianism. I described the Korean Confucian culture and its patriarchal characteristics and how Korean Protestant women have experienced subordination and devaluation in this culture. I also looked at their suffering in the patriarchal Korean Protestant church, then I explored some negative dimensions in their spirituality that is effected by both patriarchal systems, Confucianism and Protestantism.

I criticized Confucianism generally in this chapter from a feminist perspective but I do not believe that all components of Korean Confucianism are hurtful to or negative for Korean women’s spirituality. For example, its emphasis on relationship and community can be seen to fit well with Christian values. However, when this emphasis turns out to be oppressive to minorities such as women, certain tenets of Confucianism will have to be challenged. In addition, although Korean women have generally suffered under patriarchal Confucianism, individual women’s experience will vary according to
social, economic, or educational class and particular life events. As the Korean society has been changing rapidly for the past few decades, young people seem to have gotten out of the influence of Confucianism by degrees. So, my general findings regarding Korean women’s experience and spirituality will not apply equally for each Korean woman. Therefore, a spiritual director should not approach individual Korean women with any bias. However, the influence of patriarchal Confucianism are still valid in society as well as Protestant church, especially to those who I have usually met in spiritual direction—they are usually over 40 years old. I believe that the findings in this chapter can prove a helpful resource to those providing spiritual direction for Korean women.

In the second section, I presented my theology of Christian spiritual direction, particularly for women. I articulated the working definition of Christian spirituality and Christian spiritual direction in this research. Then I discussed five significant points that feminist spiritual direction generally emphasizes: 1) honoring women’s experience; 2) helping women get in touch with and express their feelings; 3) helping women befriend their desires; 4) helping women recognize the patriarchal context in which their spirituality is damaged; and 5) providing a reconstructed Christian tradition to support women’s spirituality.

Finally, in the third section, I presented “God-image” as an essential theme of Christian spiritual direction, and outlined some feminist perspectives on this theme. Overall, this chapter presented key features of the theoretical framework operative in this
study. In the next chapter, I will present the process of the action-in-ministry that I undertake in this research project and the research methodology engaged in this action-in-ministry.
Chapter two

Research methodology

In the previous chapter, I presented my theology of the ministry of spiritual direction, particularly for Korean Protestant women. This includes my theoretical reflections and observations about their cultural and religious context, their spirituality, their experience of spiritual direction, the impact of such experience on their spirituality, and appropriate approaches to spiritual direction for them. Even though these assumptions are based on my own experience of providing spiritual direction to Korean Protestant women, they have not been tested and confirmed. Most especially, I need to explore Korean Protestant women’s own descriptions and interpretations of their own experience in this regard. The basic objective of this research, therefore, is to test such anecdotal assumptions of mine in an academically credible way. In order to make this project manageable, I narrow its scope to the theme of God-image. In this research project, I investigate how Korean Protestant women experience Christian spiritual direction, and how such experience affects their God-image and other aspects of their life.

For this investigation, I engage in a qualitative inquiry. Qualitative research typically focuses on learning the meaning that holds for the participants with respect to the chosen research problem, rather than the meaning researchers bring to the research or the meaning discovered from the literature. Furthermore, in qualitative research, the
researchers interpret what they see, hear, and understand from the gathered data.\(^1\) The result of qualitative research includes the voices of the participants, the reflexivity of the researcher, and a complex description and interpretation of the research problem.\(^2\) This approach will provide a holistic picture of the problem under study.\(^3\) It is appropriate for this research project.

In this chapter, I will present a multiple case study as the qualitative research methodology that I will employ, and I will explain why I have chosen this methodology. Then I will describe the detailed process of this research project using the multiple case study methodology.

**A. The Qualitative Research Methodology That I Employ**

John W. Creswell has identified five traditions of qualitative inquiry among a number of choices of qualitative approaches: narrative research, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and case study.\(^4\) Considering my research problem, there are a number of these methodologies that I could use, such as grounded theory, phenomenology, and case study. From available qualitative research methodologies, I opted for case study, particularly because it encourages various sources of data.\(^5\) In

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\(^2\) Ibid., 37.

\(^3\) Ibid., 39.

\(^4\) Ibid., 6-10.

\(^5\) Even though the grounded theory method also collects multiple data, I eliminated the option of grounded theory because I do not intend to develop a theory from the gathered data.
phenomenology, the source of data is limited solely to participants’ own descriptions of their lived experience, which are usually collected by interviewing. But I want to include various forms of data in my research. The methodology of case study allows a researcher to collect data from multiple sources of information such as observation, interviews, documents, audiovisual materials, and physical artifacts. ⁶ Also in case study, there is space for the researcher’s own interpretation, so that I can integrate my interpretation and the participants’ descriptions more freely in the research.

Specifically, my research employs a multiple or collective case study as a research methodology. I researched five cases involving participants who have experienced Christian spiritual direction by a spiritual director—myself—for a limited period of time (6 sessions within two months). The detailed process of the research project using the multiple case study methodology is described in the next section.

B. The Detailed Process of the Multiple Case Study

1. The Action-in-Ministry

First, I looked for would-be participants, got in touch with them, examined their qualifications, and got consent for their participation in my research. I looked for Korean Protestant female participants through the Jubilee Institute for Spiritual Formation, where I had worked as a staff member. The Institute had contact information for those who had participated in programs offered by the institute, such as introductory seminars to present

⁶ Ibid., 132.
*Lectio Divina* and *Gospel Contemplation*, bimonthly open seminars, silent retreats, and a spiritual formation program; the total number of such participants was about two hundred. With the approval of the Institute (See Appendix A: Administrative Consent Letter from the Institute), I was able to inform them about and ask them to participate in my research project using emails or announcements at events such as our bimonthly open seminars and the spiritual formation program (See Appendix B: Recruitment Script).

As I found women who were interested in participating in my research project, I had a brief interview with them and selected my actual participants from among them. My approach uses “purposeful sampling” which is commonly employed in qualitative research. Among various types of sampling strategies, I employ a “criterion” type of sampling, where a researcher selects all cases that meet a particular criterion; this sampling type is useful for quality assurance. In my research, the first criterion is related to a participant’s ability to clearly articulate well her experience of Christian spiritual direction both in writing and speaking. I did not include anyone who had recently been receiving regular spiritual direction. My concern here was that there were not many women who had such experience of spiritual direction, and most of them were in fact my current directees; I did not want to let my current directees participate in the research because I wanted to minimize possible power differentials between researcher and

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8 Ibid., 127.
participants. I was also concerned to restrict variables—the experience of long-time directees and novice directees might be quite different—and increase potential homogeneity among the participants; so the participants for my research are novice directees. In sum, I selected the participants for my research from among those who were interested in but had rarely or never experienced spiritual direction before. In addition, they were chosen because they were considered sufficiently self-reflective and able to articulate their perspectives on Christian spiritual direction and their own inner experiences including their experience of God or image of God. As I found five appropriate participants, I got their consent for their participation in my research using an informed consent form (see Appendix C). I also offered them a clear explanation of what Christian spiritual direction is, what role a spiritual director plays in spiritual direction, and what I wanted to discover in my research.

We practiced spiritual direction together for a certain period of time; there were six sessions per person within two months, approximately once a week. For this practice, I used a room designed for spiritual direction at the Jubilee institute (200 Racco Parkway, Thornhill, Ontario, L4J8X9).

Spiritual direction in my research focused on the participants’ God-image and its impact on other dimensions of their life. Considering the nature and process of spiritual direction, I as a spiritual director did not propose any agenda about what is to be shared by a directee. The participants were invited to share what they wanted in each session, particularly their prayer practice and life experience. My role as spiritual director was to
help them recognize how they perceived God; such perception often emerged in their sharing of life and prayer experience. I also helped them reflect on how their images of God may affect other aspects of their life. I could encourage them to bring these topics into their ongoing prayer and reflection. These forms of assistance are what a spiritual director normally does in any spiritual direction. I attempted to stay with what the participants said, within the focus of this short spiritual direction series on their image of God.

In terms of prayer methods, I respected and stayed with the ways of praying that the participants were using at that time. If they were not using any particular prayer method or as they wanted to learn to pray, I suggested prayer methods such as *Lectio Divina*, the Examen Prayer, or Gospel Contemplation. When I needed to suggest some scriptural passages, I offered what I thought would be useful for further exploring the directees’ God-image; this offer included at least two passages, so that they could have a choice about what they wanted to pray on. I made clear to them that there was no problem with their choosing not to pray on such suggested passages, if they so chose.

After finishing all the sessions of spiritual direction with the participants, I moved on to the stage of data collection in earnest.

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9 *Lectio Divina* is a traditional method of praying of the Scripture in Christianity, which usually consists of four steps: *lectio* (reading), *meditatio* (meditation), *oratio* (prayer), and *contemplatio* (contemplation). The Examen prayer is a daily spiritual exercise popularized by St. Ignatius of Loyola [1491-1556], which helps one become aware of God’s presence and the Holy Spirit’s movement throughout one’s day. Gospel Contemplation is an imaginative prayer, often useful for recognizing and transforming our images of God.

I assumed that the participants used such methods in their experience of programs at the Jubilee Institute for Spiritual Formation.
2. Data Collection

I collected data from multiple sources, including documents, interviews, and observations. First, before I began to provide spiritual direction to the participants, I asked them to respond in writing to a questionnaire (See Appendix D). It consisted of a few open-ended questions about their faith journey and their images of God; answers to these questions provided me with general descriptions of the context of the cases. Each participant’s written response to the questionnaire was collected at the first session of spiritual direction for each participant. All the written responses were translated into English.¹⁰

Second, after all six sessions of spiritual direction, I asked participants to respond in writing to another questionnaire (See Appendix E) about their experience of spiritual direction. After receiving all the written responses, I conducted an in-depth interview with each participant. I asked clarifying questions about what the interviewees had written to understand at a deeper level what they were telling me about their experience. All interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim (in Korean), and translated into English.

¹⁰ As qualitative research is increasingly conducted in an international environment, such issues as how data are translated, how data should be presented to the reading audience, and how analytic transparency is secured, become crucial. To secure validity, for transparency I will provide the readers with a parallel transcription using a side-by-side column layout; the English translation of the data is presented in the left hand column, followed by the original Korean in the right hand column. See Pirjo Nikander, “Working with Transcripts and Translated Data,” *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, vol. 5, no. 3 (2008), 225-231.
Third, I asked the participants to do “assigned homework” as another way of gathering data from participants.\textsuperscript{11} In my research, each participant’s prayer journal is an agreed upon “assignment.” I designed as a protocol such a prayer journal (Appendix F) and asked participants to write in their prayer journals at least once a session. I collected them at the time of the final interview.

In addition to all the gathered data from the participants, I added my observations as a spiritual director. I designed an observational protocol (Appendix G) and filled it in with my observations immediately following each session of spiritual direction. It consists of a “descriptive notes” section for recording a description of how each session had proceeded and a “reflective notes” section for reflections on what the directee said and how I, as the director, responded to her.\textsuperscript{12}

\textbf{3. Data Analysis}

Data analysis in qualitative research usually consists of preparing and organizing the data for analysis, then reducing the data into themes through a process of coding, and finally representing the data in figures, tables, or a discussion.\textsuperscript{13} Based on these basic steps of analysis, I present here the detailed process of data analysis used in my multiple case studies.


\textsuperscript{12} Creswell, 135-138.

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., 148.
First, I organized and classified all the collected data by creating “locator codes.” I began this classification by making word processing files for all the data. I labeled the names of the files with locator codes. For example, I used “Q1” for the written response to the first questionnaire, “Q2” for the written response to the second questionnaire, “I” for verbatim from transcribed interviews, “P” for prayer journals from the participants, and “O” for my observations. I used the initial of each participant’s name to indicate each person’s data; H for Hwayeon, J for Jihyun, M for Minsoo, Y for Yeonji, S for Sooyoung. For instance, the file of Hwayeon’s interview can be named “I-H.” In each file, I numbered paragraphs. These locator codes were used to indicate the exact location of the data throughout my research; for example, if I quote the 14th paragraph from Hwayeon’s written response to the first questionnaire, I wrote down “Q1-H14” as a locator code for the data. Second, I read through all the data while making margin notes and forming initial codes. Third, I described each case and its context mostly based on the written faith story of each person. Fourth, coded data were then compared, contrasted, moved around, and eventually organized into “themes” within each case. To establish themes, “categorical aggregation” was used, in which the researcher seeks a collection of instances from the data, hoping that issue-relevant meanings will emerge. However, if I

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14 Myers, 75.

15 In the file of verbatim from transcribed interviews, there are questions and comments from the researcher. I used the initial “R” for them and numbered them.

16 Ibid.

17 Creswell, 163.
discovered a single instance which in itself was not enough to establish a theme and yet this single instance seemed significant, I appropriately drew meaning directly from it without looking for multiple instances (“direct interpretation”). Also, I established “patterns” by looking for a correspondence between two or more categories. In addition, I developed “naturalistic generalizations,” generalizations that I can learn from each case. Fifth, in addition to the “within-case analysis,” I did “cross-case analysis” in which I looked for similarities and differences between cases. I produced generalizations to be applied to cases. Throughout the entire process of data analysis, I tried to present systemically how all the analyses were derived from the raw data.

4. Interpretation and Confirmation

The final task of the researcher is to interpret the data and present it in a comprehensible way that accurately reflects the meaning of the participants’ experiences. This interpretive stage is inseparably related to my own background, context, experience, and prior assumptions. However, I tried to make a clear distinction between the data and my interpretation, and articulate the evidence for the interpretation as much as possible. If necessary, I interpreted the data in conversation with significant literature on spiritual direction, including some feminist perspectives.

18 Ibid.
19 Ibid.
20 Ibid., 172.
21 This is quite significant for the researcher to gain the credibility and validity of the research from readers. See David Silverman, Doing Qualitative Research: Practical Handbook (London: Sage Publication Ltd., 2000), 11-12.
For the confirmation phase, I asked each participant to review and verify the synthesis and interpretation of the data upon completion of the analysis. All the results of the data analysis and interpretation were integrated and written in chapter three and four and conclusion.
Chapter Three

Within-Case Analysis: Korean Protestant Women’s Experiences of Christian Spiritual Direction

Introduction

The major task of this project is to analyze Korean Protestant women’s experiences of Christian spiritual direction, focusing on their images of God. This chapter presents the analysis of five cases. I chose five Korean Protestant women who were interested in but had rarely or before never experienced spiritual direction; only one of them has experienced spiritual direction a few times before. However, through Jubilee Institute for Spiritual Formation, all of them had been exposed more or less to various prayer-traditions of Christian spirituality, such as Lectio Divina, Centering Prayer, Gospel Contemplation, Examen, and silent retreats.

The five participants, Minsoo, Jihyun, Yeonji, Sooyoung, and Hwayeon,¹ are first generation immigrants who have lived in Canada for certain periods of time; three of them for less than ten years, one of them for over ten years, and one of them for over twenty years. Most of them are permanent residents or citizens of Canada, but one of them is still a temporary resident. All of them struggle with listening, speaking, and writing in English. They are very loyal to Korean culture and attend Korean churches for first generation Koreans. Although I did not intend to choose participants from a specific denomination, the selected participants are all Presbyterian—probably because a majority

¹ These names are pseudonyms.
of immigrant Christians are Presbyterian and the Jubilee institute for Spiritual Formation was established by Vaughn Community Church, which belongs to The Presbyterian Church in Canada (PCC). Even though all the informants are currently Presbyterians, two of them have Catholic backgrounds and one of them has a Methodist background. They currently attend three different Presbyterian churches; two of these churches belong to Korean Presbyterian Church Abroad (KPCA) and one of these belongs to PCC. The ages of the informants range from early forties to early fifties.

I have collected five types of data for each case: four from each participant and one from the researcher. Each participant has provided a written response to the questionnaire about their spiritual journey (locator code: Q1, Appendix D), prayer journals (locator code: P, Appendix F), a written response to the questionnaire about the experience of spiritual direction (locator code: Q2, Appendix E), and an in-depth interview based on the second questionnaire (locator code: I). As researcher, I wrote my own observations about how each participant experienced six spiritual direction sessions (locator code: O, Appendix G).

In this chapter, I present the analysis of the data for each case. To begin, I offer some background information for the case and a brief description of the context within which the case is located. Then I organize themes extracted from the raw data into four categories. The first category consists of specific issues that each directee brought up in spiritual direction. The second category includes themes related to her God image and her

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1 I will use such locator codes of Q1, Q2, P, I, and O as abbreviations for each data.
relationship with God that appeared in spiritual direction. The third category contains themes in terms of her relationship with self, others, and the world. The fourth category comprises themes in relation to the practice of spiritual direction: how the director practiced spiritual direction and how each directee experienced and evaluated spiritual direction. Then I discuss meanings of the themes, establish patterns between the themes, and develop generalizations that I can learn from each case.

A. Case 1: Yeonji’s Experience of Christian Spiritual Direction

1. Yeonji’s Background and Context

* Age: 45
* Marital Status: Married

Yeonji started going to church the year she turned 6, but her parents did not. She liked going to church because there she always felt happiness, comfort, and warmth. However, she envied her friends who came to church with their families. When she got to be high school age, her father did not allow her to go to church. So she could not attend church at all for 4 years. “Regardless, God was in my heart,” she says. During that lonely time, God was her only friend who listened to her stories and dried her tears. She spent her days telling God about her difficulties, plans and complaints. Even though she gained the freedom to go to church with her admission to university, she always wanted to go to

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2 This section is basically a summary of each participant’s written response to the first questionnaire, which was collected before the first spiritual direction session.
church with her family. Finally, she married a man raised in a Christian family and it
seemed to her that her long-held dream came true.

However, the reality Yeonji was facing was not what she had expected. She was
disappointed by her husband, who she thought was not a true believer and often skipped
Sunday services. Yeonji felt oppressed by her mother-in-law, whose faith and life did not
match even though she was a pastor’s daughter and a very active church-goer.
Particularly, her mother-in-law did not acknowledge and respect Yeonji’s faith because
she had not been raised in a Christian family. Yeonji often felt that she was not treated
fairly by her mother-in-law and the other family members in her husband’s family. Her
expectation that she would be led to a deeper faith by her husband’s Christian family was
not realized.

In her life as a business person, Yeonji met Christians who had visions of serving
church and missions. She was happy and had great expectations that she could do what
God wanted through her association with these believers. However, she was disappointed
by their double-sided life, talking about God everyday, yet always deeply concerned
about making profits at the same time. She could not find God in their daily lives and
wanted to distance herself from them. In her family and business life, she felt stressed.
Yeonji describes the sorrow, frustration, and resentment she felt at that time as follows:
“During my prayer which started with tears, I had a heavy feeling pushing down my
shoulders. I couldn’t stand up. I was scared. In this rigid condition, my prayer became a
painful cry and went on and on.” After some time, her husband who noticed her suffering
encouraged her to visit her sisters, who had immigrated to Canada. Yeonji planned to stay for a year and a half for relief from her suffering and to provide an early experience of study abroad for her children but she has stayed in Canada for almost ten years.

Yeonji’s life in Canada has not been easy. She has spent much time with her children and participating in church activities. However, she has experienced hostile attitudes of some church members’ toward her, and has felt frustrated and hurt. She was still filled with resentment towards her husband. Her mother-in-law visited her once a year, even though she was not with her husband. Her ongoing struggle with her mother-in-law in Canada worsened Yeonji’s resentment towards her. In this situation, God has been the only one she could talk to. Through times of prayer and meditating on the Word, she has been able to meet God who is always with her, loves her, and holds on to her. Her love for her husband and mother-in-law has been gradually increasing.

In her response to a question about God image in the first questionnaire (Appendix D, 4b), Yeonji articulated her images of God as “a friend who listens to me” “a provider and supporter,” “God who accompanies me,” “God who invites me to a dining table, and heals and restores me.” She did not mention any negative images of God in this written response.

I started seeing Yeonji in spiritual direction with this brief understanding of her faith journey and her God-image. In the first spiritual direction session, I heard more in detail about what she had written. In the following sessions, themes that she had
mentioned in Q1 recurred and were developed. In the next section, I present significant themes that emerged in spiritual direction with Yeonji.

2. Themes that Emerged during Spiritual Direction with Yeonji

a. “Religious Oppression”

Yeonji used the term “religious oppression” two times in Q1 when describing her negative experience in relation to her mother-in-law. Yeonji shared in more detail in the first spiritual direction session how she had been oppressed by her mother-in-law. Her mother-in-law had not acknowledged Yeonji’s faith and regarded it as immature because she had not been raised in a Christian family. When Yeonji asked her mother-in-law to persuade her husband to go to church, she rather admonished Yeonji by saying that she should not disobey her husband. Also, she felt oppressed by her mother-in-law’s unfair acceptance of Yeonji’s sister-in-law’s mistreatment of Yeonji. When her husband failed in his business, her mother-in-law and sister-in-law blamed Yeonji for his failure rather than telling him directly about their concerns. They implied that her lack of faith and prayer might be a spiritual reason for his failure. This religious oppression resulted in Yeonji struggling with resentment towards her husband and his family. However, she could not tell her own family about her suffering because she was worried that her family might worry about her. She even thought of divorcing her husband because of this oppression even though she still loved her husband very much. As Yeonji shared this story in the first session, she also explained that she had been healed and restored by God’s grace to the
point that she could understand and forgive her mother-in-law to some extent. However, I could see lots of tears as she shared her painful story.

b. Experience of Being Judged and “Spiritual Inferiority Complex”

One of the significant themes in the first three spiritual direction sessions was Yeonji’s experience of being judged by others, particularly other Christians. In the first session, she talked about her feelings of hurt from being judged by those who had had longer experience of church life than she and those who seemed to have more knowledge of the Bible or more experience of prayer. She often felt that they judged her meditations on the Bible, prayer, decisions, and service by their own standards. They often tried to teach her what to do and how to do it. Yeonji told about a painful experience that had happened a year before. She had participated in a ministry with the honest intention of helping people; she believed that God wanted her in this ministry. However, someone in that ministry misconstrued her intention and gossiped about her. She heard the rumors and received many judgmental comments from others. A dream that she had at that time describes her suffering well. In her dream, she saw a child smiling brightly at her. But the child’s smile turned into laughter. With a sneering face, the child tortured her with a long needle. She felt she was experiencing “spiritual death” at that time. In great fear, she prayed.

In the second session, Yeonji told another painful experience of being judged. In a ministry with which she was involved, she had become disappointed with a pastor in
charge. She suspected him of bad intentions and authoritative and judgmental attitudes, and was aware of her uncomfortable feelings towards him. She did not think he was acting appropriately but she tried to repress her negative feelings and become adjusted to his style because he was the authority in the ministry and she believed that he was a more mature Christian than she was. However, she got to the place where she could not stand his authoritative and judgmental manner toward her any longer and she left that ministry. She said that it is still not easy for her to see him or listen to his sermon.

Yeonji’s repeated experiences of being judged caused her to suffer from a “sense of inferiority in terms of faith.” She mentioned in her response to the first questionnaire that this sense of inferiority had been caused by her mother-in-law’s judgment of her spirituality. She recognized in spiritual direction that her “sense of spiritual inferiority” had been strengthened by repetitive experiences of being judged. She called it a “spiritual inferiority complex” in an interview. This complex made her less confident about her own experience of God and her own relationship with God. Yeonji describes this phenomenon in the interview as follows.

“Because I had a spiritual inferiority complex, my identity as a believer was shaken. When I met or talked with someone who was considered ‘spiritually mature’ in my estimation, I wondered if my relationship with God was right, or if I was believing God in a wrong way. Although I have always believed that my relationship with God was firm, meeting such people shook it deeply and I couldn’t get over this confusion.”
c. Guilt about Negative Feelings and the Tendency to Blame One’s Self

When Yeonji listened to others’ judgmental comments, she tended not to express the inner resistance she felt. However, she felt hurt and struggled a lot with negative feelings against them such as hatred and resentment. She criticized them inwardly, feeling that their real life did not match their confession of faith. She sometimes found herself talking negatively with others about them. She found it difficult to acknowledge that she could not control her negative responses to them or forgive them. For instance, when she shared her hatred and resentment against the pastor in the second session, she was frustrated by the fact that she was still controlled by those feelings and had not overcome them. Throughout the process of spiritual direction, she repeatedly expressed feelings of guilt about her negative feelings.

Moreover, throughout spiritual direction, Yeonji showed a tendency to blame herself for the pain she had experienced. She thought she must have contributed to causing those situations or she should have dealt with them better. She said in the interview after the final direction session, “I blamed myself rather than blaming them [people who judged and hurt her]. I thought to myself, ‘I have a problem. I must have a problem.’ ... ‘Why did I act like that?’ or ‘Why couldn’t I understand that person while others could?’” She regarded those painful situations as the consequence of her impetuous decision-making without careful discernment in prayer. She said she should have discerned what God wanted her to do before deciding to participate in those ministries. Her comment in response to the second questionnaire (Q2) clearly shows what
she was doing to herself: “At that time, I endlessly dug myself into the problem and hurt myself...”

d. Desire to Prove Myself: “I Want to Discern by Myself”

While Yeonji did struggle with her sense of spiritual inferiority and the resulting reduction of confidence in herself and her experience of God, she recognized and expressed her desire to prove herself at times. For example, she wrote about her resistance against her mother-in-law’s religious oppression in the response to the first questionnaire (Q1) as follows: “So I promised myself, ‘I will become an ideal (at least in my view) believer and show my mother-in-law so that I will never be repressed by her again.’” In the third spiritual direction session, Yeonji realized that she had always felt a desire for others to recognize the authenticity of her faith and spirituality. For instance, she said that she had always wanted to attain the ability to discern because she wanted to say confidently to others, particularly those who had judged her faith under the name of discernment, “I have experienced God,” “I have heard from God,” “I have discerned by myself.”

3. God Images in Spiritual Direction

a. God Image of a Warm Parent and a Big Tree

In the written response to the first questionnaire (Q1), Yeonji said that some positive images of God had been formed in her faith journey: God as a listening friend, a providing God, an accompanying God, etc. These God images were affirmed and
developed in the process of spiritual direction. Specifically, Yeonji experienced God as a warm parent in her prayer. For instance, in the second spiritual direction session, she illustrated an image of God that she had perceived in her prayer as “a parent who looks at me with a benign smile and is happy and satisfied with who I am.” In the third session, she talked about God being like a dad who embraced her warmly and gently, walked with her securely holding her hand, and lifted her up when she fell. In the fourth session, she described God as a dad waiting for her with open arms as she toddled towards him. In the fifth session, she shared a God image of a dad who gave her thumbs up, saying “My daughter, you are the best.” Yeonji felt that as God’s child she was loved in these images of God.

Another image that illustrated her relationship with God was a big tree with a branch attached. In the second direction session, Yeonji shared her experience of praying on John 15:1-14 (The Vine and the Branches). In her imagination, her whole body turned into a branch attached to a huge tree. She could not see any fruit growing on her, so she was disappointed. Then she felt like God was saying to her, “Remain in my love” (verse 9). She felt warm water streaming from the root of the huge tree and going through her body. She said in her prayer journal (P), “I felt I was deeply loved by God. Without any impatient concern for fruit I remained peaceful, feeling warm water that was flowing inside me.” In both images of God, parent and huge tree, she experienced warmth and love from God.
b. Image of Accepting God: “It’s OK”

In the third spiritual direction session, Yeonji talked about her experience of God saying to her, “It’s OK!” She felt God was raising her up by saying “It’s OK”, as she blamed herself for impetuous decision-making and her attitude of judging others with her negative feelings about them. She also remembered sharing in the second direction session that she had forgiven her son’s mistake of damaging her car and said to him, “It is ok. I am ok with it. Do not worry.” She felt that God was talking to her exactly the same way as she had talked to her son. She could believe that she was God’s beloved daughter and God accepted her mistakes.

c. “You Are My God”

In the fourth spiritual direction session, Yeonji shared her prayer experience of Psalm 63. As she read the psalm, the phrase “You are my God” in verse 1 touched her heart. In this prayer, she felt that her own faith journey was affirmed. She felt affirmed that she had encountered and experienced her own God, not any other person’s God in her unique journey. She felt that she no longer needed to be affected by the judgment of her by others. She experienced freedom, in which she felt God more intimately. This made me recognize that her personal relationship with God had been established more deeply.

In another prayer experience Yeonji shared in the sixth session, she realized God was calling her to pay attention to her own relationship with God rather than being
sensitive to the judgment of others. In praying on John 21, she was struck by the question in verse 21, “Lord, what about him?” She found Peter’s curiosity about or attention to John similar to her relationship with others; she thought that she had been too much involved in being judged by or judging them. In addition, she accepted Jesus’ response to Peter, “What is that to you? You must follow me” as Jesus’ response to her. With this, she felt Jesus inviting her to focus more attention on her relationship with him.

**d. From Abstract to Concrete; From Distance to Intimacy**

According her written response to the first questionnaire, Yeonji had positive images of God. In the process of spiritual direction, her images of God were generally positive. To the question about any change in her God-image through the process of spiritual direction in the second questionnaire she answered: “Previously, I only had abstract images of God in my head, but now those images became concrete, as in the image of parent ... and an image of a big tree. God is with me in these images.” In the interview, she explained this change: “... God images that seemed abstract before became more clear and certain. Previously I put some distance between God and me, and I could only draw God in my head, as a warm father. But now, I feel I’ve experienced God as being with me. Therefore this warmer image made it more clear to me that God is not far from me.” Her abstract images of God became more concrete; her distant relationship with God became more intimate.
4. Themes in Relationship to Self, Others, and the World

a. From Low Self-Esteem to Confidence

As she answered a question in the second questionnaire (Q2, 1b) about what she had experienced as significant in spiritual direction, Yeonji explained that she had gained confidence in herself through the process. “I have experienced God’s touch in my relationships with God and with other people. I have become more confident about who I am and about God’s endless love for me. This gave me the experience of reducing my spiritual inferiority complex and restoring my self esteem.” In the interview, she said, “However, I was able to get over it [low self-confidence triggered by the judgment of others] after doing this spiritual direction as I became certain that I’m receiving love from God.” Yeonji’s experience of being more confident about God’s love for her in the process of spiritual direction, helped her gain self-confidence and feel less oppressed by the judgment of others.

I offer this example of Yeonji’s becoming more self-confident and accepting of herself as she is. As mentioned above, she had a painful experience of being judged and gossiped about even as she participated in a ministry with good intentions of helping others and even following God’s calling. After this difficult experience, she blamed herself for immature discernment and decided to be very careful about helping others because she was too confused to discern if this decision was God’s will. However, this caution made her hesitate to help others altogether. As a result, she felt useless, because she could not follow her desire to help. In the process of spiritual direction, as she
became freer from others’ judgment, she expressed her desire to be herself saying “I want to walk my own way in which I feel comfortable.”

**b. From Conflict to Reconciliation**

As mentioned above, in spiritual direction Yeonji shared her struggles with her conflicted relationships. She struggled with being judged by others and judging them in turn. She got hurt by others and felt hatred and resentment against them. However, through the process of spiritual direction, she became less concerned about and more freed from others’ judgments. She even reached the point where she could embrace those who hurt her without as much hatred and resentment. In the response to the second questionnaire (Q2), she said, “... I could acknowledge and understand others [including those who had trouble with me] as God’s children who receive the same love as me.” In the fourth spiritual direction session, Yeonji talked about her experience of having a conversation with her mother-in-law by phone on Mother’s day. Yeonji could call her without much reservation. In that conversation, Yeonji felt love for her mother-in-law. She regretted that she had not been able to understand and love her mother-in-law before. She even felt that her mother-in-law was feeling thankful for her. Yeonji was grateful for her ability to understand and love her mother-in-law in that moment and for a degree of resolution in their relationship. As she shared this experience with me, she shed lots of tears. But these tears were not like tears she shed in the first session as she shared the
painful experience of being hurt by her mother-in-law; these were tears of gratitude and joy for the transformed relationship with her mother-in-law.

5. Themes Related to the Practice of Spiritual Direction

a. Affirming the Directee’s Experience and Encouraging Her to Bring It to God in Prayer

As her spiritual director, I listened to Yeonji’s painful experience of being misjudged. With many tears, she described how much she had suffered. However, I could see she felt uncomfortable expressing negative feelings such as hatred and resentment against those who had hurt her. She felt guilty about judging them and speaking ill of them. She even tried to blame herself excessively for what had happened. She also had difficulty expressing those feelings to God in prayer. I guided her toward bringing them honestly to God in prayer. Further, I encouraged her to affirm and taste her positive experience of God in prayer. I encouraged her to talk to God about desires she discovered in prayer and spiritual direction no matter how small or vague these desires were. I do not mean that I judged experiences as positive or negative. I tried not to imply that her feelings of hatred and resentment were appropriate or inappropriate, right or wrong. I encouraged her to accept what she was experiencing, positive or negative, as her own experience and to bring it to God in prayer.

Yeonji affirmed that my approach of spiritual direction was helpful for her. In the interview, she admitted that she was not praying honestly before our meetings.
“I don’t think I was honest before. Even though I thought that I laid down everything before God and I was telling God everything honestly, I didn’t say anything about how others had hurt me or how I hated them. Even when I was hating them in my mind, I prayed about other things, not the real problem. Since the problem was always on my mind, it wasn’t solved and my hatred towards them increased.... I also condemned myself for being pathetic and not being able to act [forgive] like a believer.”

Still, after our time together, praying honestly was not easy for Yeonji. She thought, “Don’t I first need to discern before bringing it to the Lord? Shouldn’t this be already solved before my prayer?” However, after trying to pray honestly, she realized that her gentle God accepts and understands her, no matter what she talks about. In her response to the second questionnaire (Q2), Yeonji described my approach as “a direction that helped me smoothly move toward God.” She continued to talk about the positive effect of this direction as follows:

“... [through the help of this direction.] I noticed problems that I had left buried and interior movements that were happening hidden inside me. When I took them to the place of prayer, it became an experience of finding gifts hidden inside of them. Just like finding the start of a tangled yarn makes it easier to untangle, spiritual direction helped me recognize and understand the problems that had before been incomprehensible and confusing through questioning and encouraging, and turn and move towards God.”

Yeonji “learned to naturally and gently take the problems to God” while before she had endlessly dug herself into them.

b. “Gentle and Flexible Spiritual Direction”

In her written response to the second questionnaire (Q2), Yeonji found the non-judgmental, non-authoritative attitude she experienced in spiritual direction to be helpful.
She said, “It was comfortable for me since spiritual direction was not about judging my inner state through authoritative teaching or direction.” She called this spiritual direction “gentle and flexible.” In the interview (I), she described one aspect of spiritual direction as an attitude of not judging and not teaching. She explained that this attitude in the spiritual director was not like those who tried to judge and teach her in an authoritative manner in her church. She also said in Q2, “Rather than teaching or judging, my spiritual director waited until I could realize on my own, and when I turned around to move towards God, he encouraged me even for the smallest change I made.” She affirmed that this gentle spiritual direction “made going to the place of prayer more enjoyable” and was helpful for her to develop a more intimate relationship with God.

c. Gentle Spiritual Director and Gentle God

At the outset of spiritual direction, Yeonji seemed not to truly believe that God could accept and understand whatever she brought to God in prayer. As a result, she was unable to pray about her negative feelings. However, through her participation in spiritual direction she developed a new image of God as a gentle parent. This experience evolved through her process of reflecting on her negative feelings and sharing them in spiritual direction. Attending to her feelings freed Yeonji to bring these feelings to prayer. Spiritual direction supported her to move from an inability in prayer to a more free expression of prayer where she experienced God’s gentleness. In the interview (I), she said, “However,

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3 In spiritual direction, it is an ordinary dynamic for a director to serve as a model of God to a directee. Although modeling the Sacred or God, the director should not get “caught” in the reality of being ‘god’ for another. This issue can be a topic that the director may bring up in supervision.
I realized that gentle God accepts and understands me through the process of spiritual direction, and this eliminated a burden [of expressing negative feelings] that I had previously carried. The realization that I am God’s child and it is okay for me as God’s child to bring my problems to my parent God was the big change that eliminated the burden.” She acknowledged that this gentle image of God as “a warm and tender parent” was confirmed in “spiritual direction which was done in a gentle and flexible manner.” That is to say, the gentle spiritual direction helped her affirm and make clear her gentle image of God experienced in her personal prayer. She even said in the interview (I), “this gentle image of God could have come from your [the director’s] way of guidance. Your gentle approach of spiritual direction helped me relate and think that, ‘God also accepts me gently like this.’” In Q2, she affirmed this point: “This gentle characteristic of him [the director] helped me solidify my [gentle] image of God and have a deeper and closer relationship with God.”

6. Patterns and Generalizations

In spiritual direction for Yeonji, one important issue was her experience of being judged. She shared her experience of judgmental oppression from her mother-in-law and of being misjudged by her church members. As a result, she found herself suffering from low self-esteem or “spiritual inferiority complex.” This complex made her less confident about her own experience of God and her own relationship with God. She also found
herself judging and having negative feelings against those who hurt her by judging her. Her experience of being judged was harming her relationships with God, self, and others.

In the process of spiritual direction, Yeonji had prayer experiences that featured positive images of God: she experienced God as a warm and loving parent and a huge tree providing love to her as its branch. Through these images, she experienced warmth and love from God. She also encountered God who non-judgmentally accepts her saying “It is OK.” In these experiences, her abstract images of God turned into more concrete ones. She found that her relationship with God became more intimate than before. She became more confident about her own experience of and relationship with God on her own faith journey.

Meanwhile, Yeonji found herself being more liberated from the burden of the judgments of others, especially in the fourth session. She became deeply rooted in the relationship with “her God,” not the God of other persons. In the sixth session, she felt God calling her to focus on her own relationship with God rather than being too concerned about being judged by or judging others. Still, this focus on her personal relationship with God was not an inner movement toward self-centeredness or unconcern for others. As she gained more freedom from being judged, she came to experience actual reconciliation with her mother-in-law and inner reconciliation with those who hurt her. Furthermore, she became more confident about who she is and decided to walk in her own way when she felt a deep desire to help others.
At the beginning of spiritual direction, Yeonji’s relationships with self and others were characterized by a judging attitude. She felt judged and she judged in turn. She got hurt and hated in turn. However, at the end of spiritual direction, she found herself not having to judge and hate those who hurt her. She experienced freedom from the burden of others’ judgment. In this transformation, she encountered a loving and accepting God who does not judge her. At the outset, her main focus was on outer relationships with others. In time, it shifted to her inner relationship with God. As a result, her relationship with others became peaceful as well.

In the process of spiritual direction, Yeonji reflectively pondered her life, thoughts, desires, and experiences of God. Bringing all to prayer influenced her renewed image of God and had an important part in Yeonji’s transformative experience. The director’s non-judgmental, gentle attitude helped her pray authentically and honestly about whatever she felt, thought, or desired. Consequently, she could enjoy her prayer more and move toward a more intimate relationship with God. Furthermore, gentle spiritual direction helped her experience a gentle God.

In summary, Yeonji experienced spiritual direction as a gentle, non-judgmental guidance that encouraged her to bring everything to God in prayer. It helped her pray honestly and authentically and encounter God more intimately with many positive God images. Her intimate relationship with God that had developed through the process of spiritual direction helped her be freed from her spiritual inferiority complex and have more confidence in herself. She is developing an ability to be less bound by others’
judgment and consequently, is coming to the place where she is more able to accept and reconcile with those who have hurt her.

B. Case 2: Minsoo’s Experience of Christian Spiritual Direction

1. Minsoo’s Background and Context

* Age: 40
* Marital Status: Married

Minsoo grew up in a Christian environment where both of her parents’ families were Christians (Protestants). Her family converted to Catholicism when she was about 20 years old. Around that time, she distanced herself from the church (both Catholic and Protestant) and for about 10 years she says she was away from the church and from God. During this time, she felt she could not even seek God because she thought that it was too late to go back to God and God would no longer accept her. Then a serious incident (divorce) occurred which shocked her into thinking about suicide. She started to seek God, little by little, praying inwardly “God, I’m really sorry but I have come before you. How am I supposed to live?” During this period, she moved to Canada. Gradually she became more and more dependent on God and experienced God’s presence.

Regarding her God image, Minsoo had been experiencing a change from “a God of justice” to “a God of love” for the past two years before she participated in spiritual direction. Minsoo describes her image of God in the past as follows:

My images of God in the past can be described as a God who emphasizes justice rather than grace. He is a God who probably loves me, but mine was more an intellectual acknowledgement of God’s love rather than a love experienced in
my heart. Also, right and wrong were most important for a God who always
claunches and judges, for God is a God of justice. A God who is scary and
feared some will not accept us if we do not meet God’s criteria. Despite this, if I
approach with courage and seek help, God will always help. If I do right, God will
compliment me.

Minsoo assumed that this God image of hers was influenced by her father, who was
always right, objective, and logical, and was deeply concerned about how others
perceived him. He would never compliment her if something did not match his standards.
However, after her divorce, she realized that her strong and perfect dad got hurt even
more than she and was in deep emotional pain. She began to have sympathy for and a
deep understanding of her father. She thinks that along with this, her past image of God
slowly started to change. During that same time she remarried and her second husband’s
deep love for her also affected her image of God. In addition, her image of God continued
to be refined through people she met in Canada. Her transition to experiencing a God of
love has progressed by degrees. She describes the change in her God image as follows:

God is just and righteous, but fair and always on my side. Grace from the
One who is on my side and loves me in any situation started to warm my heart,
and the tears of sorrow and pain turned into tears of thankfulness and happiness.
God has led me to understand that there is nothing to be afraid of if I only look to
the Lord, that I should not keep my eyes on others’ evaluations on me, and that
God wants me to live with confidence in the Lord. With this, a change has begun
in me. Even though it is still a little difficult, I can accept my shame and be joyful
with my shame.

I started seeing Minsoo in spiritual direction with this brief understanding of her faith
tourney and her God-image. My initial understanding of her was based on her response to
the first questionnaire (Q1). In the first spiritual direction session, I heard more detail
about what she had written. In the next section, I present significant themes Minsoo brought up in spiritual direction.

2. Themes that Emerged during Spiritual Direction with Minsoo

a. Change in Her Relationship with Her Husband

One theme Minsoo shared in spiritual direction concerned her relationship with her current husband. In the first spiritual direction session, she talked about a recent quarrel with him. She had felt peaceful after the quarrel even though she had been deeply afraid of its possible outcome, to the point of fearing another divorce. She said this was her first experience of feeling peaceful after such a quarrel. Also, she found that during that quarrel, she was able to talk with him honestly and without hesitation, explaining what she felt and thought. She believes she has gradually grown more able to trust him over the past 10 years of marriage and that this growth reflects a corresponding growth in her ability to trust in God who guides her life.

In the next session, Minsoo talked about another quarrel with her husband in the previous week. She shared mixed feelings about this incident. She reported getting too irritated about small issues. She was perplexed by the fact that she lost her temper too easily whereas she had been able to hold her anger better before. She felt sorry for her husband because she was causing him too much grief when he was such a good husband and had encouraged her to express honest feelings and thoughts to him. On the other
hand, she also felt she did not want to be the first to apologize. She felt guilty and
confused about what she was doing to him.

b. Desire Not to Initiate Apologies

In the process of sharing about confusion, Minsoo shared her reflections on how
she had acted in other similar situations of conflict. She tended to endure those situations
and be the first to offer apologies to others. Even though she felt guilty and confused for
her unwillingness to initiate the apology in the situation with her husband, she also
sensed this might be a meaningful change in her. As I asked a question about her desire,
she answered, “I do not want to apologize to him first. I want to hear him saying to me ‘I
am sorry.’” She shed many tears around this answer and said she had no idea of the
meaning of these tears. In her prayer journal she wrote after this session, “Before, I would
think to myself, ‘If I endure, if I understand all things, if I repress my thoughts and
feelings, it will become OK’ or ‘If I think the other way, this may be my fault.’ However,
now I think that these rationalizing thoughts and this way of silencing my real voice
might be my fault…. Being different is not wrong. I think that God wants me to say
boldly, ‘I am different.’”

c. Shame of Divorce

In the response to the first questionnaire (Q1), Minsoo’s experience of divorce
appeared as a key factor in her background. In spiritual direction she did not talk about
her experience of divorce itself but she repeatedly expressed how that experience has
affected her life. She seemed to feel shame about it. She did not mention the word
“divorce” at all in spiritual direction but only referred to it indirectly. I realized that she
was referring to her divorce, but in Q1 she never used the word divorce; instead, she
referred to it indirectly as “a serious incident,” or “my first failure.” In the fifth spiritual
direction session, she shared her concerns about disclosing her experience of divorce to
other church members. She was worried about how they would think about her and how
they might hurt her son from her first marriage. She said she felt much more
uncomfortable and stressed talking about her experience of divorce in “Korean” churches
or communities than she did in “Canadian” churches or communities. She said she felt
“cultural pressure” in Korean communities and felt the shame of being a divorcée much
more among Koreans. She also said her husband who was a “1.5 generation immigrant”
and even her son who was living in Canadian culture did not seem to struggle with this
matter like she did. In spiritual direction she showed some movement toward accepting
divorce as a part of her life but at the same time she continued struggling with it.

3. God Images in Spiritual Direction

a. God of Justice Who Punishes

As mentioned above, in response to the first questionnaire (Q1) Minsoo described
her past image of God as a God of justice who accepts and compliments her if she does
right and rejects and punishes her if she does wrong. This God image had influenced her
interpretation of her divorce. In the fourth session she said she had thought that her
divorce was God’s punishment because she felt she had become distant from God for a 
while (she had not been attending church) and she had been fearful of this punishing God. 
In the sixth session, she said she had not complained about her suffering, since she 
believed that she deserved it. She said she had been too distant from God to make any 
complaints. In spiritual direction, she shared how these images of God had changed.

b. “God on My Side”: “A Just and Fair God”

In spiritual direction as well as Q1, Minsoo repeatedly used the expression “God 
is on my side,” which represented a change in her God image to “a God of love.” She 
said the image of God on her side had affected her deeply. This image of God gave her 
the feeling that God understood her and knew her suffering. She felt God had been with 
her when she had gone through the divorce. This God image challenged her assumption 
that the cause of her divorce was God’s punishment. She came to believe that God was 
saying her divorce was not all her fault. As she said, “God is on my side,” she was not 
trying to reinterpret her faults for her own benefit, just because God was on her side. She 
was not talking about a God who would “spoil” her. Rather, with this image of God, she 
felt that God was not simply holding her responsible for her part in the divorce but was 
caring for her as well.

From the third session to the end, Minsoo mainly spoke about “a just and fair 
God.” This God image related closely to the image of a God who is on her side. This 
image was quite different from the “God of Justice” in which she had previously
believed. A God of Justice had been a God who justly punished her for her sins—being away from God and not worshipping God for 10 years—by inflicting on her the suffering brought by her divorce. However, “a just and fair God” was a God who judged fairly what had happened. She felt this God knew how she had suffered in her first marriage and how hard she had struggled not to fail. She felt God did not judge that her failure in the first marriage had resulted entirely from her faults. She felt God justly and fairly cared for her as God did for others. She no longer believed that God had punished her for her sins with the divorce.

In the sixth session, Minsoo came to realize that in these images of God on her side and God as just and fair, her relationship with God had grown. She felt she had come into a more intimate relationship with God. She said, “God is now very close to me. God listens to me and accepts whatever I say to God.” She realized she could express her honest feelings and even make complaints to God. She felt she had become able to trust God more.

**c. Suffering Jesus’ Trust in God**

In the fourth spiritual direction session, Minsoo shared her prayer experience on Matthew 3:13-17 (The Baptism of Jesus). She felt God’s deep love for Jesus in this passage. As she meditated on God having loved Jesus so much, and still having allowed Jesus to be crucified, she felt God’s deep love for her. She also felt Jesus had trusted God so deeply that he could carry the cross. She was struck by Jesus’ firm trust in God’s love
even in the midst of his suffering. In response to the second questionnaire (Q2), she said, “Jesus’ deep confidence and trust in God pierced my heart as the most important words. Confidence and trust in God!” In the fifth session, she talked about another experience of meditating on Jesus’ suffering. In this prayer, she could accept her suffering from divorce as relatively small and easy compared with Jesus’ suffering. Minsoo’s prayer on Jesus’ suffering and his trusting relationship with God in the midst of that suffering was influencing her interpretation of her own suffering.

4. Themes in Relationship to Self, Others, and the World

   a. “Seeing Self from the Perspective of God’s Fairness”

   In response to the second questionnaire (Q2), Minsoo reported that an essential insight she had gained in spiritual direction was that God wanted her to see herself from the perspective of God’s fairness. God wanted her to discern from this perspective. When this insight came to her, she said in her heart, “This is it!” In the interview (I), she explained the meaning of seeing from a perspective of God’s fairness.

   ... For example, when I do something wrong, it looks really bad from my perspective, but when I look into it deeper, I realize that I was thinking it was bad because others judge it as bad. But if I turn around and think about it more, it may not seem that bad in the eyes of God.... If I committed a sin with bad intention, it could be a sin. But if I did the same thing with no bad intention, it could be that it is not a sin in the eyes of God. When we see a person, we only judge the person based on their actions. But if we were able to see more than just the actions, we might see why s/he acted that way. We might be able to understand how and why things happened.... Probably God wants to focus more on the person’s pain than the wrong actions.
In Minsoo’s estimation, a fair God does not judge people based only on their actions; God sees intentions and hearts as well. God considers situations in which people cannot help acting the way they do. God even cares for their pain. Minsoo said she came to understand God’s standard (or perspective) clearly and God wanted her to see herself through God’s fair eyes. She said, “Therefore, rather than judging myself through my subjective standards or certain standards set by our society, God wants me to use God’s fair perspective to understand who I am.” She also made an attempt to see her experience of divorce from this perspective. “The thing that I consider shameful may not be a shameful thing to God.” As she admitted, she still felt bound by the worldly standards but found it difficult to discern through God’s eyes. However, she had discovered the perspective of God’s fairness from which she started to see herself, understand who she was, and reinterpret her past experience of divorce. I could see that she had been relieved of the burden of shame by degrees in the process of spiritual direction.

b. Desire for an Equal Relationship with Her Husband

In response to the second questionnaire (Q2), Minsoo said that in spiritual direction she had thought about God’s desire for her and her real desire for God, particularly in relation to her husband. She said “God wants me, as equal to my husband and together with him, to move towards God.” She wanted to make sure that he had not ruled over her at all. Rather, he had been the safest place where she could let herself loose and feel accepted. Therefore, when she was talking about an equal relationship with her
husband, she meant she previously had been too dependent on him and had followed his opinions unconsciously without expressing her own even though he had encouraged her to be true to herself. Now she felt God wanted her to feel more confident and to come to express herself. She said, “I think God made me find my own voice.” She also felt God led her toward independence.

... I do love my husband the same and I still depend on him, but for certain aspects of my experience, God became the one I could depend on. My husband is still God’s precious gift to me and still a companion who understands me, but he shouldn’t be the one I depend on.... I think God wants me to stand independently before God.

She realized the safest place for her to be accepted had shifted from being with her husband to being with God. Through the process of spiritual direction, Minsoo also came to an understanding of why she had acted the way she had in the quarrels with her husband, and of what God wants her to develop: greater dependence on God and greater independence in her relationship with her husband.

c. Seeing Others from the Perspective of God’s Fairness

In the fifth spiritual direction session, Minsoo expressed her desire to see not only herself, but also others from the perspective of God’s fairness. She wanted not to judge them only on their outer actions. She wanted to attend to and understand their inner struggles and pain. She wanted to see them through God’s eyes. In her daily life, she felt emerging within herself a new and greater compassion for people around her. She found herself listening empathetically.
Furthermore, she wanted to see fairly those she felt were hurting her. She did not want to immerse herself in self-pity, seeing herself as a victim and those who were hurting her as offenders. Of course, she did not want to blame herself without discernment; but she also wanted to see those who were offending her through God’s fair and compassionate eyes.

5. Themes Related to the Practice of Spiritual Direction

a. Encouraging Exploration of Inner Movements

As noted above, in spiritual direction, Minsoo shared incidents from her daily life, such as quarrels with her husband. She felt confused because she could not discern if she had acted appropriately and did not understand what her responses meant. She was perplexed by the way she would lose her temper and her not wanting to be the first to apologize. As her spiritual director I tried not to judge her actions, emotions, or thoughts as good or bad. I tried to affirm her experiences as hers and encourage her to explore them more deeply in prayer. Particularly, as she struggled with negative feelings and tried to repress them, I encouraged her to express them. I suggested they might contain important meaning and I encouraged her to look for changes hidden inside her. I asked questions such as “How did you feel?”, “Why do you think you felt that way?”, “What do you think is your desire as you say that?”, and “What do you think is the meaning of your actions or emotions?” I also encouraged her to pray to God whatever she found or realized in this exploration.
b. Leading to Deeper Understanding of Experiences

In her written response to the second questionnaire (Q2) and the interview (I), Minsoo mentioned that spiritual direction was helpful for her in terms of understanding her experiences more deeply. First, she said she had come to a deeper understanding of daily experiences that had been previously overlooked. She used the example of quarrels with her husband.

You know how I continuously talked about my husband from the beginning of this 6-week spiritual direction. It was strange. Things like, “We had a quarrel but I felt comfortable.” ... But in spiritual direction over the past 6 weeks, I got to share about things that I used to just let slip by and this process [of spiritual direction] helped me realize [the meanings of them].... You asked questions about why I used a certain expression or why I did certain things. This led me to rethink and reinterpret things that I normally hadn’t questioned....

In spiritual direction, Minsoo shared daily experiences, sometimes unexpected things.

Instead of disregarding them, she began to pay attention to them according to the director’s guidance, and to explore their meanings in reflection and prayer. Therefore, she was able to come to a deeper understanding of her experiences.

Spiritual direction also helped Minsoo toward a deeper understanding of her God image and her relationship with God. As mentioned above, before coming to spiritual direction, she had already experienced an important change in her God image. She entered spiritual direction as the image of a loving God was beginning to replace the image of a punishing God. In Q2, she said:

I have God images such as God as my friend, God who is on my side, and God who is trustworthy and just. Although I recognized to some extent that I had these images even before, spiritual direction has provided me with time to ask
questions, rethink these images, and retrace why, how, and when these images began to emerge for me. This process helped me confirm and further understand my current God images. It led to the realization of how much the image of “God on my side” brings me peace. Moreover, I was able to find myself trusting the “God who is just.”

In the interview she said, “[As mentioned in Q1, even before spiritual direction,] I had experienced a change in my relationship with God and already knew that this change was having a positive influence on me, but I didn’t fully understand how I was experiencing this change and how I was being influenced by it. I think I was able to understand a little more about the change [in my relationship with God] through the spiritual direction.” She also came to a clearer realization of how God wanted her to develop in her relationship with God from this point on. She said she could feel something changing inside herself. As she clearly stated in Q2, she did not experience any radical change in her God image through spiritual direction. She said, “From this spiritual direction, I experienced growth in God image rather than a change.” However, she could understand her God image and relationship with God more deeply: how her new God images affected her life and her relationships with God, self, and others.

Minsoo commented on how she experienced spiritual direction itself in Q2:

The atmosphere [in spiritual direction] allowed for calm conversation, and the director was good at listening empathetically and expressing that empathy. His restating of what I had said to him and offering comments that summed up my story gave me opportunities to gain insight on my own and to think about the parts that I hadn't recognized before. Being asked appropriate questions and being allowed to share my thoughts gave me the feeling of having a meaningful conversation....
Specifically, mirroring what Minsoo had said and putting questions to her were ways she said she found helpful for deepening her understanding of her experience.

6. Patterns and Generalizations

Minsoo considered her experience of her divorce as significant in her faith journey. After this painful experience, she began to seek God again. However, she felt God was distant. Her God was a God of justice who punished her for the sins of being distant from God and not worshipping God for a while; she felt divorce as a punishment from God. She thought this punishment was deserved, and so she made no complaints to God. Even after she remarried, her experience of divorce continued influencing her life in many ways. Most of all, she has struggled with shame and fear. In spiritual direction she shared these struggles implicitly and explicitly at times. However, she clearly mentioned in Q1 that her God image had changed over a period of years from a God of justice to a God of love. In her relationship with a loving God, she has experienced a new freedom from shame.

In spiritual direction Minsoo talked much about her relationship with her present husband. Particularly she shared recent quarrels. She found herself being able to express to him her thoughts and emotions with honesty and also with a new level of comfort. She felt confused about expressing herself too strongly and troubling her husband who had been so good to her. Still, she also found herself reluctant to initiate the apology after a quarrel. By exploring this experience in spiritual direction and prayer, she recognized that
she had tended to repress her feelings, suffer unnecessarily, blame herself too much, and be too quick to initiate apology to others. In this reflection, she came to recognize a connection between her earlier tendencies and her recent feelings and actions in the quarrels with her present husband. She finally realized that God wanted her to find her own voice, to become herself and to find a new freedom to express who she is. This would involve becoming less dependent on her husband. It would also involve moving toward God in equality with and in closeness to her husband. She realized that her safest place, the place where she feels most accepted had changed from her husband to God. She found herself in a more intimate relationship with God.

In spiritual direction Minsoo shared her images of God: “God who is on her side” and “A fair and just God.” These images did not come up for the first time in the process of spiritual direction; she had recognized them before to some extent. However, in spiritual direction, she could explore and achieve a new and deeper understanding of how meaningful they are in her relationship with God, self, and others. Through encountering God who is on her side and justly and fairly cares for her, she found herself imagining herself from a perspective of God’s fairness. She imagined a fair and loving God who did not judge her based solely on her actions or her situation but understood her intentions and even cared for her pains. As a result, she became able to accept and love herself more. She could even see her divorce through God’s eyes as not being shameful. As she found herself in a more intimate relationship with God, she experienced a movement toward a more independent relationship with her husband. She also wanted to see other
people from the perspective of God’s fairness. As she believed that God also treated others fairly, she wanted to see them through God’s eyes. She found herself listening to them with compassion and avoiding hasty judgment.

Spiritual direction was helpful for Minsoo in that it helped her explore more deeply whatever she experienced in her daily life and brought to spiritual direction. She began to see it all in terms of her relationship with God. She was able to come to a deeper understanding of her life and prayer experience. She found helpful the basic attitudes and skills of spiritual direction such as empathetic listening, mirroring, and asking questions. Minsoo found the experience of spiritual direction meaningful and helpful for reframing her previous life and prayer experiences. She found that spiritual direction provided her a new beginning.

C. Case 3: Jihyun’s Experience of Christian Spiritual Direction

1. Jihyun’s Background and Context

* Age: 44
* Marital Status: Married

After her marriage, Jihyun started attending church. For the first 10 years, she remembers no particular experience of God. However, as she planned to immigrate to Canada and encountered difficulty with this plan, she experienced God comforting and strengthening her through Bible verses and lyrics of praise songs. After she arrived in Canada, she began an earnest church involvement. She says, “I attended church almost every day as if I were working there.” She participated in “early morning prayer”
service, Bible study programs, small group meetings, and many different kinds of services. She says, “I wanted to serve church as if I were serving God.”

Meanwhile, Jihyun had a painful experience that she says has affected her relationship with God over the past few years—she refers significantly to this experience in response to the first questionnaire (Q1). She felt deeply hurt by hearing of critical comments about her from others, “She (Jihyun) is overzealous,” “She is serving to showoff,” “She is working hard [for the church] because she has plenty of time and money [unlike other immigrants who struggle to survive],” “She is not even knowledgeable of the Bible,” etc. This gossip about her secretly spread in the church community. This was a painful experience. For a while she felt unable to leave her home and even avoided church. Later she found out who had originally started the gossip about her. They came to her and apologized. She felt God wanted her to forgive them so she accepted their apologies. However, when she found them gossiping about her again, her feelings of resentment increased.

Jihyun was also angry because no one in the church stood up and took a clear position against what was being done to her; even pastors who were aware of the gossip pretended to know nothing and simply walked away. She prayed to God asking what to do. She felt God was saying to her, “Be silent in order to protect the church as one body in Christ.” She did not expose their hostility to get revenge, because she believed God

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4 The Korean Protestant church has had a tradition of early morning prayer since the beginning of the 20th century. Most Korean Protestant churches both in Korea and Canada offer early morning prayer service every day.
would punish them for what they did and she believed that the community would be better off with her remaining silent. Her silence would constitute another form of her love for God. That all happened four years ago and the situation has quieted down.

In response to the first questionnaire (Q1), Jihyun said she still felt that there were some unresolved issues in terms of her relationship with God. She still believed in God. She still wanted to cling to God. She felt she needed God to live in this troubling life. However, she felt God might abandon her at any time and simply leave her alone. God could ignore her hurts if they are insignificant compared to some great cause, such as expanding the kingdom of God. In Q1, she articulated her image of God as follows: “I find God cruel when God asks us to work for the kingdom of God and to dedicate ourselves to the community, but leaves us alone in our wounds and our difficulties, requiring us to follow in dedication to God simply in order to refine us and bring us to maturity.”

I started seeing Jihyun in spiritual direction with this brief understanding of her faith journey and her God-image. In this next section, I present significant themes that emerged in spiritual direction with Jihyun.

2. Themes that Emerged during Spiritual Direction with Jihyun

a. “Spiritual Slump”

In the first spiritual direction session, Jihyun shared in more detail her relationship with God after the hurtful experience of four years ago. She said she had been going
through a “spiritual slump.” After that experience, she had difficulty feeling God as intimately as she had before; rather, she often felt God did not care for her. She would feel God asking something of her but without taking responsibility for her needs or taking care of her. Therefore, she would resist doing something for God even though she wanted to. She said, “These days, I really don’t want to volunteer [in the church] for something that would make me stand out. If I serve enthusiastically, difficulties will arise again. Once again, God will not care and I will be the only one who suffers; I will be embarrassed.”

In the session, Jihyun also talked more about how she really felt towards God who had not cared for her four years ago. She expressed feelings of bitterness, hatred, and resentment towards God. She asked questions such as “Why didn’t God, who knows and loves me and has amazing power, help me in my difficult moment?” “Was there not even one person God could send for me?” and “Why did God just leave the situation the way it was?” She also expressed resistance to biblical explanations commonly given to those who are suffering, such as “A faithful God will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear (1 Corinthians 10:13),” “Suffering is, in fact, a blessing,” and “God’s grace is sufficient for you.” She felt she had needed to be properly cared for at that time but she had not received such care from God. As she shared these negative feelings towards God, she shed many tears.

As Jihyun shared her honest feelings, she recognized that these feelings were much stronger than she had expected. She found herself still bound by the earlier
experience that had seemed to be resolved. I asked her how she had prayed to God about these feelings. She found she had not yet expressed herself in prayer to God honestly and authentically. As I encouraged her to express these feelings honestly in prayer, she resisted my suggestion saying, “Do I have to speak about my feelings to God who already knows everything?” and “Can’t God come to me first and comfort me before I go before God?” Even though she struggled with expressing her negative feelings towards God in prayer in the first session, she found herself gradually able to pray on these feelings.

b. “I Wanted to Be a Good Daughter”

In the second session, Jihyun said she had tried to pray to God honestly but still had found that difficult. She felt God had been silent during her prayer. She said she wanted to be freed from her negative feelings towards God and toward others as soon as possible. She felt uncomfortable as she saw herself still bound to those feelings and unable to forgive those people. During the session, she came to realize why she had not expressed her feelings towards God. She said, “I think I wanted to be a good daughter [of God].” She suspected that she had thought God’s good child must be able to forgive those who hurt him or her and to accept whatever happened without complaint and s/he, of course, must not have or express negative feelings towards God. She assumed that this thought had led her to hold back her negative feelings and not to pray about them. She wondered if she had ignored and rationalized her true feelings and had pretended to be a mature Christian. She felt she still wanted to be a good daughter of God, so she was
reluctant to express the negative feelings toward God typical of a bad or immature child; she felt she wanted to resolve those feelings on her own, rather than bringing them up in prayer. With this insight, she said she would try to pray honestly about her feelings.

c. “Low Self-Esteem and Self-Contempt”

Throughout the process of spiritual direction, Jihyun sometimes said she had low self-esteem or even self-contempt. In the second session, she offered an example of her low self-esteem. She said she did not like her personality, which was outgoing, active, and sometimes eager to assume leadership. She said she had often received negative feedback or judgment from others because of her personality and thus had felt hurt. She said she had tried to act differently, repressing her natural characteristics, but this had not worked well. She said she had felt more hurt when the outgoing, active side of her personality had been judged as showing-off or prideful by others in the church. Even though she believed she had been trying to serve the church with no bad intentions, she still found herself disliking herself, as one who looked overzealous or proud in the eyes of others. In the fifth session, she said she had regarded herself as “a defective creation that was poorly made.” She struggled with her low self-esteem or even self-contempt.

3. God Images in Spiritual Direction

a. “So Was I”: A Suffering Jesus and His Boldness

In the third spiritual direction session, Jihyun shared her prayer experience around the Bible passage in John 4:1-26 (Jesus and the Samaritan Woman). In prayer, she had
identified herself with the Samaritan Woman. As the woman did not welcome Jesus with hospitality, Jihyun was talking back to Jesus who was speaking to her. She found it painful to see herself pouring her negative feelings and thoughts onto Jesus. As she kept praying honestly, she felt Jesus was saying to her, “So was I.” In her imagination, Jesus said, “I was misjudged too,” “I was betrayed too,” and “I was hurt too.” These words deeply touched her heart. She came to the profound realization that Jesus had been wounded as she had been. Then in her contemplation, she found herself running around town, crying out with many tears, “Do not misjudge Jesus,” “Do not betray him,” and “Please do not hurt him.” After the prayer, Jihyun felt Jesus fully understood her previous painful experience and her heart. She felt very close to Jesus and surprisingly light-hearted. In the following spiritual direction session, she came to realize why she had been so emphatic in her defense of Jesus in her previous prayer; those defending words actually uncovered her authentic heart that she had not revealed for a long time. She found this prayer helpful in her efforts to change.

In the fourth session, Jihyun shared her prayer experience with the Bible passage in Luke 4:16-30 (Jesus Rejected at Nazareth). She was struck by the fact that even Jesus had been rejected in his hometown. As she was seeing Jesus being rejected in imaginative prayer, she began to accept as natural in human life the hurtful experience by which she herself had felt unrecognized, misjudged, or disregarded. She thought, “If Jesus experienced being rejected, it must be natural that we as humans and sinners hurt each other. I can be hurt by others and I can hurt others too.” Most of all, the image of Jesus
boldly walking right through the threatening crowd and going his own way (Luke 4:30) grabbed her attention. She was struck by his boldness and authority. In her prayer, she was following after Jesus, who was going through the crowd. She sincerely wanted to imitate Jesus’ boldness. In the interview she elaborated on this prayer experience: “As I walked through the crowd following Jesus [in my imaginative prayer], I thought ‘Aha! I can go through it like this,’” She prayed to God, “I want to bear my cross well—as Jesus did.” She said she felt relieved from her wounds through these prayers.

b. God Who Patiently Loves and Is with Us in Difficulties

In the fourth session, Jihyun shared her realization that during the past 4 years, she had closed the door of her heart towards God even though she had seemed to be open to God. She also realized God had loved her patiently despite her closed heart and had waited patiently for her to return. She felt God’s patient love had been with her during the past years and this love had led her to reopen her heart to God and to repent. She said “God’s patient love is so marvelous.” In response to the second questionnaire (Q2), she said this patient, loving God in fact had been with her, understanding and empathetic through her difficulty and pain. In the interview, she explained, “I was not abandoned.” She felt God saying to her, “It is not that I [God] am abandoning you; you are so lovely and special to me. I am waiting for you because I know you can overcome it [any difficult situation] on your own. You can do it. This is why I've allowed such a difficult thing but I have kept watching over you.” In Q2, she articulates a change in her image of
God: “From the image of God who left me alone to solve difficulties for myself to the image of God who helped me according to my needs, gave me special love, and waited until I understood and accepted [the difficult situations].”

c. “God Who Is Pleased with the Way I Am”

In the fifth session, Jihyun shared her experience of prayer while walking in nature. As she was observing nature along some trails, she thought God’s creation is most beautiful just as it is. “It doesn’t have to decorate itself or to make an effort to look better.” “God calls what God created beautiful.” Then she applied this insight to herself. She felt she was hearing voices from inside herself: “I was not poorly made by mistake”; “I am the best just the way I am, the way I was created.” As she spoke out these words in the session, she shed many tears and remained silent for a while. Then she said she felt confident that God was pleased with the way she was. In the sixth session, Jihyun said that during the past week, she had experienced God continuing to say to her “I am deeply pleased with you.” She felt this voice of God was significant for her, something she must listen to. In the interview, she talked about how this voice of God affected her relationship with God.

… So after listening to this message, I became joyous and when I looked at God, God was like really close… an intimate father, an intimate dad. I think my former image of God was actually derived from the image of my parents who always told me to overcome and achieve when I was struggling. However, now God is the one that waits for me, looks after me, and sustains me when I'm sick and inadequate. Yeah. I think it is a kind of love that I have never received…. I think I didn't get this kind of love from my parents, but yeah, I felt that I was receiving such love from God, and God and I are both very happy.
Jihyun said she came to believe that she was a beloved daughter of God and God was her intimate dad. In the sixth session, she felt she could tell everything to God in this new intimate and trustworthy relationship with God that had been developed through the process of spiritual direction.

4. Themes in Relationship to Self, Others, and the World

a. Restoration of Self-Esteem: Accepting and Loving Self

Through the process of spiritual direction, Jihyun complained that her self-esteem was very low. She said she regarded herself as shameful and even as a defective human being. Specifically, she had thought her personality was inferior and simply not good enough. In the fifth session, she said she had made extensive efforts to look better in the eye of others because of this view about herself. She also admitted that she had been hurt by others’ judgment or gossip much more because of her own self-contempt. She also said in the interview that she had done her best to become a better daughter of God. However, through the process of spiritual direction, she had come to experience God as the one who created her the way she is and is well pleased with who she is. She said this experience of God led to continued healing of her self-esteem. She explained, “God was telling me that I was not poorly made. I wasn’t a defect nor made inferior, but rather he made me as is, exactly as I am. And the realization that God is very pleased with me made me think, I can be happy about myself, just the way I am. I, too, can be very pleased. It [this insight] gave me freedom.” She was not claiming to be free from all
weakness in her personality. But she felt liberated by the thought that she was good enough before God, just the way she was.

In response to the second questionnaire (Q2), Jihyun said that as she realized that she experienced major healing in her self-esteem, she was now able to become more confident and bold before the world and other people. In the interview, she said the sense of self-worth was something that she had really wanted to gain.

I think I always dreamed of living confidently and freely with the God-given sense of self-worth, not really knowing what it meant. But when I heard God's voice saying that God loves me despite my lack and my difference, that God loves me just as I am—God's children are countless like sand, but God exceptionally and dearly loves me, who is just a grain of that sand—it felt like such a great support. When I went outside I could think, “What's to worry? I have someone that waits for me at all times and will welcome me. I have someone that is always on my side. Who cares if some people view me unfairly, if some people misjudge my intentions? God is watching me, accepting me.” I think these thoughts really helped me to become confident and bold.

She realized that her sense of self-worth was being healed by God’s accepting love and consequently she became more confident and bold before other people. In Q2, she said that the words “My [God’s] grace is sufficient for you” which had sounded cold to her before but now sounded to her as words of love directly to her from God. Through the process of spiritual direction Jihyun came to accept and love herself with gratitude.

b. Understanding and Forgiving

As mentioned above, in spiritual direction, Jihyun shared her realization that she had tended to be overly sensitive to others’ judgment of her because of her low self-esteem. However, throughout the process of spiritual direction, she found herself
gradually overcoming this tendency. In the fourth session, she talked about her experience of hearing some people’s gossip about her during the past week. She found it surprising that she did not feel as much troubled or hurt as before and that she could let that incident go. She also recalled other incidents from the past week when she had been able to accept others’ advice without much inner resistance.

Furthermore, Jihyun was becoming able to better understand and forgive those who had hurt her. As she realized that Jesus also was rejected and misjudged by people, she found the strength to accept the very human reality in which we do hurt each other by rejecting and misjudging one another. In the interview, she said, “People are not like that [rejecting and misjudging] just toward me but also toward Jesus. It wasn’t primarily because of a problem I had. Our sinful human nature can lead anyone to act in such a way, and I too could also be doing the same to someone.” In the fifth session, she came to think that those who had hurt her might also be suffering from low self-esteem. She thought they might be trying to cover up their own weaknesses and shame and make themselves look better by thinking badly about and gossiping about her. From this new perspective, she could better understand and accept what they had done to her as “mistakes.” She even said she really wanted to pray for them. In the interview, she summarized a change in her relationship with those who had hurt her.

I thought that I wanted to be a person who could forgive and understand them [those who had hurt me]. I realized that God wanted me to become a person who could participate in God's delight [by forgiving and understanding]. I could now wait for them. In fact, I realized that a greater joy did not come from their apology but came from understanding this situation through talking with God.
Yeah! Recently, I came across the person who had gossiped about and hurt me and I discovered that I did not have any hatred in my heart. That person hadn't apologized and still talked to me in an unkind and offensive way. But there were no longer feelings of hatred, and I was surprised and amused to see myself thinking, “I knew she would talk like that, but that's okay.” (Laughs)

Throughout the process of spiritual direction, Jihyun experienced the joy of forgiveness.

c. Reframing Difficult Experience

In response to the second questionnaire (Q2), Jihyun described a changed image of God as “a God who wants me to grow by going through difficulties so that I become God’s child who can have deep conversations with God.” In the interview, she added more comments on this point.

… I think what God wants for us is to pass through difficulties, not to sink and stray in it. But I misunderstood, thinking that God abandoned me in my difficulties. I believe God wanted me to receive power not to remain in those difficult situations and to pass through them by trusting God, through speaking to God in prayer. I am really happy to see this happening in my life…. I think I now have more to talk about with God…. my suffering, others’ suffering, God’s heart towards our suffering, what God wanted us to do in our suffering, what I gained through suffering, etc. My prayer to God has become abundant with these things. And through this I have come to be opened up to many different perspectives…. 

Unlike before she began spiritual direction with me, she now showed an attitude of accepting difficulty and suffering, and framing them more positively. Particularly, she acknowledged that she could develop her relationship with God more intimately through these difficult situations. In the sixth spiritual direction session, she said she realized that restoring her relationship with God was the most important thing in her life. She felt this restoration could solve all the problems in her life. She said the problems she had
complained about and wanted to solve (being hurt by people in church) she no longer saw as “problems.” She also said she has begun praying with trust in God about many difficult life issues, whereas before she had not prayed about them at all because it had seemed useless. She said, “Although God gave me answers I did not want to hear, I would no longer complain about them and be hurt by them. I believe God will make me understand and accept them by God’s grace.”

5. Themes Related to the Practice of Spiritual Direction

a. Dealing with Working Images of God

In response to the first questionnaire (Q1) as well as in the first spiritual direction session, Jihyun shared extensively about a hurtful experience from four years ago. She recognized that this experience had left a great impact on her image of God and her relationship with God. She found herself feeling that God had abandoned her and not cared about her. This caused in her hatred and resentment towards God. She said in the first session that this realization had started to form as she had written Q1, and had taken concrete form as she was sharing in the first session. However, I noticed that she was finding it difficult to accept her “spiritual slump.” She was surprised to discover that her working image of God, which had been shaping her real relationship with God over the previous four years, was so negative that she was feeling bitterness, hatred, and

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5 According to Au, people often have working images of God that are quite different from the images they can verbalize. Au names the former an “operative image” (the actual image that influences our thoughts, feelings, and attitudes) and the latter a “professed image” (what we consciously believe and say is our image of God). See Au, Discerning Heart, 111-112. I provided a detailed explanation of this distinction in Chapter 1.
resentment towards God. Although she recognized the reality of her real relationship with God and even shared that recognition with me, she tried to rationalize what she was experiencing. She said, “Probably God has God’s own plan or will for me that I do not understand.” As I suggested that she honestly express her negative feelings towards God in prayer, she resisted this suggestion. I calmly encouraged her to face her current relationship with God, to stay with her negative feelings towards God, and to express them to God as much as she could. I tried to keep this approach throughout the process of spiritual direction.

b. Finding Her Own Way: Vitamins, Not Medicine

In response to the second questionnaire (Q2), Ji hyun said she had expected at the outset of spiritual direction to get clear answers about her struggles or to learn something from the director. However, in the process of spiritual direction, she came to realize that spiritual direction was a time for the directee. She said the conversations she had in spiritual direction focused so much on her that she was able to understand herself more deeply. Specifically, she found spiritual direction helpful for exploring her interior self. In the interview, she explained, “I think there were many different layers [inside myself] and I went in deeper in spiritual direction so that I could uncover the layers one by one to get to the real thing. Like getting rid of all the wrappings on top.” She said that this process of exploring her interior self was helpful for finding her own answers, understanding, and insights about herself and her experience.
In the interview, Jihyun admitted that focusing on herself in spiritual direction had not been comfortable for her at first.

… It was painful at first to reveal myself. You know, revealing that kind of thing to your spiritual director is… it sometimes hurt my pride, I wanted to avoid it… I also thought, “Do I really have to do all this?” But the reason why I could continue despite this reluctance was a feeling that there might be something here? Yeah, I began to have this anticipation that there might be something really valuable after I dig into this.

She said the inviting and calm atmosphere in spiritual direction had given her a sense of security. She came to feel that it was all right to have long conversations focused on herself. She also said the encouragement of the spiritual director provided her with the willingness to dig into her long-held spiritual slump. She said as she had revealed herself and shared unorganized stories with the spiritual director, he listened attentively to her stories and gave appropriate feedback such as summarizing and asking questions to her. She felt this manner of listening and responding was helpful for her in organizing her experience in her own mind and coming to understand it more deeply. She said in the interview, “During spiritual direction, I didn’t know what the director was doing for me but after it ended I realized, ‘He helped me sort out my experience by putting commas and period marks for me.’”

In Q2, Jihyun described spiritual direction as vitamins, not medicine. For her, spiritual direction was not the place where she was diagnosed by the director and received medicine suitable for the problems. She said, “It was not like a medicine that quickly transformed me. It was more like vitamins. Yeah, it played the roles of vitamins.”
It helped me make my relationship with God more dynamic and lively.” She also used this metaphor of vitamins in a sense that spiritual direction might be helpful not just for somebody who had serious problems but for anybody who received it as taking vitamins might be helpful for both sick and healthy people.

c. Non-Judgmental and Non-Directional Spiritual Direction

In Jihyun’s estimation, the director’s non-judgmental attitude was helpful for her. She felt the director was listening to her words without prejudice and with respect. In Q2, she wrote, “The director didn’t see me the way people commonly see me, but he trusted and acknowledged what I was saying as I shared difficult things that only I knew I was struggling with.” She also wrote, “It was very comfortable as [the director] did not unnecessarily praise me or put me down, but responded to me with an objective air.” In the interview, she added:

Yeah, you might not understand but this is one of my struggles. There are many times when I feel a burden if others regard me highly…. The spiritual director never once said to me, “You have a very good faith.” This by itself was very relaxing. Yeah. I did not want to be seen that way. I just wanted to talk about my real thoughts and if there were any problems I just wanted to think about them. The director didn't judge me hastily. The way he just listened and accepted what I said the way I said it really helped me feel comfortable. I felt like, “He’s really listening to me,” “He doesn’t want to just close the lid [solve my problems],” “He wants to discuss it together.” This attitude [of the director] made me keep talking. If the director had said some defining words like, “I think you are this kind of person,” I might have adorned myself as such. I might have tried to look better to him too…. He wasn’t forceful or didn't give me any instructions but, in fact, this place [spiritual direction] felt like a large tree that I could lean on and talk to.
She affirmed that the director’s non-judgmental, neutral, objective listening, helped her open herself in trust without worrying about how she was evaluated. In the interview, she also affirmed that the director’s non-directional approach made her feel comfortable.

… While I was struggling over the past two months [during the process of spiritual direction], I got a lot of help. However, as I tried to articulate the help that I received from the spiritual director, I thought, “I gained a lot but what did I exactly gain? What did he tell me?” Really, there weren't any words of direction or command. I think this really helped me feel comfortable…. I’m so thankful for this.

For her, the director was not someone who just listened to her and to whom she could talk, but she felt he had walked alongside her for those two months. She explained that this experience of companionship called to mind for her an image of the God who accompanies, an image she had reflected on throughout the process of spiritual direction.

6. Patterns and Generalizations

In response to the first questionnaire (Q1), Jihyun explained that the hurtful experience from four years ago, the experience of hearing gossip about herself had greatly affected her relationship with God. She found she had felt God as a God who did not care for her in that difficulty and who rather sacrificed her for the greater good of God’s kingdom. She also reported negative feelings such as bitterness, hatred, and resentment towards God. In the first spiritual direction session, these findings were confirmed and articulated. Even though she sorted out the causes of her “spiritual slump” for the past several years, she found it difficult to accept her real relationship with God as it was and to struggle with it in prayer. Therefore, the spiritual director kept encouraging
her to face that real relationship and pray to God honestly about what she was feeling. In her struggling prayer and in the supportive context of spiritual direction, she came to realize she had been suffering from low self-esteem or self-contempt, seeing herself as a defective creature, particularly in terms of her personality. She also realized that low self-esteem made her more sensitive to others’ judgment and gossip about her and caused her greater hurt. She realized she had sincerely tried to look better to God, that is to say, to become a better daughter of God. As she saw herself unable to forgive those who had hurt her, she felt a sense of failure in her efforts to be a good daughter of God. This sense of failure troubled her quite a bit.

In her prayer, Jihyun experienced positive images of God. She encountered a God who accepts and loves her the way she has been created, the way she is. With this image of God, she became more confident that God is pleased with the way she is. This new confidence resulted in a restoration of her self-esteem. She came to love and accept herself as she is and to be grateful for who she is. She also came to the realization that God had not abandoned her in her difficulties but God had been present with understanding and empathy in the midst of her suffering. In fact, God had patiently endured all her complaints and had waited for her to come to realize the meaning of that suffering. She was comforted by the fact that Jesus himself had experienced the same suffering, which helped her accept her suffering as natural to the human condition. As she saw Jesus go confidently and boldly through criticism and rejection by others, she felt the desire to imitate his boldness and confidence in her own situation. She felt liberated from
the previous painful experience and its negative effect on her relationship with those who had hurt her. She came to understand and forgive them and even to pray for them. She came to realize that difficulties can provide the opportunity to experience God more intimately.

Jihyun acknowledged that spiritual direction had been helpful in this transformative process. Specifically, she affirmed that non-judgmental and non-directional approach was especially helpful for her, since she was so sensitive to others’ judgment. This approach helped her trust the process of spiritual direction and open herself honestly to the director and to God. She understood spiritual direction as “taking vitamins” in that it encouraged her to explore her relationship with God, others, and the world dynamically even though it did not give her clear solutions.

D. Case 4: Sooyoung’s Experience of Christian Spiritual Direction

1. Sooyoung’s Background and Context

* Age: 47
* Marital Status: Married

In the late 1980s, Sooyoung’s family immigrated to Toronto. After immigration, her family began to attend church for the first time. She began attending a Korean Methodist church, but, after her marriage, she switched to a Korean Presbyterian church. Her younger brother’s unexpected death 13 years ago brought important changes to her life, especially her spiritual life. She began to search for God and to pray in earnest, and she encountered God in some powerful experiences.
In response to the first questionnaire (Q1), Sooyoung described her first personal encounter with God in a revival meeting in her church.

While praying, I suddenly felt huge body tremors, which started in my toes and moved up along my legs. It felt as if I were being electrocuted. Without having a moment to figure out what was happening to me, tears were endlessly falling from my eyes. I just knew it was God's response. Realizing that God listens even to my small prayer and responds explicitly, I was embarrassed and I felt sorry for the days that I didn't know of God’s existence and the moments I denied God. In God’s incredible presence, I confessed with tears. “Forgive me for all those days I didn’t acknowledge you.” Just like that, I received God’s grace to experience God’s existence, which I had often read about in the Bible, but now I could feel God’s presence with my heart rather than simply intellectually. “Words written in this thick Bible are all true!” I could suddenly believe everything. After this, I began to enjoy worshiping God more than anything else. Now I always acknowledge God’s presence and sincerely worship during the service.

A year later (in 2007), Sooyoung experienced God by receiving the gift of “speaking in tongues” in another revival meeting. She described the experience.

… [during a worship service,] I realized I had always received love from God, but had never given my love to God, and at that moment, I confessed, “I truly love you, God,” with uncontrollable passion. In that moment, I was confident that God was listening to my confession, and although I did not understand why, I asked for the “gift” for which I had yearned for the past 2 years. “Lord, let me speak in tongues.” Right after I prayed, I had an unforgettable physical experience. My tongue moving on its own after a strong wind came into my mouth and the body tremors that were like standing on the ground during an earthquake were really astonishing. With my will, there was nothing I could do but praise God with gratitude and joy…. After receiving the “heavenly language” as a gift, I really began to enjoy my prayer times. Having the fellowship time with God gave me a tremendous amount of energy, and I realized the love that is flowing through my spirit is naturally flowing through my surroundings including my family, and my church. I was always full of joy and filled with laughter, and I felt energized every time I thought of God.

Sooyoung also shared her experience of God who heals. Not long after she experienced speaking in tongues, her daughter became severely ill. She did not recover, in spite of six
months of medical treatment. Eventually she did recover, by the grace of God, after being prayed for by her pastor from her church retreat. Since then, Sooyoung has had new confidence in the power of prayer. Through these positive experiences of God, her faith has developed and consequently she has served the church with enthusiasm and love.

However, Sooyoung confessed in Q1 that for a little more than a year she had felt dry and frustrated in prayer, particularly because she felt God had not answered her long-time prayer, that her daughter would have a personal encounter with God and turn around her sinful life. She said, “Although I believe that she [my daughter] will recover, I feel frustrated and exhausted by important aspects of her situation that simply do not change.”

Sooyoung described her positive image of God as “a God who listens and responds to [her] prayer of petition.” She said she had experienced a God who attentively listened to her voice and therefore she had enjoyed praying to this God. However, she said more recently she was experiencing a God who is silent, who does not respond to her prayer of petition. She was struggling with this God image that was so different from her previous image.

I started seeing Sooyoung in spiritual direction with this brief understanding of her faith journey and her God-image. In the next section, I present significant themes that emerged in spiritual direction with Sooyoung.
2. Themes that Emerged during Spiritual Direction with Sooyoung

a. Struggle with Dryness in Prayer

In the first spiritual direction session, Sooyoung gave me a detailed explanation of what she had written in response to the first questionnaire (Q1), particularly of her struggle in prayer. For more than a year, she had been praying for change in her daughter's life, but Sooyoung could not see any result. Sooyoung felt God did not listen to or answer her prayer. She felt unfamiliar with this image of God who does not respond to her prayer, because earlier she had experienced a God who always answered her sincere prayer request, sometimes in apparently miraculous ways. She found an unresponsive God distant. She said this current image of God was affecting her prayer and relationship with God. She felt frustrated, confused, and dry in prayer. She said that the time she spent praying had decreased gradually over the past year and that she recently found herself spending time absent-mindedly in prayer without making any effort to pray sincerely. She expressed a desire to overcome this struggle of dryness in prayer, and to restore her prayer life and her relationship with God. She said this was why she had decided to come for spiritual direction as part of this research project. A restoration of her prayer and her relationship with God was a key theme throughout the process of spiritual direction with Sooyoung.
b. Regarding Her Daughter with Shame

In the second spiritual direction session, Sooyoung shared her prayer experience with the Bible passage in John 4:1-26 (Jesus and the Samaritan Woman). The Samaritan woman’s shame reminded Sooyoung of her own feeling of shame. She realized that she was feeling ashamed of her daughter in front of others because her daughter was not the person Sooyoung wanted her to be. In her first prayer journal, she said she felt God saying, “Your child was made in my [God’s] divine image. When you are ashamed of her, you are, in fact, ashamed of me.” She came to feel she was hurting her daughter by not accepting her for who she is and instead regarding her as shameful. Sooyoung considered this attitude sinful and repented of it. She also began to suspect that her own relationship with God might be hindered because of her distorted assessment of her own child, rather than because of God’s indifference to her. In the session, Sooyoung said she felt God trying to transform her first, in order to transform her daughter. This was different from the way God had directly intervened and solved problematic situations in the past. Sooyoung felt relieved to some degree by this new insight, but still found it difficult to pray. However, as spiritual direction processed, I could see her finding it less difficult to pray and able to pray more sincerely.

c. Desire to Know God More

As spiritual direction progressed, Sooyoung gradually expressed the desire to know God more rather than simply to get clear answers to her prayer requests. In the
fourth spiritual direction session, she shared her realization that she had been putting a lot
of energy into solving the problem itself (her daughter’s sinful life) in prayer. However,
as she failed to solve it, she felt helpless and frustrated and lost her drive to keep praying.
She realized now was the time to focus on knowing God more. She felt confident that
God would let her know God’s heart more as she kept praying. She found herself feeling
excited and full of anticipation even though she did not know what would happen. In the
sixth session, she said she now felt God wanting her to search whole-heartedly for God
whereas God had first come to and encountered her in the past.

3. God Images in Spiritual Direction

a. Jesus As the Representation of God

Sooyoung said meditating on Jesus helped her know God increasingly better
throughout the process of spiritual direction. She explained in response to the second
questionnaire (Q2) that Jesus as God or as representation of God provided her with
congrete images of God. She said those images of God through Jesus changed her earlier
God images. God images which had been for her “conceptual” became more “personal
and specific” through meditating on Jesus. In these images of God, she found herself
having a more intimate relationship with God. She said in Q2, “In sum, my prayer about
Jesus had the greatest influence on changing my images of God. Seeing God through
Jesus, that is to say, learning more about God through Jesus (His life, his character and
his ministries), and re-forming my images of God based on Jesus’ images provided the
greatest gain and help from spiritual direction. I became more determined to rediscover God images and to learn about God through Jesus Christ as described in the Bible. This is what I want to do now.”

b. Jesus Listening to God’s Loving Voice

In the third session, Sooyoung provided an example of how Jesus’ image affected her God image and her relationship with God. During the previous week, she again had prayed on the passage about the Samaritan woman. She empathized with the woman’s loneliness. But while the woman in the story was liberated from it and felt happy, Sooyoung found herself still feeling unhappy. She began to ask Jesus in her imagination a question, “When were you most happy?” She felt Jesus replying to her question, “It was when I heard my Father saying to me ‘You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.’” Then in her imaginative prayer she began to pay attention to the way Jesus was listening to God’s loving voice while he was being baptized. She felt Jesus being filled with happiness and strength. She realized that this happiness Jesus was experiencing in God’s loving voice would later strengthen him to bear the cross. As she meditated on Jesus being affirmed and strengthened by God’s loving voice, she felt God speaking to her, “You are my beloved daughter, with whom I am pleased.” She felt this voice affirming her identity as God’s child; she could recall how God had loved and encountered her up to that point. She could experience God’s love intimately. She came to feel happy and grateful for God’s love. As she saw herself having been overwhelmed
by a relatively small issue (her worry about her daughter) compared to Jesus’ suffering and death, she realized she could be happy even though the problem remained unsolved.

c. A God Sometimes Hidden Yet Always Present: Prayer as Relationship

In the sixth session, Sooyoung summarized her experience of spiritual direction during the previous six weeks. She had experienced a shift in her relationship with God. She described her earlier relationship with God as “tangible.” She would experience a God who meddles with her life and answers her prayer requests directly and spectacularly. In prayer and worship services, she would experience God’s presence closely, sometimes even physically. However, that experience of God had been different for more than a year. She had come to feel far from a God who remained silent in the face of her desperate prayer of petition. She struggled with this unfamiliar God and avoided prayer for a while. Her experience of spiritual direction had reshaped her understanding of her current struggle and led her to rethink her relationship with God. She said she was experiencing a shift in her relationship with God. In response to the second questionnaire (Q2), she describes this shift as follows:

… Although I avoided praying for a while as I felt God was silent or absent, I was able to go back to the place of prayer, and experience a restoration through 6 sessions of spiritual direction. I became able to form a different understanding of my spiritual life compared to the past and a new expectation for my spiritual journey in the future…. I realized that my previous faith life focused too much on tangible experiences and that this should change…. Even when nothing happens or even when I am not certain that God will answer my prayer [the way I want it to be], I think this time with God should be accepted as a part of my life.
In this renewed relationship with God, Sooyoung experienced a new image of God. In the fourth prayer journal, Sooyoung described this God as “a God who is sometimes hidden but always present with me.” Through the process of spiritual direction she became more confident that God was present with her even though she did not receive a clear solution to her problem or feel God explicitly. She also felt God even in this situation calling her to seek God more in prayer with faith. In Q2, Sooyoung explained that she was finding herself in “an inner relationship with God” and “a more relational prayer.” In the interview, she described the effect of this relational prayer: “The grace [that I receive through the relational prayer] is different. It's different from the previous tangible experiences of God…. Now I am experiencing God very calmly and persistently. If my earlier experiences included something that I could see and touch, this [my current experience of God] is an experience in my heart; I am experiencing a God who is present with me in my heart.”

4. Themes in Relationship to Self, Others, and the World

a. Self, Others, and the World as God’s Precious Creature

As mentioned above, in her imagination Sooyoung heard God saying “You are my beloved daughter.” This voice of God strongly affirmed her spiritual identity and brought happiness to her. Through the process of spiritual direction, she realized that she and her daughter were both children of God and loved by God in an intimate way. In the second session, Sooyoung was reminded in prayer that her daughter was made in God’s image.
This recognition caused her to stop feeling shame towards her daughter and to try to accept and respect her as she is. In the fourth spiritual direction session, Sooyoung said she found herself seeing other people as precious creatures made in God’s image. She found herself trying to respect even those whom she disliked and criticized. In the same session, Sooyoung also said her view of nature was changing too. She said insights from a lecture on ecological theology she heard several months ago kept coming to mind these days. She said she felt inclined to view nature as something God takes care of. This new insight increased her respect for nature.


At the outset of spiritual direction, Sooyoung shared that she had prayed for her daughter’s need to repent and to renew her relationship with God. However, she felt frustrated by God’s silence and failure to answer her persistent prayer request for her daughter. Through the six weeks of spiritual direction, she experienced in prayer that God affirmed her as God’s beloved child. As already mentioned, she also realized that what she was struggling with was small compared to Jesus’ suffering. She said these experiences enabled her to set aside the relationship with her daughter that she had been deeply immersed in for a while. She found herself regarding her daughter as not a “problem” any more. In the interview, she described this change as follows:

I had been too involved in my problem. I was too entrenched in it and I was struggling with solving it—I was in the centre of my problem. So I put off praying; I didn't go to the place of prayer. However, as my relationship [with God] and my identity as “the pleasing one” began to get restored, I felt delight
springing up in me. This joy, not all at once but slowly over time, covered over my problem. Along with this, I felt ashamed of taking my problem to God, to Jesus. As my joy, thankfulness, and love were restored, what is really most important and what should take priority became clear to me…. As my identity was restored by God’s affirmation, I was able to become freer from the problem that was not yet resolved.

Sooyoung gained a new perspective on the problem with which she had struggled.

5. Themes Related to the Practice of Spiritual Direction

a. Inviting the Directee to a New Dimension of Relationship with God

Sooyoung shared her confusion with an unfamiliar image of God who does not respond to her prayer, and the resulting frustration and dryness she was feeling in prayer. As spiritual director, I encouraged her to go to the place of prayer and talk to God honestly about her feelings and her thoughts. I encouraged her to face reality: she was experiencing a silent God. I encouraged her to try to communicate honestly with this unfamiliar God. I also encouraged her to keep praying even in dryness, even when she found praying to be useless. I implied that God might invite her to a new dimension of her relationship with God through her time of struggle. I encouraged her to follow this invitation without rushing it.

b. Helping the Directee Restore and Develop Her Relationship with God

At the beginning of the process of spiritual direction Sooyoung said she wanted to restore her prayer life and her relationship with God through this process. At the end of the process, in response to the second questionnaire (Q2), she said that spiritual direction
had met her expectation. “Regular spiritual direction helped me tremendously with building a closer relationship with God, living a deeper and more meaningful faith life, and integrating my prayer into my everyday life.” She was grateful because she felt her desire for spiritual restoration had been accomplished. In Q2, she explained what was helpful for her in the process of spiritual direction.

Sooyoung found the “safe atmosphere” in spiritual direction was helpful. In Q2, she said “my spiritual director created a safe atmosphere that helped me open myself comfortably and talk a lot about myself.” She also acknowledged that focusing on her own story in spiritual direction was helpful. She said in Q2, “When I was sharing my prayer experiences, I was in position to do most of the talking while the spiritual director mainly listened. Just having someone listen to my story attentively was enough for me to be healed spiritually and mentally.” In the interview, she added,

… I experienced a lot of healing as you listened and understood me well when I shared my [experiences] with you. I had shared with others the same things I shared with you,… but this is the first chance I had to talk about these things “officially.” So, as I was allowed to talk through these things from start to finish, I felt healed and became calm.

Sooyoung found the director’s comments and questions helpful even though they were few. In Q2, she said, “… the director’s questions and comments were focused on my prayer experience and this helped me understand my prayer experience more deeply.” She said that through this help, the director encouraged her to “sort out and draw conclusions about [her] experiences on [her] own.”
Sooyoung found that understanding her God image through spiritual direction was of great benefit. She explained in Q2, “While I was writing answers for this second questionnaire after receiving spiritual direction, I came to realize that my own images of God had been formed through my spiritual life and that these images could continue to be developed.” She also found that spiritual direction encouraged her to link her prayer experience to her everyday life seamlessly. Consequently, she could build a more mature relationship with her daughter and with others. In the interview, she said, “I am so thankful and happy that through your spiritual direction God came to me again with love and restored me. I have learned that God has not been just a silent bystander.” She concluded that spiritual direction had had a very positive influence.

6. Patterns and Generalizations

Sooyoung began to receive spiritual direction while she was struggling with frustration and dryness in prayer. This frustration came from her perception that God’s answer to her prayer request about her daughter’s spiritual opening was delayed. The image of God who is silent and unresponsive to her prayer was quite new to her, so she was finding it difficult to pray to this God. I as her spiritual director encouraged her to go to the place of prayer, express honestly to God whatever thoughts or feelings she had, and patiently try to discern meanings of this struggle in prayer.

Throughout the process of spiritual direction, Sooyoung found her desire shifting from solving the problem (her daughter’s lack of spiritual openness) to knowing God.
Following this desire, she tried to meditate on Jesus’ life. Meditating on Jesus helped her experience God more concretely and intimately. In her imagination Sooyoug saw Jesus filled with happiness and strength while hearing God’s loving voice and walking along the way of Cross. Sooyoung then came to think about her relationship with God. She found herself listening in prayer to God’s loving voice to her, “You are my beloved daughter.” She found this loving voice affirming her identity and bringing her peace, joy, and strength. She found her relationship with God being restored gradually. In the end, Sooyoung came to realize that her previous spirituality was bound to “tangible” incidents such as supernatural experiences, miracles, and clear and direct answers to her prayer. She realized that her attachment to those incidents might keep her from seeing God in the midst of her unresolved problem. However, through the process of spiritual direction, she experienced “a God who is sometimes hidden but always present.” She became confident that God always had been present with her, including in her unresolved problem, even though God did not work it out according to her desire. Through this experience, she felt called to build an inner relationship with God and experience a relational prayer.

As her God image changed and her relationship with God developed, Sooyoung became more free from the problem she had prayed about. She felt that it might not be a problem anymore. She came to realize that her daughter was made in God’s image. She repented of the sin of being ashamed of her daughter. She began to respect and to accept her daughter for who she is. In addition, she found that her perspective on seeing others
and nature was changing as well; she came to respect other people and nature as God’s precious creation.

Sooyoung acknowledged that spiritual direction had helped with all these changes. As she had hoped at the outset, she had been able to restore and develop her prayer life and her relationship with God through the process of spiritual direction. She particularly appreciated the safe atmosphere of spiritual direction where she could open herself comfortably and where attention was focused on her story. Sooyoung found spiritual direction to be a positive experience.

E. Case 5: Hwayeon’s Experience of Christian Spiritual Direction

1. Hwayeon’s Background and Context

* Age: 53
* Marital Status: Married

Hwayeon began her faith journey attending a Catholic church while her husband was studying in U.S.A. When they moved back to South Korea, he stopped attending church and she began to attend a Presbyterian church. He did not like her going to church but she kept attending church without his knowledge. Participating in Bible studies and small group meetings, she gradually learned about the spiritual life and accepted God in her life. She became more determined in her conviction that the truth lies in the church. Although there was persistent opposition and persecution from her husband, Hwayeon persevered in her faith, seeing the opposition as necessary hurdles she had to overcome for God.
Meanwhile, Hwayeon became suspicious of her husband, who was coming home late every night. Her suspicion of his unfaithfulness became obsessive. As she suffered from these suspicions for more than two years, she maintained strong faith in God, believing God would heal her of what she questioned as delusional thinking. She suffered from her husband’s lack of affection for her and began to think of divorce. Still, she hoped God would cure her of her delusions, and she held onto her church life. Finally she was delivered from her delusional suspicion. She confessed that God had helped her overcome it and saved her family.

A few years later, Hwayeon’s family immigrated to Canada. Her husband began to attend church. She met a married couple (church deacons) that helped her and loved her family. At first, Hwayeon considered the experience of meeting them as God’s plan for her. However, as time went on, she found herself adoring the man, perceiving him in contrast to her husband. She defined her feelings for him as lustful and felt she was sinning. She was afraid she would be punished by God and prayed trembling with fear and with tears. She desperately asked God to take away her sinful thoughts and feelings. Finally she moved to another church and the situation resolved itself.

In her new church, Hwayeon and her husband came into conflict with the senior pastor. It seemed there would be no resolution to the conflict, so she left the church. Around that time, her daughter became ill because of depression and withdrew from university. Hwayeon was shocked. She looked at her life and it seemed that everything was going wrong. She felt abandoned by her husband, since he was working in Korea at
the time. In this difficult situation, Hwayeon saw all her suffering, including her daughter’s illness, as God’s punishment for the sins of “mental adultery” and criticizing God’s servant (pastor). In response to the first questionnaire (Q1), she explained. “I accounted for all of my misfortunes by seeing them as what “the little fox that spoiled the vineyards” (Song of Songs, 2:15)\(^6\) deserved for destroying them, which is the sin that God hates and despises the most, and that they were punishments for despising, condemning, and criticizing God’s servant [the pastor].” However, she said she had experienced a change in her God image. As she recently participated in some programs offered by the Jubilee Institute and prayed sincerely about her suffering, she began to understand God’s love for her more deeply. As she felt God coming to her, even though she be full of sins, and wanting to hear her stories, she tried to pour out, little by little, her sins, wounds, and pains to God in prayer.

In Q1, Hwayeon described her image of God as follows:

> God is omnipotent and spotless and does not overlook sins, but always punishes them. God is a righteous being, who looks through the centre of our hearts and judges even sins of our hearts. Despising evil, God punishes those who sin against God through three generations. Even though God forgives the one who repents, the person needs to be recompensed for his or her sins until s/he enters into the kingdom of heaven. Although I have always heard and believed that God is love, I simply limited God’s love to something given for our eternal salvation. In order to receive God’s blessing and grace in our life, I believed that we must live our lives righteously, obey God’s words, and dedicate ourselves to church and God’s work….

\(^6\) Hwayeon refers to *Song of Songs*. She thought that the little fox represents a sinner committing adultery.
She said she liked her image of “a just God” in that she believed that blessings and hardships in our life are the rewards given by a just God, based on our good deeds and wrongdoings and that the suffering she experienced unfairly would be made up for by this God. However, she also said she had been afraid of this just God. Believing her daughter’s illness was God’s punishment for her sins, she had feared that God would keep punishing her beloved daughter because of her own sins. However, Hwayeon said she has begun to believe in a different God these days, a gracious God who loves steadily and patiently rather than punishes her for every single sin she commits.

I started seeing Hwayeon in spiritual direction with this brief understanding of her faith journey and her God-image. In the next section, I present significant themes that emerged in spiritual direction with Hwayeon.

2. Themes that Emerged during Spiritual Direction with Hwayeon

  a. Long-term Conflict with Husband

In spiritual direction, Hwayeon shared several times about her conflicted relationship with her husband. She said this problem between her husband and her had lasted for a while. In her opinion, the critical issue that usually brought the conflict to the surface was her husband’s lone decision-making about important family issues. In response to the first questionnaire (Q1), she said her husband had decided to immigrate to Canada without discussion with her and had announced his decision to all family members. Even though she did not want to immigrate and had a long quarrel with him,
she could not win him over. Even during the process of spiritual direction, she experienced and shared about similar conflicts over decision-making issues. In the fifth session, she said that in the past week her husband notified her of his decision to do a short-term mission trip in a dangerous area abroad for a few months and consequently, they had a serious quarrel.

In these recurring, similar incidents, her husband made big decisions without consulting with her. Hwayeon felt frustration, resentment, and anger towards him. She expressed her feelings and tried to persuade him to change his decisions to fit with her needs. And yet repeatedly he did what he wanted. She felt that he wronged her and hurt her. At the beginning of spiritual direction, she did not come right out with her negative feelings towards her husband. However, as spiritual direction progressed, she showed more of her honest feelings to the director. Especially in the fifth session, as her spiritual director, I could observe explicit (facial and verbal) expressions of her anger and contempt towards him.

**b. Feeling of Being Rejected and Low Self-Esteem**

Hwayeon explained that the negative feelings towards her husband were caused by his lone decision-making. As she talked, she came to realize that these feelings might be spontaneous reactions to her experience of being rejected. In other words, she felt he did not accept and respect her as his wife, did not consider how she would feel when he made decisions without consulting with her or what his unilateral decisions would cost
her. She saw that she had been struggling with feelings of being rejected by her husband from the very beginning of her married life; she assumed that her suspicions of his unfaithfulness in the past could have arisen from her feelings of rejection by him. In the fifth session, as she told about his decision to serve other people abroad, she found herself feeling that she was rejected by him and that he was ignoring the fact that she should be the primary object of his service and love. She came to realize that her feeling of rejection lay at the core of her struggle with her husband.

Hwayeon also realized that her self-esteem had been affected by these feelings of rejection. In the interview, she said she had felt that her value was not acknowledged by her husband, and this feeling had damaged her self-esteem. In addition, in response to the second questionnaire (Q2), she said her low self-esteem had made her discount her own feelings and desires.

As her spiritual director, I asked in the fifth session what her desire was with respect to her relationship with her husband. Hwayeon replied, “I want my husband to really become my husband. I want to be respected and acknowledged by him as his wife. I really want to have a mutual, intimate relationship with him.” As she shared her authentic desire, she shed many tears.

c. Feelings of Guilt and Failure

Although Hwayeon thought it was acceptable for her to criticize her husband’s lone decision-making and expect him to treat her properly as his wife, she also felt guilty
for her aggressive attitude towards him. In her prayer journal, she wondered if her heart had been too hardened to listen to him and to accept what he wanted. She felt guilty about not being able to support his opinion while at the same time showing agreement with him. In the fourth session, she said she felt she had failed to be a good “help mate” (Genesis 2:18) or a “worthy woman” (Proverbs 31:10) for her husband, that is, a “biblically appropriate” wife who supports and obeys her husband. She felt she might be too self-centered and selfish.

3. God Images in Spiritual Direction

a. A Caring God vs. A Rejecting God

As mentioned above, Hwayeon’s image of God had shifted during the past several months. A just God who punishes or rewards us according to our deeds had given way to a gracious God who patiently loves and forgives us even when we commit sins. In the first session, she explained more in detail about this shift. She had come to be able to imagine that God can understand and have pity on her weaknesses. She said this shift had enabled her to feel closer to God, believing “God is concerned about me and cares for me.”

In the second spiritual direction session, however, Hwayeon shared her prayer experience during the last week, in which she had struggled to express her honest feelings and thoughts to God. She said she had tried to pray after a quarrel with her husband. She said she wanted her feelings and opinions, which had been rejected by her husband, to be
accepted by God. However, she felt God was not affirming her feelings, but disagreeing with her opinions. She felt God judged her feelings and opinions as self-centered. She felt God asking her to relinquish her desires and feelings. She felt more confused and burdened in prayer.

Throughout the process of spiritual direction, Hwayeon alternately experienced a God who accepts and cares for her true feelings and a God who rejects them. At the same time, she found herself more comfortably articulating her feelings to God at the end of spiritual direction. In response to the second questionnaire (Q2), she reported that through the process of spiritual direction she had begun to experience a merciful God who embraces her deep inner desires and even her negative emotions. In the interview (I), she said she had developed a more intimate relationship with God through the process of spiritual direction even though she still felt she needed and wanted to develop more intimacy with God.

b. God’s Invitation to God’s Fulfilling Love

In the fifth session Hwayeon came to realize she had for a long time earnestly wanted a mutual, intimate relationship with her husband. As this relationship failed to develop, she had felt frustrated and hurt. In the sixth session, she shared a new insight about this desire that had emerged in prayer. She had come to suspect she might have been desiring something that her husband was incapable of providing. She wondered if her deep desire for acceptance and intimacy might only ever be fulfilled by God. She felt
God inviting her into God’s perfectly fulfilling love, rather than her husband’s limited, human love. In this prayer, she felt God being with her in the midst of storm—representing her inner struggle arising from her husband’s decision to serve people abroad—and replacing the storm with peace.

4. Themes in Relationship to Self, Others, and the World

a. Restoration of Self-Esteem

In response to the second questionnaire (Q2), Hwayeon said she felt her self-esteem restored through the process of spiritual direction. She explained that being accepted, respected, and understood by God in prayer and by her director in spiritual direction had made this restoration possible. In Q2, she said, “By experiencing a merciful God who embraces my deep inner desires and even my negative emotions, my self-esteem was restored.” She also said, “In six sessions of spiritual direction, I have felt fully understood and respected [by the spiritual director].” In the interview (I), she added that the director’s attitude of respecting and dealing delicately with her feelings and desires was especially conducive to the renewal of her self-esteem.

b. Laying Down Expectations for Her Husband

In the fifth session, Hwayeon expressed strong anger towards her husband for his announcement of his lone decision to serve people abroad. By the sixth session, she reported that she had found inner peace about this. She had been able to lower her expectations of her husband through prayer. She could clearly recognize his weaknesses
and accept him for who he is. She also realized her inability to change him into the man she wanted him to be. Again, she realized that her deep desire for a mutual, intimate relationship could not be fulfilled ultimately by her husband’s love but from God’s love. As she lowered her expectations for him, she found deep peace. She no longer felt that she was rejected by him. She said she had experienced a God who changed her heart in prayer even though she had prayed for God to change his heart. She found peace in her decision to let him do what he wanted to do.

5. Themes Related to the Practice of Spiritual Direction

a. Encouraging the Directee to Recognize and Express Her Feelings and Desires

At the outset of spiritual direction I noticed that Hwayeon found it difficult to candidly express negative feelings about her husband. This was not surprising since she had only just met me. As spiritual direction progressed, I found her feeling guilty about negative feelings towards her husband and finding it difficult to articulate them to God in prayer. I tried to listen attentively to what she was sharing and accept whatever she was feeling and thinking while withholding any judgment. Not that I would affirm whatever she was feeling as right. I tried not to judge her feelings as right or wrong. I simply encouraged her to recognize her true feelings, accept them as part of her experience, and talked honestly about them to God in prayer. I also encouraged her to explore her deepest desires by asking herself questions when she was feeling guilty about her negative feelings and her actions based on those feelings.
b. “Considering My Experience as Important”

In response to the second questionnaire (Q2) and the interview (I), Hwayeon repeatedly said she had felt that in spiritual direction her experience was considered important. She liked the way spiritual direction focused on the directee. In Q2, she said,

… I appreciated the way the focus of spiritual direction was me…. I felt I was respected since my reactions and feelings were considered more important than the other person, who raised the conflict and issues…. Since it [spiritual direction] was done in an open manner, I was able to lead the conversation into the topics that I want to talk about. I liked this approach in spiritual direction.

Hwayeon found it especially helpful that her feelings were respected—even if these were negative and complicated—and dealt with in a delicate manner. In Q2, she explained.

… At times, it was surprising to find that I could talk about my inner problems or emotions since these had been difficult to share even with close friends. Even when my story had no logic to it or seemed long-winded to the point of being very confusing, my spiritual director listened to me whole-heartedly without a single frown. He didn’t ignore my feelings or regard them as worthless but rather treated them as valuable, and sorted out the essence of my confusing story. It made me wonder if there would be any other person in this world who would be this nice to me! I felt thankful.

Hwayeon also appreciated the way the spiritual director asked questions about her feelings. In the interview, she said, “… An aspect that really healed me in spiritual direction was the question, ‘How did you feel about it?’ or ‘How was it?’… I have hardly been asked such questions. But when the spiritual director asked me such questions, I felt that I was being fully respected.”

Hwayeon found it helpful for the director to ask about her desire. In Q2, she explained, “[My spiritual director] asked … what I desire in my relationship with my
husband. He suggested that I try to recognize my desire and my feelings in prayer and share them with God. Before this, no one has ever told me that my desire or my feelings were important… I was able to think that I am a precious being. I realized that before I had considered my desires and feelings as trivial.” Hwayeon found herself feeling respected through spiritual direction, because her own experience, such as feelings and desires, were considered important. She appreciated being encouraged to move to a deeper understanding and discerning of her experience.

c. Feeling God’s Presence in Spiritual Direction

In response to the second questionnaire (Q2), Hwayeon reported that she had felt God’s presence in the process of spiritual direction. She wrote, “While in conversation [with the spiritual director], I felt that I was confessing to God about my wounded heart and that God was sitting right there at this place of spiritual direction. At some point, I felt God touching my heart and understanding all of me. Realizing that I was not the only one struggling with my problems, but God was also working on these for me, I found my emotional burden getting lighter.” She felt that the director’s attitude of listening to and respecting her opened up for her how God was treating her. She said, “In the 6 sessions of spiritual direction, I had the valuable experience of being fully understood and respected, [by the spiritual director] and so I felt that I was being respected and loved by God.” She also said, “When he [the spiritual director] was listening to me in silence and waiting until I became calm [after I finished pouring out negative emotions towards my husband],
an image of kind and merciful God overlapped him.” In the interview (I), she also said she had felt God intervening in spiritual direction and leading it, as she unexpectedly gained essential insights and spoke of things hidden deep inside. She acknowledged that spiritual direction where she experienced God’s presence facilitated her prayer and her relationship with God.

d. “Safe Operating Room”

In response to the second questionnaire (Q2), Hwayeon talked about her understanding of spiritual direction as follows: “I think the goal of the spiritual direction [that I experienced] was not solving my problems but leading me towards God. It helped me to reflect on my inner self and pray to God, so that I could experience peace, healing and freedom in God.” However, she admitted that this process of exploring her inner self and praying to God was not simple or easy because in this process she discovered and faced her hidden wounds. Nevertheless, spiritual direction provided an atmosphere safe enough to allow this difficult process. In this respect, she illustrated spiritual direction as “safe operating room” provided by God. In Q2, she explained,

However, unexpected questions from the spiritual director sometimes helped me find wounds that were hidden in me and led me to experience the process of healing. When the spiritual director delicately handled my wounds, I was able to witness his caring intention to set me at ease, as if he was assuring a fearful patient on the operating table. My poisoned areas were treated in this spiritual direction and now I’m seeing myself being freed from fear and waiting to recover.
In the interview, Hwayeon explained the benefit of the safe atmosphere of spiritual direction:

Spiritual direction was a safe space where I could talk without any worries or suspicions such as, 'What will the director think of me? Will he think poorly of me?' … I may have worries or fears like, 'this person will ridicule me when I say this,' or 'what if this gets spread as a rumor?' even when I'm talking to a close friend. But I never, not even once, worried about this with you….

Hwayeon experienced spiritual direction as a safe place provided by God for her spiritual growth.

6. Patterns and Generalizations

Throughout the process of spiritual direction, Hwayeon’s relationship with her husband recurred as a crucial issue. Communicating with him and building a more intimate relationship with him since her marriage had proved impossible. She specifically complained about his lone decision-making, independent of her feelings. Even during the six-week process of spiritual direction, she heard him announce decisions without any consultation with her. She shared feelings of anger, resentment, and frustration toward him. At the outset of spiritual direction, she did not express these negative feelings strongly. She also hesitated to pray about those feelings. She felt guilty about her feelings towards her husband and frustrated that she failed to behave as a good wife who should obey and support her husband. As a spiritual director, I encouraged her to recognize her honest feelings and desires, explore possible meanings they held, and pray about them. I could see that she was beginning to express her feelings more honestly to me in spiritual
direction and to God in prayer. In this process, she realized that she had been struggling with a feeling of being rejected in her relationship with her husband and this feeling of rejection had undermined her self-esteem.

Hwayeon did not talk specifically in spiritual direction about her previous God-image of a “just God” who rewards and punishes her based on her deeds. She claimed at the beginning of spiritual direction that she was currently experiencing a God who loves and cares for her. However, at times in the process of spiritual direction she still felt God judging her negative feelings as self-centered. She felt God rejecting her feelings and desires. She struggled with confusion between a caring God and a rejecting God. I could detect that she was experiencing a caring God more and beginning to express her true feelings and desires to God in prayer. She admitted that her experience of a caring God helped her self-esteem. She also experienced a God who was inviting her into God’s fulfilling love rather than focusing on her husband’s limited, human love. This made it possible for her to lower her expectations for him. Then she found herself not feeling rejection from him as much as a new, inner peace.

Hwayeon affirmed that spiritual direction was helpful for her growth. Most of all, she liked the way the spiritual director considered her actual experience as important, including her feelings and desires. This style of spiritual direction made her feel respected and helped her consider her own experience as important, so that she could understand her experience at a deeper level. She explained that her experience of God’s presence in the process of spiritual direction facilitated her prayer and her relationship with God.
Also, she rated as positive the safe atmosphere provided in spiritual direction. She understood that this safe environment allowed her the strength and courage she needed to go through a difficult and fearful process of dealing with painful wounds. She invoked the image of a “safe operating room.”
Chapter Four

Cross-Case Analysis: Korean Protestant Women’s Experiences of Christian Spiritual Direction

Introduction

In this chapter, I will present cross-case analysis in which similarities and differences among the five cases are discussed. I will produce generalizations to be applied to the cases. When necessary, I will add my interpretation to the analysis. Results of the analysis and interpretation will be organized into three sections. The first section will discuss what is common to the themes that emerged in spiritual direction for the five cases. The second section will deal with what the five cases do or do not have in common in their experiences of spiritual direction. The third section will present findings from the cross-case analysis in terms of God image and its implications for other aspects of life.

A. Common Themes that Emerged in Spiritual Direction

1. Tendency Not to Be Really Aware of What They Are Actually Experiencing

In the process of spiritual direction, all the directees showed a tendency not to be really aware of what they were actually experiencing. Especially if they had negative feelings towards God or toward some persons, they tended to repress those feelings or feel guilty about those feelings, attributing them to their own spiritual immaturity. They also tended to regard their desires as unimportant or even as something caused by selfishness or self-centeredness. They often found it difficult to face and accept as their
own experiences negative feelings and desires, and to express them honestly and freely to
the director in spiritual direction and to God in prayer.

Yeonji’s experiences of “religious oppression” by her mother-in-law and of being
misjudged by others caused her to suffer and struggle with resentment and hatred towards
those who hurt her. However, Yeonji found it difficult to acknowledge that she could not
control her negative feelings towards them or forgive them. She felt guilty about those
feelings. She even tried to blame herself for her suffering rather than those who hurt her.
She considered that her spiritual immaturity was the cause of what had happened to her.
At the beginning of spiritual direction, Yeonji was not able to recognize the true desires
hidden in her feelings of hatred and resentment, such as her desire to resist those who
misjudged her and to prove her faith and spirituality to them.

Minsoo felt perplexed as she perceived a change in her relationship with her
husband. In quarrels with him, she found herself losing her temper easily even though he
had not made any big mistake. In addition, as she found herself unwilling to initiate an
apology, she felt guilty and confused about what she was doing to him. In the process of
exploring this experience, Minsoo came to realize that she had generally been first to
offer apologies to others in similar situations of conflict. But now she found herself
reluctant to silence her real voice.

Jihyun talked about the painful experience of hearing of others’ gossip about her.
This had happened a few years ago but had continued to upset her relationship with God
to a considerable extent. In spiritual direction, she expressed feelings of bitterness, hatred,
and resentment towards those who had hurt her and toward God who had not taken care of her in that situation. As she shared these honest feelings, she recognized that they were much stronger than she had expected and that she had not yet expressed them honestly in prayer to God. However, she felt guilty about those feelings towards God and about not being able to forgive those who hurt her. She considered this attitude as unworthy of “a good daughter of God.” She found it difficult to accept her own reality and to talk about it to God in prayer.

Sooyoung struggled with accepting an unfamiliar God who remained silent in the face of her sincere prayer request. This was radically different from the God who had always answered her prayer, sometimes in miraculous ways. She felt frustrated, confused, and “dry” in prayer. Rather than expressing those feelings of frustration and confusion to God in prayer, she found herself avoiding prayer time.

Hwayeon shared that her long-term conflict with her husband was usually brought to the surface by his arbitrary decision-making without consulting with her. Even though she felt frustration, resentment, and anger towards him, she found it difficult to express these feelings to the director and to God, especially at the beginning of spiritual direction. In the process of spiritual direction, she also recognized her authentic desire to be respected by him as his wife and to have a mutual and intimate relationship with him. However, she hesitated to claim these desires as justifiable, considering them rather as self-centered. She felt guilty about her failure to behave as a “biblically appropriate” wife by not supporting what he wanted.
All the participants found it difficult to accept their own experiences, especially their own desires and their negative feelings towards others and toward God. This tendency confirms my assumptions in Chapter One about characteristics that Korean Protestant women would display in spiritual direction; for example, they tend to repress their negative feelings which have traditionally been seen as undesirable, particularly for women, in Confucianism and Christianity.

2. Suffering from Low Self-Esteem and Shame

Most of the participants shared their suffering from low self-esteem and shame. Two participants mentioned explicitly that they were suffering from low self-esteem. Jihyun said that she had received negative judgments from others for her outgoing, active personality and as a consequence had disliked who she was, regarding herself as a defective creation. She said she had been struggling with low self-esteem, even self-contempt. Hwayeon realized that her self-esteem had been damaged by the long-term experience of being rejected by her husband. She felt hurt when she realized her value was not acknowledged by him. Due to her low self-esteem, she found it difficult to honor her own feelings and desires.

In Yeonji’s case, she did not mention the term “low self-esteem.” Instead, she talked about her suffering under a “sense of spiritual inferiority” caused by her mother-in-law’s and other church members’ opinion of her spirituality. She not only felt hurt when
her experience of God and her discernment were disparaged by them, but she also
became less confident about her own spirituality.

Minsoo struggled with a feeling of shame, particularly because of her divorce.
She considered this divorce a serious failure in her life. Even though it had happened
about ten years ago and she had remarried, she still found it difficult to talk about it. She
was afraid it would be discovered by others, especially other church members.

It became clear to me that most of the participants were struggling with low self-
esteeem or shame. Their common experience reflects that of many Korean Protestant
women in the patriarchal Korean society as presented above in Chapter One.

B. Themes Related to the Practice of Spiritual Direction

1. Honoring Directees’ Experience of Certain Feelings and Desires

As mentioned above, as spiritual director, I noticed that all of the participants
tended not to be really aware of what they were actually experiencing, especially when
recognizing and expressing negative feelings towards others and towards God. Even
when able to express these feelings to the director, they found it difficult to express them
to God in prayer. For instance, even though Jihyun had hatred and experienced anger
towards those who had hurt her and towards God for not taking care of her in her
suffering, she did not pray about these feelings; this produced her “spiritual slump.” All
participants found it difficult to get in touch with their desires that were hidden in their
feelings. Even when they recognized their desires, they hesitated to accept and express
them as their own. Some of them even tried to repress their desires by regarding them as inappropriate or self-centered; for example, Minsoo felt guilty about her desire to avoid initiating apology to her husband; Hwayeon considered her desire to be respected by her husband as selfish.

As spiritual director, I encouraged them to accept and affirm both positive and negative experiences as their own and bring them honestly to God in prayer. I also tried not to make them think that what they were feeling or thinking was absolutely right. I indeed tried not to betray any judgment of their experience. I encouraged them to honor their own experiences, whatever they were, and to pray about them honestly. I encouraged this because I believe it is important for them as they develop their relationship with God to explore and reveal their true selves in prayer. If they are unable to be true to themselves in prayer, it might become inauthentic, indifferent, or dry. I also encouraged the directees to get in touch with their desires and to pray about them, no matter how small or vague they seemed.

This approach to spiritual direction seemed to work well for all the participants. It became clear to me that many of them discovered their own authentic desires and as a result, developed a more genuine relationship with God. For instance, Yeonji reinterpreted her desire for others to respect her faith and spirituality as her authentic desire to affirm her own spirituality without letting herself judged by others. She became more self-confident, just as she had hoped.
When Minsoo recognized her resistance to initiating any apology to her husband, she tried to repress that recognition. However, as she kept exploring it in prayer, as the director had suggested, she came to realize that she was resisting her tendency to initiate apology to others in any conflicted situations in the past. She wanted to stop blaming herself first, rather to hear others apologize to her—if that was what she deserved. She eventually came to realize that her deepest desire was to quit silencing her voice and to develop an equal relationship with her husband.

Hwayeon gradually recognized her hatred, resentment, and anger towards her husband. As her spiritual director, I kept probing for the desire hidden in these negative feelings, and slowly she came to realize that she wanted to be respected and to be acknowledged by her husband as his wife so as to develop a mutual, intimate relationship with him. She did not get what she wanted during the time of the spiritual direction process. However, she affirmed my approach in spiritual direction as it made her consider as important her desires and feelings. She felt respected, so she could begin to regain her self-esteem. She sensed that she could also reach a deeper understanding of her experience.

In Jihyun’s case, I could see the importance of authentic prayer, in which we pray honestly as our genuine selves. As Jihyun began to receive spiritual direction, she had not yet tried to pray about how she really felt about God who had failed to take care of her in her suffering. As a result, she had been experiencing for some time a “spiritual slump” in which she could not feel intimate with God. However, as she began to express her true
feelings to God in prayer, following the director’s guidance, she came to experience a God who had been with her and cared for her in her suffering.

2. Gentle, Empathetic, Non-Judgmental, and Safe Atmosphere

All the participants found the atmosphere of spiritual direction to be positive. Yeonji experienced the practice of spiritual direction as “gentle.” She liked the way I did not judge her from an authoritarian position, which presented a radical contrast to the way she had been judged by her mother-in-law, her pastor, and other church members. She affirmed that this gentle spiritual direction helped her enjoy prayer and develop a more intimate relationship with God. Minsoo found the empathetic tone of spiritual direction helpful to allow calm and meaningful conversations, which in turn opened up a deeper understanding of her experiences.

Jihyun evaluated the director’s non-judgmental attitude as helpful for her. She felt the director listening without judging her experience as either right or wrong. The objective, yet empathetic listening helped her open herself comfortably in trust without worrying about how she would be evaluated. This experience of spiritual direction was starkly different from her hurtful experience of hearing gossip and judgment about herself.

Sooyoung evaluated the safe atmosphere of spiritual direction as positive. Hwayeon described this aspect of spiritual direction as a “safe operating room.”
Hwayeon could go through the difficult process of revealing and dealing with her deep wounds in a safe space of spiritual direction.

3. Spiritual Director as a Model to Convey a Certain Image of God

In spiritual direction, a spiritual director is not supposed to explain to the directees who God is or to impose a certain image of God. However, it seems natural that the director himself or herself may act as a model to portray a certain image of God. How the director listens to and treats directees in spiritual direction can affect their images of God and their sense of how God listens to them and treats them. In data from some participants, I could see this phenomenon at work. Yeonji said the gentle approach of the spiritual director helped her affirm her gentle image of God experienced in her personal prayer. Also, she suspected that this gentle spiritual direction might help her experience a gentle God more easily by helping her think that God might accept her gently as the director did. After the entire process of spiritual direction, Jihyun found that the accompaniment of the director was quite similar to her sense of the accompaniment of God whom she had experienced throughout the process of spiritual direction. Hwayeon found an image of a kind, merciful God emerging for her from the attitudes of the director.
4. Male Director for Female Directees

In the questionnaire about the experience of spiritual direction (Q2), there was a question asking about anything unhelpful in the experience of spiritual direction. None of the participants reported anything unhelpful in their experiences of spiritual direction.

In Q2, there was another question, “If your spiritual director were a woman, how would your experience of spiritual direction be different?” Yeonji answered as follows: “I have nothing to comment as I never thought about any possible effects which the gender of the spiritual director may make in the past six weeks.” Minsoo answered, “I think there would be not much difference. If the spiritual director were a woman, it would have taken more emotional approaches… However, I am very satisfied with the spiritual direction that I received.” Jihyun answered, “At first, I questioned whether he could empathize with me and expected it to be a little awkward. But the more I received spiritual direction, I felt that the spiritual director had both masculine and feminine characteristics.” Sooyoung answered, “If my spiritual director had been a woman, I could have received a more empathetic response to the part of my life story that I shared as a woman. But I think there might not be a huge difference.” Hwayeon answered, “If my spiritual director were a woman, she might be able to empathize with me more easily…. However, because I think my story was sufficiently understood and accepted even in this experience, I have no regret and I don’t think about how it would have been different or what if my spiritual director were a woman.” In sum, the participants tended to suspect that they would receive more empathy if they had a female director because the director would be likely
to have more experience in common with them as women. But they affirmed that the director empathized with them enough to benefit them and the fact that the spiritual director was male did not cause any particular discomfort and problem in the process of spiritual direction.

Some of them mentioned possible benefits of having a male director. Jihyun said, “I liked that I could rule out the risk of losing objective perspective [through receiving spiritual direction from a man] as women tend to get overly emotional and get sucked into others’ emotions.” In response to the second questionnaire (Q2), Hwayeon said that at first she had hesitated to share her critique of her husband with the director because he would defend the man’s position. However, as she saw the director listening to her patiently and calmly without defending her husband, she began to feel comfortable. In the interview she said she was surprised that she could have honest conversations in trust with the director who is male and younger than she. It seems to me that she was pleasantly surprised that spiritual direction with a man could go so well.

C. God images and the Relationship with God, Self, Others, and the World

1. Experiencing a More Intimate God

The God images of all participants reflected increased intimacy through the process of spiritual direction. Yeonji confessed that she had had abstract, distant images of God before spiritual direction even though these images had seemed positive at the time. However, through the process of spiritual direction, she experienced more concrete
images of God such as “a warm parent” who loves her as God’s daughter and “a big tree” which provides her with streams of love. She also experienced a God who accepts her, including her negative feelings, saying in effect “It is ok.” She came to experience a loving God in a more concrete and intimate way in these images.

Minsoo’s previous God image was of a punishing God. However, not long before she began to receive spiritual direction, she had begun to picture a “God who is on her side” and a “just and fair God.” In the process of spiritual direction, she explored these God images and achieved a deeper understanding. She came to experience in a more intimate way a God who is on her side, and justly and fairly cares for her. She felt she had come into a more intimate relationship with God in this process.

At first, Jihyun’s images of God were negative. She found God cruel and unconcerned about her in her suffering. However, during the process of spiritual direction, she experienced a God who had not, in fact, abandoned her in her suffering but had been present with her. She experienced a God who had accepted her and waited for her even though she had complained to God. She also experienced God as her intimate Dad.

Sooyoung said meditating on Jesus as God or as a representation of God provided her with concrete images of God. As she imagined Jesus listening to God’s loving voice, she also felt God speaking to her, “You are my beloved daughter.” She also experienced a transformation of her God image from a silent God to a God who, while sometimes
seems hidden, is still always present with her. In these images, she found herself coming into a more intimate relationship with God.

Hwayeon experienced a shift from a rejecting God to a caring God. In this changed image, she felt that her deep inner desires and her negative feelings were accepted. She felt her relationship with God becoming more intimate in the process of spiritual direction. In sum, through the process of spiritual direction, the God images of the participants became more intimate, which in turn moved their relationships with God toward greater intimacy as well. The changed images were concrete, and conveyed God’s love and care for them.

2. Encountering A Suffering Jesus

Some of the participants found it helpful to meditate on a suffering Jesus. As they thought of Jesus’ suffering, they could consider their sufferings as small by comparison and they could accept them. As they pondered Jesus living out his suffering, they began to learn how to bear or accept their own sufferings. For instance, Minsoo was struck by Jesus’ firm trust in God’s love even in the midst of his suffering. In prayer, she came to accept her own suffering from her divorce as relatively small and easy compared to Jesus’ suffering. She began to seek the same sort of trusting relationship with God that Jesus had put into practice. Jihyun was deeply touched by the fact that Jesus had gone through the same suffering that she was experiencing. She felt very close to Jesus. She was also impressed by the boldness that enabled Jesus to overcome any fear of the threatening
crowd and to go his own way. Following Jesus’ boldness, she could overcome her hurt feelings and fear of the criticism of others. Sooyoung could also let go of her worries about her daughter as she meditated on Jesus’ suffering and death. As she imagined Jesus bearing the cross while hearing God’s loving voice, she realized she could be happy in the midst of her life problems when paying attention to God’s loving voice to her. These participants experienced comfort in encountering a suffering Jesus in prayer and modeled their own attempts to overcome their own sufferings on Jesus’ example.

3. Exploring Operative Images of God

As spiritual director, I tried to encourage the directees to explore their images of God. I especially tried to help them recognize their operative images of God through asking how they were thinking of, imagining, or feeling about God—although I did not explain the concept of an operative image and a professed image of God to them. Some of them found big differences between their professed images of God and their operative images. They could then understand why they had had difficulty in their relationship with God. As a result, they could pray more authentically and further develop their relationship with God.

Jihyun provides an example. At the beginning of spiritual direction, she was surprised to discover that her real image of God was more negative than she had expected. She came to understand why she had been in spiritual slump for a while. She
realized that she had not yet prayed about her honest feelings toward this God. This realization helped her rethink and further develop her relationship with God.

Hwayeon gives another example. At the beginning of spiritual direction, she said she had experienced a shift in her God image over the past several months: from a punishing God to a loving and caring God. However, I could see her struggling to express honest feelings and thoughts to God. She felt God judged and rejected her feelings and opinions. It seemed to me that she was going back and forth between the image of a rejecting God and the image of a caring God. As she became aware of her operative image of God, she could deal with this matter authentically in prayer.

4. God Image and Relationship with Self

As the participants experienced changes in their images of God, they found these shifts influencing not only their relationships with God but also their relationships with the self. Through the process of spiritual direction, they generally experienced a more intimate God who loves and accepts them as they are. Consequently, they became more able to accept themselves as they are. They also found a new freedom from the judgments of other people. Their self-esteem was restored or strengthened.

Yeonji became more confident about God’s love for her in the process of spiritual direction. She also gained confidence in her own experience of and relationship with God. These experiences helped her rebuild her low self-esteem and feel less oppressed by the judgment of others. She came to accept herself as she is.
As Minsoo experienced a fair and just God who does not judge people based only on their outer actions but sees intentions and hearts, she began to see herself from the perspective of God’s fairness. She felt God wanted her to see her life from this perspective. As a result, she became more able to accept herself, even including her shameful experience of divorce.

At first, Jihyun regarded herself as shameful and as a defective human being. She said she had been struggling with low self-esteem or even self-contempt. However, in the process of spiritual direction, she experienced a God who loves and is pleased with her just the way she is. This new experience of God freed her from shame and self-contempt. She became more confident before other people, even those who had criticized her in the past.

Sookyung experienced a God who was saying to her “You are my beloved daughter.” This voice from God strongly affirmed her spiritual identity.

Hwayeon experienced a God who accepts, respects, and understands her, specifically, her inner desires and even her negative emotions. She reported that this experience of God had restored her self-esteem.

5. God Image and Relationship with Others and the World

A common theme emerges in main issues brought up in spiritual direction by each directee: these issues are all related to relationships with others. Yeonji talked about her relationship with her mother-in-law and those who had misjudged her; Minsoo, her
relationship with her husband; Jihyun, her relationship with those who had gossiped about her; Sooyoung, her relationship with her daughter; and Hwayeon, her relationship with her husband. In spiritual direction, the director did not focus on solving relationship problems but rather on their God images and the impact of these images on their relationships with God and with their prayer lives. However, the development of their relationships with God in their transformed images of God had positive influence on their relationships with others in different ways.

First, the participants’ relationships with others tended to reflect their perceptions of how God sees and treats them, and how they saw themselves and treated themselves. Yeonji, at first, struggled to deal with people who misjudged her spirituality and with her consequent negative attitudes towards them. However, in the process of spiritual direction she experienced a God who accepts and loves her without judging. She found herself gradually freed from others’ judgments. She even reached the point where she could acknowledge those who had hurt her as equally God’s children who receive the same love as she did. This enabled her to understand and forgive them. Minsoo experienced a God who treats her fairly and justly. She developed a desire to see herself from a perspective based on that same fairness of God. Furthermore, she came to want to see others fairly—not judging based simply on the way things appear but treating them with compassion and seeing them through God’s loving eyes—even those who had offended her. At the outset of spiritual direction, Jihyun struggled with her feelings of hatred and anger towards those who had misjudged her and gossiped about her. As she experienced a God
who loves her just the way she is, she was becoming able to understand them more and even forgive them. She considered the possibility that they might be suffering from low self-esteem just as she had been. She wondered if they might gossip about her to cover up their feelings of shame. This opened for her the possibility of embracing them with compassion. Sooyoung, at first, talked about her dissatisfaction with her daughter. She had been praying for her daughter to change. As Sooyoung experienced a God loving her as a beloved daughter and as she became confident about her own spiritual identity, she came to realize that her daughter’s identity was given by God as well. This recognition made Sooyoung stop seeing her daughter as shameful and she became able to accept her daughter as she is. In sum, I found all the participants becoming better able to love others, even those who had hurt them. This enhanced ability to love seemed quite natural as they developed a more intimate relationship with God and became more able to love themselves. They expressed great joy and happiness as they found themselves more able to overcome hatred towards others and to forgive them.

Second, as their relationships with God improved, some participants showed a tendency to reinterpret their own suffering or difficult experiences in a more positive way. When Jihyun heard reports of gossiping about her, she felt God did not take care of her. This experience led in turn to a spiritual slump and a distant relationship with God. However, as she experienced a God who had been present with her in her suffering, she began to accept that suffering as positive. She considered it an opportunity to develop greater intimacy in her relationship with God. She began to think that her relationship
with God was the most important thing in her life and in this intimate relationship she felt she could overcome any of life’s problems. Sooyoung also struggled with frustration about her daughter’s delayed transformation. However, through the process of spiritual direction, she began to repair her relationship with God. Then she became able to rise above her previous struggles to see them in a positive light.

Finally, development of their relationship with God seemed to enable some participants to achieve new levels of autonomy and independence in their relationships with others. Yeonji became freed from others’ criticism of her spirituality as she became more confident about her own experience of God. She came to express a desire to walk her own way in her spiritual journey without being concerned about others’ judgments. Jihyun also showed a tendency to become freed from others’ criticism of her personality as she experienced a God who accepts her just the way she is. Hwayeon shared that she had struggled with feelings of being rejected by her husband and she thought these feelings had damaged her self-esteem. Even though she deserved to be respected by her husband, it seemed that her very identity had become too dependent on his respect and love. However, as she experienced a God who respects and loves her, she became able to lower her expectations for her husband, clearly recognize his weakness, and be less dependent on him. Minsoo expressed her desire for an equal, independent relationship with her husband more directly than the three cases above. Through the process of spiritual direction, she wanted to find her own voice. She felt called to develop a greater dependence on God and a greater independence in her relationship with her husband.
Conclusion

In this chapter, I presented the cross-case analysis of the five cases, in which I primarily discussed common characteristics of the cases. The participants showed a tendency not to be really aware of what they were actually experiencing, particularly if these were related to negative feelings or desires. They tended to suffer from low self-esteem or shame about themselves. These tendencies confirm some of my assumptions about Korean Protestant women’s characteristics, as laid out in Chapter One.

As spiritual director, I noticed these tendencies through the process. I tried to honor the experiences of the directees and to encourage them to accept what they were experiencing as their own. Especially, I encouraged them not to repress negative feelings towards others or toward God, and not to ignore their own desires. I encouraged them to explore their feelings and desires in prayer, expressing them to God. Participants reported finding this approach in spiritual direction helpful for developing their relationships with God in prayer. They experienced a God who empathetically listens to their honest and authentic prayer, accepting even their negative feelings, and loving them as they are.

They found the gentle, empathetic, non-judgmental, and safe atmosphere of spiritual direction quite helpful for the development of their relationship with God and their prayer. They also thought that the atmosphere created by the spiritual director and his general approach helped them to imagine God in a more positive way.

The God images of all the participants tended to become more intimate through the process of spiritual direction. They experienced a God who cares for and loves them
and accepts them as they are. This transformation of their images of God definitely affected their relationships with God. They became more able to feel God’s intimate presence. In addition, their renewed images of God and relationships with God made them rethink their self-images. They could rebuild their low self-esteem and accept and love themselves as they are. Furthermore, the development of their relationships with God in their transformed images of God positively influenced their relationships with others. They tended to love others just the way they felt loved by God.
Conclusion

Christian Spiritual Direction for Korean Protestant Women

This study began with the question of how the practice of Christian spiritual direction affects the way Korean Protestant women experience, understand and imagine God, and what implications this God image may have for other aspects of their lives. In order to explore this question, I researched five cases of Korean Protestant women who have experienced Christian spiritual direction with me as spiritual director. I employed a multiple case study as research methodology.

In Chapter One, I presented theoretical frameworks operative in this study. This included an analysis of the cultural and religious context in which Korean Protestant women live, my theology of the ministry of Christian spiritual direction with a focus on women, and an examination of the theme of God-image in spiritual direction as it relates to this study. In Chapter Two, I set out the research methodology employed in this study and detailed the research process based on this methodology. Chapters Three and Four presented the critical analysis of five multiple cases consisting of the participants’ experiences of Christian spiritual direction. Chapter Three presents my “within-case analysis” in which each case is analyzed separately. Chapter Four adds a “cross-case analysis” in which similarities and differences between multiple cases are discussed.

In conclusion, I will present my inferences drawn from the analysis of my data. I will discuss answers the analysis offer for the research question. I will present some
pastoral implications of this study. Finally, I will provide recommendations for future study.

A. Conclusions Drawn from Research Data

The participants reported that their experiences of my practice of Christian spiritual direction were generally positive. Even though spiritual direction was a ministerial practice unfamiliar to them, they seemed to feel comfortable with it. They liked the way spiritual direction focused on their own experiences rather than on the director’s perspectives or opinions. They found it helpful that the director encouraged them to honor their own experiences, especially their negative feelings and desires. This enabled them to explore their experiences in spiritual direction and prayer without repression or guilt. They also found the director’s attempt to offer gentle, empathetic, non-judgmental, and safe atmosphere of spiritual direction helpful for this exploration.

In spiritual direction, the directees were encouraged to think about and articulate their images of God and to explore how those images were affecting their relationships with God. In this process, they could understand more deeply their real images of God as opposed to their professed images of God. They also found a deeper understanding of their actual experience of God. In addition, through the process of spiritual direction, their images of God became more intimate ones and consequently, their relationships with God evolved positively; they came to feel confident about God’s love for them. Their transformed relationships with God as illustrated in their transformed images of
God affected their relationships with themselves; they became more able to love themselves and to accept themselves as they are. Their self-esteem began to be restored as well. Furthermore, they became more able to love others, even to the point of understanding and forgiving those who had caused them pain.

It could seem unwarranted to claim that spiritual direction itself was the direct cause of the transformation of the directees’ images of God and the consequent development of their relationships with God, self, and others. After all, the transformation of their images of God emerged in their prayer. Nevertheless, considering the research data, it seems legitimate to claim that spiritual direction had a positive influence on the development of their images of God and their relationships with God, self, and others. However, it was the spiritual direction experience that provided the specific encouragement for directees to explore their images of God and their real relationship with God in prayer. Spiritual direction also created an atmosphere conducive to an examination of images of God and focused prayer. It also helped them to honor their personal experiences and to get in touch with, understand, and express their real feelings and desires in prayer. The help of spiritual direction seems to me to have been important for their spiritual growth. I believe that it might have been difficult for them to experience new images of God and transform their relationships with God, self, and others if they were not in truth able to recognize and understand their hearts and pray to God about their experiences and feelings. If they could not pray authentically, they might avoid praying at all, or, at least, feel dry and meaningless in their prayer times. I believe that
Jihyun’s image of spiritual direction as “vitamin” was an example for illustrating the positive effect of spiritual direction on their spiritual development. Just as a vitamin is not a direct cure for one’s disease but helps one’s body function better and become healthy, spiritual direction did not immediately solve the directees’ problems in life and spirituality. However, it did help them to go to a place of prayer with authenticity. In that place of authentic prayer, problems could be explored through their relationships with God. In spiritual direction, the director did not try to lead the directees to any predetermined outcome or even any predetermined direction but the process helped them to move towards God. The participants experienced spiritual direction as a positive help in becoming true to themselves and praying with authenticity. This approach and their experience in spiritual direction significantly influenced the positive development of their images of God and their relationships with God, self, and others.

In Chapter One, I presented my assumptions about Korean Protestant women’s spirituality and my theology of the ministry of spiritual direction for them based on my experience and developing knowledge. This experience included providing spiritual direction for Korean Protestant women and my knowledge of Korean cultural and religious context, spiritual direction in general, and spiritual direction from a feminist perspective. Through analysis of the research data, I was able to test my assumptions and the validity of my practice of spiritual direction for Korean Protestant women. I was able to conclude that my assumptions about and approaches to spiritual direction for them generally proved to be valid.
In the research data, I found evidence of oppression the participants were experiencing in the patriarchal Korean context. However, this evidence was not extensive because the focus of my research was their experience of spiritual direction rather than their experience of oppression in the patriarchal Korean context. Nevertheless, it is still relevant to understanding and picturing how Korean Protestant women may experience oppression in the patriarchal Korean context.

Yeonji provides an example of typical conflict in Korean families between daughter-in-law and her husband’s family members, especially mother-in-law: we call it “Go-Boo-Gal-Deung.” Yeonji shared her experience of feeling mistreated and oppressed by her mother-in-law and sister-in-law. Even though Yeonji’s request seemed reasonable when she asked her mother-in-law to persuade her husband to go to church, her mother-in-law reproached Yeonji for disobedience to her husband. Her mother-in-law and sister-in-law attributed Yeonji’s husband’s failure in business to Yeonji’s own lack of faith and prayer. Yeonji felt oppressed culturally and religiously in this familial situation. In Korean Confucian families, a daughter-in-law is typically expected to serve and obey her husband and his family members, especially her parents-in-law.

Minsoo supplies an example of the possible oppression a divorced woman can expect to experience in the Korean context. She shared feelings of shame related to the

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1 “Go-Boo-Gal-Deung” consists of four Chinese letters. “Go” refers to mother-in-law. “Boo” refers to daughter-in-law. “Gal-Deung” means conflict. This term is used in describing a typical conflict between daughter-in-law and mother-in-law in Korean families. Mothers-in-law expect their daughters-in-law to sacrifice themselves for their husbands as they themselves had done for their husbands’ families when they were daughters-in-laws.
divorce. She talked about the cultural pressure she felt in Korean communities, especially in Korean churches. Even though she did not talk about the pressure in much detail, I was able to infer what it was like. In the Korean Confucian context, a good woman is expected to maintain harmony in her family as wife, mother, and daughter-in-law. If she is Christian, she is responsible for sacrificing herself in the interests of maintaining harmony in the family God has given her. In case of a divorce, she will be seen to be lacking in faith. Minsoo would feel ashamed of her failure to become a good woman in this cultural and religious context.

Jihyun gives us an example of how a woman with “masculine” characteristics may be oppressed in the Korean context. Jihyun felt hurt when her outgoing, active, and assertive personality was criticized as “show-off” or prideful by others in the church. She implied that this was not the only such incident in her life in which her character was disparaged. She said she herself came to disapprove her own natural characteristics; she began to consider herself as ontologically defective. I believe that this censure of her natural characteristics arose from the patriarchal Korean context where those personal qualities have been considered as “abnormal” or “inappropriate” for women. Consequently, she has experienced self-contempt.

Hwayeon affords us an example of how a woman may be oppressed in a typical Korean Confucian family where the husband is regarded as lord of the family. Even though Hwayeon felt angry about her husband’s arbitrary decisions and wanted to be respected properly by him, she also felt guilty about her failure to be obedient to him. She
may have assimilated the typical understanding in the Korean Protestant church that the lord of a family is the husband and a “biblically appropriate” wife must support and obey her husband. In this cultural and religious context, she understandably repressed her true feelings and desires when they came into conflict with cultural norms for her relationship with her husband.

These examples make it plain that the participants experienced subordination and devaluation in their patriarchal Korean context. I have concluded that they were either explicitly or implicitly pressured to become culturally desirable women who are obedient and sacrificial. They felt a necessity to resist this pressure but at the same time they internalized their culturally defined failure to meet those standards for desirable women. This experience of oppression led to feelings of low self-esteem and shame. The examples presented above tend to confirm my assumptions about Korean Protestant women’s experience of subordination and devaluation in the patriarchal Korean context, and its negative effects on their spirituality.

In Chapter One, I presented five points that sum up my particular approach to spiritual direction for Korean Protestant women. This approach matches that typically taken by feminist spiritual direction. From these five points, the first three (“honoring women’s experience,” “helping women get in touch with and express their feelings,” and “helping women befriend their desires”) seem to have been confirmed by the reported experience of the participants. They came into spiritual direction demonstrating a tendency to deny their own experience, especially their negative feelings and authentic
desires. My practice of affirming their experience turned out to be helpful for their spiritual development.

As to the fourth point (“helping women recognize the patriarchal context in which their spirituality is damaged,”) I did not explicitly discuss the patriarchal Korean context with the participants because I discerned that there was no need for them to think specifically about this social context as such in order to move forward in their spiritual development. It seemed clear to me that they were able to make the needed progress through the process of spiritual direction and prayer itself. However, my own sensitivity to the patriarchal Korean context was at work as background knowledge. As I pointed out in Chapter One, I was aware of their tendency to attribute the negative feelings to their own spiritual immaturity even though such feelings may signify their sufferings from injustice and oppression in the Korean patriarchal society and church. Therefore, I gently encouraged them not to jump to the conclusion that their feelings and desires were the outcome of their spiritual immaturity. I urged them to pray about them to God sincerely.

In terms of the fifth point (“providing a reconstructed Christian tradition to support women’s spirituality”) I made no attempt to provide the participants with specific teaching on a reconstructed Christian tradition from a feminist perspective because it did not seem to be called for in their spiritual direction experience and did not come up in our discernments. If I would have explored with these participants the idea of patriarchy as a structural evil, I would have gone beyond the bounds of appropriate spiritual direction and entered into social theological teaching and critique. However, I was convinced that
the process of prayer as encouraged by spiritual direction in these cases was itself partially deconstructing the patriarchal assumptions that undermined their self esteem and kept them artificially weak. The participants developed their images of God within the boundary of the traditional Protestant theology in a way that produced more intimate God images. In Jihyun’s case, as she had expressed her desire to behave as a good daughter of God and had found it difficult to express anger and disappointment towards her father God, I discerned that she was thinking of God in the image of a father in the patriarchal family and that this image might be an obstacle to the development of her actual relationship with God. Through the process of spiritual direction, she began to experience God as her intimate “dad” accepting and loving her as she was. Jihyun’s God image of father was transformed in a more intimate direction, without even changing the male language for God to non-masculine language. Even though I felt no need to explicitly suggest to the participants any reconstructed views of traditional God-language or theology that might be harmful to women, this does not mean that my fifth point turned out to be less important. I still believe that directors for women must be aware of elements in traditional God-language and scripture that have been and can oppressive for women. These directors must be supportive in exploring new images of God and helping to integrate them into women’s spiritual lives. It will always be an important judgment call on the part of the spiritual director to choose what issues are specifically the ones that need addressing in a particular situation, and then to choose which approach to take.
Based on the research data, I conclude that my assumptions about and approaches to spiritual direction for Korean Protestant women generally proved to be valid.

**B. Implications of the Study**

In this section, I want to discuss some pastoral implications of this study. I am particularly concerned with how Christian spiritual direction may work for Korean Protestant women and for the Korean Protestant church. I believe some implications for that concern can be drawn from this study. First, spiritual direction can be an appropriate ministry for spiritual development and healing of Korean Protestant women. I am struck by the conclusion reached in this study that the participants experienced the positive development of their images of God and their relationships with God, self, and others, to a considerable extent, during quite a short period of time, through only six spiritual direction sessions. What the spiritual director did was simply to try to provide a gentle, empathetic, non-judgmental, and safe atmosphere in which they could explore their experience with less fear of being judged. Given the support provided by spiritual direction, the participants were able to pray authentically and honestly. As a consequence, they came to experience the transformation of their God images and their relationships with God, self, and others. I have concluded that this positive development in their spirituality was made possible because spiritual direction provided a safe place where they could sincerely explore their spirituality. Korean Protestant women have rarely experienced the kind of support that spiritual direction would provide in their typical
social context. Women in this context have been socially conditioned to repress their feelings and desires. They could receive the very support necessary for developing their spirituality from an experience of spiritual direction. I suspect that many Korean Protestant women would find the support provided by spiritual direction helpful for healing and developing their spirituality.

Secondly, spiritual direction can be an important ministry to meet some of the spiritual needs of the Korean Protestant Church, now and in the future. In the Introduction, I presented current and future needs for spiritual care and growth in Korean Protestant churches. This study validates my assumption that spiritual direction can be of great help to the spiritual growth of Korean Protestant women. I suspect that spiritual direction can be helpful for Korean Protestant men as well. This study clearly shows how the practice of Christian spiritual direction proceeds, how Korean Protestants may experience Christian spiritual direction, and how they can benefit by it. I hope this study encourages Korean Protestants to become more interested in Christian spiritual direction and consequently, to experience it and be benefited by it. I believe that as individual men and women are strengthened through such spiritual direction, Korean Protestant churches will become stronger and more faithful in their witness to the gospel.

C. Recommendations for Future Study

A fruitful area for future study might be to compare the experience of Korean Protestant women with women from another cultural group. I find it difficult to articulate
the unique qualities of Korean Protestant women in comparison with women from other cultures as I reflect on their experience of Korean Confucianism, on their spirituality, and on their God images. As a Korean, I myself am immersed in Korean culture, I tend to assume that Korean women’s experience in our culture is just natural, and my knowledge of the experience of women in other cultures is obviously limited. This makes it difficult for me to tell the difference between the experiences of Korean women and that of women in other cultures. I suspect that if my readers are from other cultural backgrounds, they might find it much easier to see the unique aspects of Korean women’s lives. If I were to include as data the experience of non-Korean spiritual directors’ in providing spiritual direction for Korean Protestant women, I could articulate Korean Protestant women’s uniqueness more clearly from the perspective of others in other cultures. A fruitful direction for study could be to research both Korean women and non-Korean women and compare the two groups of participants in another study.

In this study I focus on Korean Protestant women. I am also interested in the experience of Korean men. For future study, it might be good to study Korean men’s experience of spiritual direction. And further, if we would research the experience of both Korean women and men, we would be able to look for the difference between Korean men and women and explore approaches of spiritual direction appropriate for each group.

In this study, I focused on a group of Korean Protestant women who are inexperienced directees. A future study could research more experienced directees. We
could hope to reach a deeper understanding of Christian spiritual direction and its benefits.
Appendices

Appendix A

Administrative Consent Letter from the Jubilee Institute for Spiritual Formation

From: Board of Directors of the Jubilee Institute for Spiritual Formation
To: D. Min. Thesis Proposal Committee, Toronto School of Theology
Re: Joonbum Chun’s Request to Use the Resources of the Institute for His Research
Date: Monday, January 28, 2013

We are fully informed of the research project of Joon Bum Chun and approve his request to use contact information of those who have participated in the programs offered by our institute to invite participants for his research. We also approve his request to use our facility, particularly a room designed for spiritual direction, for his research.

If you have any questions, contact us (905-881-2999 or 416-910-3347) at any time.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Rev. Peter Han, Chief Director
Jubilee Institute for Spiritual Formation
200 Racco Parkway, Thornhill, ON. L4J8X9
905-881-2999
jubilee@vccc.ca
Appendix B

Recruitment Script 모집 광고문

Hello! My name is Joon Bum Chun.
I am an ordained Presbyterian minister and also a D.Min. (Doctor of Ministry) candidate at the Toronto School of Theology at the University of Toronto. I am writing to ask you to participate in a research project that I will be conducting as part of my doctoral studies.

The topic of the research project is “Spiritual Direction for Korean Protestant Women.” I am interested in how Korean Protestant women experience and are affected by Christian spiritual direction. In this research project, I will focus on God-image in spiritual direction. To achieve this goal, I am using case study as the research methodology.

For this research, I am looking for Korean Protestant female participants who are willing to receive Christian spiritual direction from me (the researcher). Spiritual direction is a Christian ministry in which a director carefully listens to a directee’s sharing of life and prayer experience in order to assist the directee’s efforts to deepen his/her relationship
with God. The participants will receive spiritual direction from me six times within two months (probably once a week). In addition, the participants will be asked to respond in writing to two questionnaires, to be interviewed by the researcher, and to hand in “assigned homework” which is their prayer journal.

If you are interested in participating in the research and want to have more information about it, please do not hesitate to call me at 647-448-4909, or email me at hasdeka@gmail.com or chunjoon@mail.utoronto.ca.

Sincerely,

Joon Bum Chun 전준범 올림
Appendix C

Informed Consent Form

Introduction: Hello! My name is Joon Bum Chun. I am an ordained Presbyterian minister and also a D.Min. (Doctor of Ministry) candidate at the Toronto School of Theology at the University of Toronto. I am writing to ask you to participate in a research project that I will be conducting as part of my doctoral studies. My phone number is 647-448-4909 and my email address is hasdeka@gmail.com or chunjoon@mail.utoronto.ca. You may contact me at any time if you have questions about this study.

Purpose: The purpose of this research is to study how some Korean Protestant women’s experiences of Christian spiritual direction affect their image of God and other aspects of their life.

Procedure: If you consent, you will be asked to participate in Christian spiritual direction with me (the researcher) six times within two months (probably once a week). In addition, you will be asked to respond in writing to two questionnaires, to be
interviewed by the researcher, and to hand in “assigned homework” which is your prayer journal.
당신이 동의하면 당신은 연구자인 저와의 영성지도에 두달 이내에 (아마도 일주일에 한번정도) 6번 참여하는 것을 요청받게 됩니다. 또한 당신은 준비된 두개의 질문지들에 글로 답하고, 연구자와 인터뷰를 하고, 또한 기도일기같은 숙제를 제출하도록 요청받게 될 것입니다.

**Time required:** The whole procedure including six sessions of spiritual direction and data gathering will take two hours a week over a period of two or three months of your time.
여섯번의 영성지도와 데이터 수집을 포함한 전체 과정은 두 세달 정도 기간동안 한 주에 두 시간 정도의 당신의 시간을 필요로 합니다.

**Eligibility:** In terms of the eligibility for participation in the research, I am looking for someone who is interested in but has rarely or never experienced spiritual direction before.
이 연구에 참여할 수 있는 요건에 대해 말하자면, 저는 영성지도에 관심이 있으나 이전에 영성지도를 경험한 일이 거의 없거나 전혀 없는 사람들을 찾고 있습니다.

**Voluntary participation:** Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. If you choose to participate, you may still refuse to answer any question that you do not wish to answer. You may also withdraw from the study any time if it becomes clear to you that you want to. If you refuse to keep participating in the study any time in the middle of the process, I will not use any of the information from you in the study.
이 연구에 참여하는 것은 완전하게 자발적인 것입니다. 당신이 참여하기로 선택했다해도 당신이 원하지 않는 질문에 답하지 않을 수 있습니다. 또한 당신이 그만두길 원한다는 것이 명확하다면 언제든지 그만둘 수 있습니다. 만약 연구 과정 중에 언제라도
Confidentiality/Anonymity: All of your personal information will be kept confidential in all of the reporting and/or writing related to this study. I will use pseudonyms (made up names) for all participants. I may alter some identifying details of your personal information in order to protect your anonymity. Although your interviews will be recorded by an electronic voice recorder, transcribed verbatim, and then translated into English for use in writing my report, I will be the only person who listens to the audio-files.

당신의 모든 개인정보는 연구와 관련된 보고나 글에서 비밀리에 다루어질 것입니다. 모든 참가자들을 위해 가상의 지어낸 이름을 사용할 것입니다. 개인 정보의 자세한 인적사항 중 일부는 당신의 익명성을 지키기 위해 변경될 수 있습니다. 당신의 인터뷰들은 전자 녹음기로 녹음되고, 문자그대로 기록되고 영어로 번역되어져서 연구에 사용될 것이지만, 연구자인 저만 그 음성파일을 듣게 될 것입니다.

Risks: There are no particular risks associated with your participation in this research. However, it is possible that you might feel distress in the course of the spiritual direction and in the course of the interview for some possible reason, such as fear of sharing your life experiences and spiritual story, especially with a male, ordained minister. It will help my research most if you can keep in mind that only candid, accurate descriptions of your experience can make the research valuable and meaningful. In this sense, if you feel any obstacle to your honest sharing, please inform me promptly.

당신이 연구에 참여함에 있어 둘발한 위험은 없습니다. 하지만 영성지도를 받을 때 혹은 인터뷰를 할 때 몇가지 가능한 이유로 (예를 들어 당신의 삶의 이야기와 영적 이야기를 나누는 것에 대한 두려움 때문에) 혼란함을 느낄 수 있습니다. 특히 남성 이면서 목사에게 나눌 때에 그릴 수 있습니다. 당신의 경험에 대한 솔직하고 정확한 묘사만이 이 연구에 가치있고 의미있다는 것을 늘 기억하는 것이 나의 연구에 가
Benefits: While there is no guaranteed benefit, several benefits are possible. You will be able to experience of the dynamics of spiritual direction. You may find your experience of spiritual direction helpful for your spiritual growth. You may find it meaningful to share your answers to the questions I ask. Your experience may benefit your relationship with God and other relationships in your life. This study is intended to benefit Korean Protestant women by discovering how they experience and are affected by spiritual direction and developing more effective ways of providing spiritual direction for them.

Publication: Even if I am doing this research to complete the requirements for my D.Min. program at the Toronto School of Theology, it is possible that some of the results could be published after the program. This publication could result in my personal benefit. I want to inform you that I could benefit from your participation in addition to the completion of the D.Min. program.

장 도움이 될 것입니다. 이런 의미에서 당신이 정직하게 나누는 데 있어 어떤 장애 물이 있다는 것을 감지한다면 즉시 저에게 알려주십시오.

확실하게 보장된 유익은 없으나 몇가지의 유익이 가능합니다. 당신은 영성지도의 역동을 경험하게 될 것입니다. 당신의 당신의 영성지도 경험이 당신의 영적 성장에 도움이 됨을 발견할 수 있습니다. 또한 제가 질문하는 질문들에 답하는 것이 의미있다고 느낄 수 있습니다. 이 연구는 한국 개신교 여성들이 영성지도를 어떻게 경험하고 영성지도를 통해 어떻게 영향받는지를 발견하고 그들을 위한 더 효과적인 영성지도 방법을 발견시험으로써 그들에게 유익을 주고자 하는 의도를 가지고 있습니다.

제가 이 연구를 하는 것이 TST의 목회학 박사 과정을 마치려고 하는 것이지만 이 연구 결과가 박사과정 후에 출판되어질 수도 있습니다. 이는 저의 개인적인 유익으로 이어질 수 있습니다. 따라서 당신의 연구 참여가 저의 박사과정을 마치는 것 외에도 저에게 유익이 될 수 있음을 알려드립니다.
**Before you sign:** If you understand what you are being asked to do in participating in this study, your signature below will mean that you have been adequately informed and that you freely give your consent. Be sure that any questions you may have are answered to your satisfaction. If you agree to participate in this study, a copy of this document will be given to you.

당신이 이 연구에 참여할 때 무엇을 해야 하는지를 이해하고 아래에 서명하신다면 그것은 제가 적절하게 연구에 대해서 알려드렸고 당신이 자유롭게 참가에 동의하신다는 의미입니다. 질문들이 있다면 만족스럽게 답을 드였는지 확인하십시오. 당신이 이 연구에 참여하기로 동의하면 이 문서 사본을 받으시게 됩니다.

**Participant’s signature:** ______________________________ Date: _______________

Print name: __________________________________________________

**Researcher’s signature:** ______________________________ Date: _______________

Print name: __________________________________________________
Appendix D

Questionnaire about Spiritual Journey: Initial Questions

1. Name 이름:
2. Age 나이:
3. Denominational background 교단적 배경:
4. Write your life story with some consideration of the questions below. There is no particular form for developing your life story but write it within three pages. Describe as concretely as you can the events, feelings, and thoughts you experienced to the best of your ability.

아래의 질문을 고려하여 당신의 삶의 이야기를 써 주십시오. 내용 전개도 정해진 틀이 없지만 세 페이지 이내로 써주십시오. 할 수 있는만큼 구체적으로 당신이 경험한 사건들, 느낌들, 생각들을 당신의 최선으로 묘사해 주십시오.

a. Write your life story particularly in terms of your spiritual journey. For example, is there any life event which has greatly influenced your relationship with God? What is your significant experience of God in your life journey? How has your life been affected by these experiences? If you can remember any special moments when you sensed God’s presence or absence, describe them.

b. Write your life story from the perspective of your image of God. For example, who is God to you? How has God been present to you in your life journey? What kinds of God-image do you have? What is your favorite image of God? What is your least favorite image of God? How do you think your images of God have affected your life? If there are concrete events or memories that come to mind, describe them.

Appendix E

Questionnaire about the Experience of Spiritual Direction
Korean Protestant Women’s Experiences of Christian Spiritual Direction: Focusing on Their God-Image

• Name 이름: ________________

• Write your experience of Christian spiritual direction over the six sessions according to the questions below. Describe concretely feelings and thoughts you experienced as far as you can. There is no page limit.

1. Write your experience of Christian spiritual direction in general according to the questions below.

a. How did you experience “spiritual direction” itself (in terms of its style, process, atmosphere, goal, contents, etc.)? In what sense was it positive or negative for you?

b. What was your personal experience that was significantly encountered in your spiritual direction for those six sessions (for example, prayer experience, life stories, life struggles, “transformation” experience, turning points, important issues of decision-making, etc.)? How did spiritual direction make a difference in how you thought or felt about your experiences?
6번의 영성지도에서 중요하게 다루어진 당신의 개인 경험들 (예를 들어, 기도경험, 삶의 분투, “변화된” 경험, 전화점들, 결정해야할 중요한 이슈들)은 무엇이었습니까? 영성지도는 당신이 어떻게 그 경험에 대해 생각하고 느끼는지 에 어떻게 변화를 주었습니까?

2. Write how your experience of Christian spiritual direction affects your images of God according to the questions below.
당신의 영성지도 경험이 당신의 하나님 이미지에 어떤 영향을 미쳤는지를 아래의 질문에 따라 기록해주십시오.

a. How your God-image has been affirmed or changed in spiritual direction as you shared your personal experience. Did any help you received from your spiritual director clarify your image of God? Can you describe what that help was, and what it meant for your God-image?
영성지도에서 당신의 개인 경험이나 나눌 때에 당신의 하나님 이미지가 어떻게 확인되거나 변화되었는지를 기록해 주십시오. 당신이 영성지도자에게 받았던 어떤 도움이 당신의 하나님 이미지를 명확하게 하였습니까? 그 도움이 무엇이었는지, 또 그것이 당신의 하나님 이미지에 있어 무슨 의미가 있었는지 묘사해 주실 수 있습니까?

b. If there has been any change in your God-image through the process of spiritual direction over the six sessions, describe it. How do you think this change happened?
만약 6번의 영성지도 과정에서 당신의 하나님 이미지가 변화되었다면 설명해 주십시오. 이러한 변화가 어떻게 일어났다고 생각하십니까?
c. How do you think your experience of spiritual direction in the area of your God image has affected your relationships with God, self, and others and the world?

하나님 이미지를 다루는 영성지도 경험이 당신의 하나님, 자신, 다른 사람들, 세상과의 관계에 어떻게 영향을 미쳤다고 생각하십니까?

3. Write your experience of your spiritual director according to the questions below.

당신의 영성지도자에 대한 경험을 아래의 질문에 따라 기록해 주십시오.

a. What characteristic of your spiritual director do you think was helpful or not helpful for the transformation of your God-image?

당신의 영성지도자의 어떤 특징이 당신의 하나님 이미지의 변화과정에 도움이 되거나 혹은 도움이 되지 않았다고 생각하십니까?

b. If there was anything about the spiritual direction that you found not helpful, please describe it. If you have any suggestions for ways the director needs to improve, please explain them.

당신에 도움이 되지 않았던 영성지도 방식이 있었다면 기술해 주십시오. 만일 영성지도자가 개선해야 할 필요가 있는 방식에 대한 제안이 있다면 설명해 주십시오.

c. If your spiritual director were a woman, how would your experience of spiritual direction be different?

당신의 영성지도자가 여성이었다면 당신의 영성지도 경험이 어떻게 달랐을 것 같나요?
Appendix F

Prayer Journal Protocol (Assigned Homework)

Date: ________________________
Name: _______________________

1. What significant experiences did you notice in your prayer? How did your prayer proceed?
기도 중에 무엇을 경험하였습니까? 당신의 기도는 어떻게 진행되었습니까?

2. What was the strongest feeling that occurred to you in your prayer? When did it happen? What do you think it means?
기도 중에 가장 강력하게 일어난 감정은 무엇입니까? 언제 그 감정이 일어났나요? 그 감정의 의미는 무엇이라고 생각하십니까?

3. How did you experience and perceive God in your times of prayer? Describe any specific image of God you noticed, if any.
기도 중에 당신은 하나님을 어떻게 경험하고 인식하고 있었나요? 만약 당신이 알아차린 구체적 하나님의 이미지가 있다면 묘사해 주십시오.
Appendix G

Observational Protocol for the Researcher

Date: ________________________ ( _____th session)
Directee’s name: ______________________________

1. Descriptive notes: Describe what you (the spiritual director) noticed in the spiritual direction session.
   a. What was the main story that the directee shared in the session?

   b. What strong feelings did the directee express during the session? How did those feelings evolve over the process of spiritual direction?

   c. Was there any significant physical sensation or body language which you were able to perceive in the directee? Describe them, if any.

   d. What was the directee’s God-image that you were able to learn from her sharing? How was it represented in her sharing?

   e. What did you do to help her become aware of and explore her God-image?
2. Reflective notes:
   a. What do you (the spiritual director) think the core spiritual issue was in the
directee’s sharing?

b. How do you think the directee’s God-image functions in her relationships with God,
self, and others and the world?

c. How did you perceive that you were able to assist the directee in exploring her God-
image and why? How do you think you can be of any further assistance in a
transformative process of her God-image?
Appendix H

Thesis Proposal

A. The Background and Context of My Applied Research Thesis

During the last few decades, some Korean ministers and scholars have begun to study and to personally experience a variety of Christian spiritual traditions that had previously been unknown to Korean Protestants. They have begun to introduce those traditions—including theologies, spiritualities, and spiritual practices—to the Korean Protestant Church and to explore their theological and pastoral implications for the Korean Protestant context. They have begun to produce a literature showing how various Christian spiritual traditions can complement Korean Protestant spirituality in theory and in practice. Examples include: Lectio Divina, Centering Prayer, and Ignatian prayer methods such as Gospel Contemplation and Examen, and silent retreats. Many of these Korean ministers and scholars have also experienced Christian spiritual direction, one of the growing spiritual practices in North American Christianity. I myself am involved in this growing trend.

In the years when I was studying for my M. Div. (from 1998 to 2001), I was introduced for the first time to a new area of Christian spirituality by professor Hae-Yong You, who had come to my seminary after studying Christian spirituality. I had an opportunity to learn about Christian spirituality and spiritual direction from this professor. I became increasingly interested in them and finally decided this would be my focus at the Toronto School of Theology.
I came to Canada to study Christian spirituality and spiritual direction in December of 2002. My interest led me to several relevant and excellent courses which enabled me to broaden and deepen my understanding of spirituality. I further sought experiential knowledge rather than limiting myself to theoretical knowledge through receiving spiritual direction for myself and attending silent directed retreats: several 8-day retreats and the 40-day retreat (at Loyola House in May of 2006). I experienced great benefit from them, not only for my own spiritual growth but also in supporting others in their spiritual journeys. I became convinced that spiritual direction would help Korean Protestants who are striving for spiritual growth. Out of my own faith journey, my desire and concrete efforts to become a spiritual director emerged.

I began in earnest to practice the ministry of spiritual direction right after my experience of a 40-day retreat at Loyola House in May of 2006. Since then, I have been giving spiritual direction to Korean Protestants who are interested in spirituality and want spiritual direction. In order to be trained properly, I participated in the Summer Practicum in Spiritual Direction of Loyola House during the summer of 2007 and received the certificate of that program. I also finished the Diploma in Spiritual Direction program of Regis College in 2010. Regarding my experience of giving spiritual direction, I have been meeting one or two directees every week for 5 years. Since January of 2008, I have also participated in 5- or 8-day retreats at Loyola House as a guest director, directing mainly Korean Protestants; I have done four retreats to date. In addition, I have worked as a staff member of Jubilee Institute for Spiritual Formation, which was established in
Toronto in September of 2010 to further develop Korean Protestants’ spirituality with a variety of Christian spiritual traditions. In this spiritual center, I have provided spiritual direction and taught prayer and spirituality. So far, I have directed about 45 directees in retreat or ongoing settings. I have conducted over 400 sessions of spiritual direction.¹

My research interest is related to the ministry of spiritual direction for Korean Protestants. Within this interest, I want to focus on spiritual direction for Korean Protestant women in my D.Min. research project. Most of my experience of giving spiritual direction has been with Korean Protestant women: 37 out of 45 directees have been women. This is probably because in the Korean Protestant church, most people who are enthusiastic about and interested in prayer are women. Most participants in the programs that have been offered by me or by Jubilee Institute for Spiritual Formation—such as regular prayer meetings, silent directed retreats, spiritual direction, seminars on spirituality and prayer, etc.—have been women.

Through my years of experience in spiritual direction with Korean Protestant women, I have become interested in their unique spirituality and in learning appropriate approaches to spiritual direction for them. In addition, I have become convinced that spiritual direction can be of great help for their spiritual growth. Sometimes, I have seen that they are wounded under the oppression of Korean patriarchal, androcentric society.

¹ Along with the ministry of spiritual direction, I am employed in another ministry at Young-Nak Korean Presbyterian Church of Toronto as an assistant pastor (part-time). I am in charge of the Young Adult Ministry in our church, which has approximately 100 students. I have administrative and educational responsibility for this ministry. In addition, I have taught Christian spirituality and prayer to adult church members in several official programs and small prayer meetings. This research is related to my ministry of spiritual direction.
In such cases, spiritual direction has often provided opportunities for them to heal their wounded spirituality. Many of them have been pleased that in spiritual direction, they can be heard in a supportive, non-judgmental way. They find it helpful when I, as their spiritual director, affirm their own experience, assist them in discovering their own voices and desires, and encourage them to make their own decisions rather than just following the guidance of their leaders or ministers. Some women, at first, think of spiritual direction as being checked or tested or ordered by a male ordained minister. As they come to understand the aim and process of spiritual direction, however, they appreciate my approaches and my effort to remain a spiritual companion, not a “director” for them in spiritual direction even though I am a male ordained minister. In sum, I have witnessed through my experience of providing spiritual direction to Korean Protestant women that they benefit from spiritual direction in terms of their spiritual growth.

In this research, I want to test my own anecdotal observations about Korean Protestant women’s spirituality, and my assumptions about how Korean Protestant women experience and are affected by spiritual direction, and how to provide spiritual direction for them. This study will offer me academically credible understanding and interpretation of these issues. Furthermore, I hope that it will enable spiritual directors including myself to learn how to assist Korean Protestant women more effectively in spiritual direction.

I do not think that the ministry of spiritual direction is the only alternative for the Korean Protestant Church in the future; it is just one of the ministries available to the
church. However, I also believe that this ministry is essential in light of the present and future need for spiritual growth in our churches. I deeply desire to establish a spirituality centre for Korean Christians that provides retreats and spiritual direction and that trains spiritual directors. I also need to learn how to adapt the ministry of spiritual direction to our church setting. I want to contribute to the spiritual growth of Korean Protestants through introducing and promulgating the ministry of spiritual direction among them. My plan is for this research to contribute to this goal.

**B. Thesis Statement**

It is my intention to study how Korean Protestant women experience and are affected by Christian spiritual direction. Therefore, I propose the following thesis statement: I will explore how Korean Protestant women’s experiences of Christian spiritual direction affect the way they experience, understand and imagine God, as well as some of the implications of this God image for other aspects of their life.

In my research, all of the participants will be first generation Korean Protestant women who have experienced the immigrant context in North America. Among them, there might be those who have settled down in North America and lived as immigrants for a while. On the other hand, there might be those who are still active in Korea and live in Canada for several months during a year; these people live both in the Korean context and in the immigrant context. Considering not only this complex immigrant situation but also the limits of the research, I will not consider such immigrant context as a significant
variable in this research, so I do not include the word, “immigrant” in the thesis statement. However, the data collected would include some information about the participants’ experience in Canada. I want to focus on how Korean Protestant women experience and are affected by Christian spiritual direction which has been fairly unknown to them.

In my research, I will not restrict its scope to a specific denomination among Protestantism. I am interested in Korean Protestant women’s experience of Christian spiritual direction regardless of their denominations. They may have different God-images which have been formed under the influence of their denominational background. Their denominational heritage may affect how they experience spiritual direction. I may be able to discover some denominational characteristics in terms of God-image and experience of spiritual direction in the stage of data analysis in my research. However, I do not want to limit participants in my research to a specific denomination. Korean Protestant women, whatever denomination they belong to, have rarely experienced Christian spiritual direction before. I want to focus on how their experiences of Christian spiritual direction affect their God images and hence their spiritual movements.

Spiritual direction is usually practiced either in a retreat setting or in an ongoing setting. Even though spiritual direction is offered in these two different settings, the nature and process of spiritual direction are almost the same. In this research, I will deal with the experience in an ongoing setting.
Spiritual direction is “help with the development of one’s relationship with the Lord.” In this help, one’s God-image is quite significant because one’s specific God-images inform one’s experience of or relationship with the holy. This is why exploring a directee’s God-image is one of the basic concerns in spiritual direction. Furthermore, how one perceives God influences not only one’s relationship with God but also how one sees oneself and others, that is, one’s relationship with self and others; in addition, our God-image affects our relationship with the earth. This research focuses on how the experiences of Christian spiritual direction for some Korean Protestant women affect not only their God-image but also certain other dimensions of their life.

The reason my research focuses on God-image among many issues related to spiritual direction is both to narrow its scope and also to avoid making spiritual direction in this research unnecessarily artificial. Considering the nature and process of spiritual direction, a director should not have any agenda about what is to be shared by his/her directees; the director must not force them to talk about one specific topic. However, the issue of God-image is so fundamental in spiritual direction that to help them explore their God-image as it emerges in their sharing of life and prayer experience is a crucial role for the spiritual director. In addition, God-image tends to become an initial focus for new

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directees. Therefore, focusing on God-image can appropriately narrow the scope of my study without distorting the nature of spiritual direction.

C. The Theoretical Framework and Assumptions Involved in the Study

1. Theory at Work in the Study

I need to present several significant theories at work in my research project to find out how some Korean Protestant women’s experiences of Christian spiritual direction affect their God-image and other aspects of their life. 1) a working definition of Christian spirituality; 2) a contemporary understanding of Christian spiritual direction; 3) the cultural context where Korean Protestant women are located; 4) some feminist perspectives on Christian spiritual direction; and 5) some theories dealing with God-image and its effect on relationships in spiritual direction.

First, I need to present a working definition of Christian spirituality in this research because Christian spiritual direction basically pursues the development of one’s spirituality. Definitions of spirituality are numerous. Among them, Sandra M. Schneiders’ definition is helpful. She defines a generic term, “spirituality” as “the experience of consciously striving to integrate one's life in terms not of isolation and self-absorption but of self-transcendence toward the ultimate value one perceives.”5 In a Christian sense, “ultimate value” refers to a trinitarian God. So she defines a more specific term, “Christian spirituality” as “that particular actualization of the capacity for self-

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5 Sandra M. Schneiders, “Theology and Spirituality: Strangers, Rivals, or Partners?” *Horizons* 13/2 (Fall 1986), 266.
transcendence that is constituted by the substantial gift of the Holy Spirit establishing a life-giving relationship with God in Christ within the believing community.”⁶ In other words, “Christian spirituality is trinitarian, christological, and ecclesial religious experience.”⁷

Elizabeth Dreyer’s definition of Christian spirituality is similar to Schneiders’ but describes more clearly many different dimensions of the self-transcending movement in a Christian sense: “Christian spirituality is the daily, communal, lived expression of one’s ultimate beliefs characterized by openness to the self-transcending love of God, self, neighbor, and world through Jesus Christ and in the power of the Spirit.”⁸ Christian spirituality is not only concerned with religious experience itself but also with living it out in everyday life. Therefore, Christian spirituality involves one’s relationship with God, self, and others and the world. As I refer to Christian spirituality in my research, I am concerned about how a Christian has and develops a loving relationship with God, self, and others and the world.

Second, I need to articulate my understanding of contemporary Christian spiritual direction. William A. Barry and William J. Connolly who wrote *The Practice of Spiritual Direction*, an influential book about Christian spiritual direction, define it as “help given by one Christian [a director] to another [a directee] which enables that person to pay

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⁶ Ibid.
⁷ Ibid.
attention to God’s personal communication to him or her, to respond to this personally communicating God, to grow in intimacy with this God, and to live out the consequences of the relationship.” In other words, it aims to assist the directee in discovering what the Spirit of God is doing or desires to do in the world and in his/her own circumstances and following this will of God in his/her daily life. Elizabeth Liebert’s definition has commonalities in form, content, and aim: “Christian spiritual direction, then, is an interpersonal helping relationship, rooted in the church’s ministry of pastoral care. In this relationship, one Christian [a director] assists another [a directee] to discover and live out in the context of the Christian community his or her deepest values and life goals in response to God’s initiative and the biblical mandate.” However, this definition also highlights spiritual direction as rooted in Christian tradition and as practiced in the context of Christian community. She also distinguishes spiritual direction from spiritual guidance which refers to “all the pastoral responses which have been called ‘care of souls’ ... insofar as these pastoral functions raise our awareness of God’s call and our appropriate responses” and defines it as “a more specific, individualized form of spiritual guidance.” Agreeing with Liebert’s distinction between spiritual guidance and spiritual direction, Gerald May puts emphasis on the formality of spiritual direction setting:

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9 Barry and Connolly, 8.


12 Ibid., 1.
“When spiritual guidance occurs in a formal, one-to-one relationship with another individual, it can be called spiritual direction.”¹³ As I refer to Christian spiritual direction in this research, I mean a one-on-one formal relationship between a Christian, the director, with another Christian, the directee, which aims to assist the directee to deepen his/her relationship with God, to discern God’s will in his/her own circumstances, and to live out the consequences of the relationship in his/her everyday life.¹⁴

Third, I need to present a critical analysis of the context in which Korean Protestant women live. We live in a multi-cultural society, especially in North America and in particular in the Toronto area of Ontario. In our church today, therefore, pastoral care often takes place between persons of different cultures and backgrounds. In the area of spiritual direction, this is commonly the case. As a result, understanding another

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¹³ Gerald G. May, M.D., Care of Mind, Care of Spirit: A Psychiatrist Explores Spiritual Direction (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1982), 8.

¹⁴ In the contemporary ministry of spiritual direction, one-to-one spiritual direction is not the only form. Many different forms of group spiritual direction have been attempted. However, I will limit the scope of the research to one-to-one, formal, structured form of Christian spiritual direction. For further study of group spiritual direction, see Rose Mary Dougherty’s book called Group Spiritual Direction: Community for Discernment (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1995).
culture is becoming a compelling task for many spiritual directors. For this research on spiritual direction for Korean Protestant women, understanding their cultural background seems crucial. North American spiritual directors who give direction to Korean Protestant women are likely to face cultural differences and any significant level of ignorance of the cultural background of their directees can hinder the efficacy of spiritual direction.

However, understanding the cultural background of Korean Protestant women is required not only for North American directors but also for Korean spiritual directors, particularly male directors. Even though they share the same culture with Korean female directees, male and female experience of that culture can be radically different. Furthermore, even Korean female directors may be too immersed in the culture to critically discern its influence on their spirituality. For these reasons, understanding the cultural background in which Korean Protestant women are located is important for anyone directing them.

In this part, I will situate Korean Protestant women’s spirituality in the Korean Confucian context. Among many different cultural influences within which Korean

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15 In a context of cross-cultural spiritual direction, understanding another culture may not be actually a prerequisite for a spiritual director. Spiritual direction is possible even though a director does not have sufficient knowledge of a directee’s cultural background; this is because all persons share much in common. Susan Rakoczy who wrote on spiritual direction in cross-cultural perspective maintains that every person is in some aspect “like all others.” She refers to Bernard Lonergan’s transcendental method in which human beings are affirmed as beings with the capacity for self-transcendence. According to Lonergan, this capacity can be actualized religiously by the experience of being in love with God. In the transcendental method, the search for the ultimate, known and experienced as God in religious language is common to all; in other words, the nature of religious experience is transcultural. In this respect, Rakoczy asserts that cross-cultural spiritual direction is possible in spite of cultural differences between the director and the directee. However, it should be also noted that Rakoczy discusses two other dimensions of cross-cultural spiritual direction as well: we are also “like some others” and “like no other.” Because as human beings we are distinctively “like some others,” that is to say, we have been shaped in a certain cultural background, understanding the difference between the cultural backgrounds of the director and the directee is no doubt important for the best spiritual direction. See Susan Rakoczy, “Unity, Diversity, and Uniqueness: Foundations of Cross-Cultural Spiritual Direction,” in Common Journey, Different Paths: Spiritual Direction in Cross-Cultural Perspective, ed. Susan Rakoczy (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1992), 9-23.
people are embedded, I will focus on Korean Confucianism in particular because it is the dominant cultural influence which forms Korean ways of life. I will not describe Korean Confucianism extensively here. I will limit the scope of this description to the Way of Harmony, a significant doctrine of Confucianism and the hierarchical relation-making system in Korean Confucianism sustaining harmony in society. Then, I will describe Korean women’s possible experience of subordination and devaluation in the hierarchical and patriarchal system of Korean Confucianism. I will also point out that they may experience such injustice and suffering in the Protestant church as well. Then, I will present some negative aspects of Korean women’s spirituality that has been formed in the Korean Confucian context. In this analysis, I will depend not only on North American feminist scholars such as Elizabeth A. Johnson but also on Korean or Korean American feminist scholars such as Hyun Kyung Chung, Grace Jisun Kim, Simone Sunghae Kim, and Angella Son. This is closely related to the next theoretical context.

Fourth, as an appropriate approach to help Korean Protestant women in spiritual direction, I need to present some feminist perspectives on Christian spiritual direction. Considering the significance of the patriarchal system in Korean Confucianism and Protestantism for Korean Protestant women's spirituality, one needs to approach spiritual direction with a feminist sensibility. Spiritual directors for them need to be convinced that God desires the full spirituality (or humanity) of women as well as of men and therefore, need to work to heal the destructive influence of the patriarchal system on women. Spiritual direction with feminist sensitivity can provide a safe space for the development
and restoration of women’s spirituality by diluting the oppressive influence of the patriarchal system.

In this part, I will present five significant points that feminist spiritual direction generally emphasizes: 1) honoring women’s experience; 2) helping women get in touch with and express their feelings; 3) helping women befriend their desires; 4) helping women recognize the patriarchal context in which their spirituality is immersed; and 5) providing a reconstructed Christian tradition to support women’s spirituality. I will rely on authors who write on some feminist perspectives on spiritual direction such as Kathleen Fischer, Janet Ruffing, and Margaret Guenther. At this point in time no feminist Korean authors addressing the ministry of spiritual direction are available for this research.

Finally, I need to present some theories pertaining to God-images in Christian spiritual direction. One of the basic concerns in spiritual direction is to explore the directee’s specific God-images. In this exploration of God-images, a director needs to understand that people often have working images of God that are quite different from the images they verbalize.\(^\text{16}\) Au names the former an “operative image” (the actual image that influences our thoughts, feelings, and attitudes) and the latter a “professed image” (what we consciously believe and say is our image of God).\(^\text{17}\) Recognizing one’s functioning image of God which reveals one’s actual relationship with God is prerequisite

\(^{16}\) Vest, 187.

\(^{17}\) Au, 111-112.
to spiritual growth. Therefore, the director must encourage the directee to explore his/her operative God-image hidden underneath his/her professed God-image.

Then, the spiritual director helps the directee discern and articulate his/her God-image. In spiritual direction it is assumed that God wants to communicate with us. Spiritual direction ultimately aims at fostering our intimate and unitive relationship with the self-communicating God.\(^{18}\) Considering this purpose of spiritual direction, appropriate images of God are images that can be helpful for developing one’s relationship with God. Further, images that are harmful for one’s spiritual growth, even though they may be based on the Scriptures, should be discerned and reinterpreted. Which image is appropriate can vary between individual directees. The director must also encourage them to discern their own images of God in this way and develop them in a way that is helpful to their spiritual movements and insights.

In addition, the director may encourage the directee to transform images of God if they appear to be distorted or unhelpful. The director can be supportive in exploring new images of God. The director may find that such shifting of God-images cannot be easily accomplished even though the directee recognizes his/her problematic God-images and desires to transform them. S/he is likely to find himself or herself still caught up with and influenced by his/her long-held God-images. The actual healing and transformation of the directee can be achieved only when new imagination is appropriated by them by God’s grace. Spiritual direction must be a safe place in which the directee’s religious

\(^{18}\) Barry and Connolly, 7-8.
imagination might be stimulated and transformed, so that they can enhance and deepen their own intimate relationship with their consciousness of God.

2. Assumptions Operative in the Study

There are some assumptions common to the discipline of Christian spirituality and spiritual direction which I share. First, I assume that human beings can experience God. According to Christian belief, this experience of God is possible because of God’s initiative in revelation to human beings; God desires to reveal God-self to human beings, and does so. In other words, we are invited into relationship with God. Christian Spiritual direction aims to facilitate a person’s intimate relationship with God. Spiritual direction should not force a directee to move in a specific direction determined by the director’s agenda. The director wants to support God’s communication with the directee and wants to assist and accompany the directee in their developing relationship with God. In this assistance, dealing with the directee’s God-image, that is, the perception s/he has of God, is essential in the sense that it precisely affects the directee’s relationship with God. The directee’s God-image influences not only his or her relationship with God but also his or her relationship with self and others and the world. Whether it is articulated directly or indirectly, the topic of one’s God-image necessarily appears in spiritual direction sessions.

Secondly, based on my experience of providing spiritual direction to Korean Protestant women, I have some assumptions of my own. First, they are not typically
familiar with the ministry of Christian spiritual direction and therefore, clear, sufficient explanation about its nature, process, and purpose, and the role of a spiritual director, should be set out for them. As they see a male ordained pastor like myself in spiritual direction, they may assume that they are judged and directed by him and this is what spiritual direction is all about. Second, in many cases, some general characteristics of Korean Protestant women’s spirituality form a significant obstacle to their spiritual growth, such as low self-esteem and shame, lack of confidence in their own experience, and expectation of not being heard with the consequent suffering. I assume the ministry of spiritual direction which emphasizes empathetic, attentive listening and respect of one’s experience, will assist in healing their wounded spirituality and help them develop a more healthy, mature relationship with God.

Thirdly, I assume that such negative characteristics of Korean Protestant women’s spirituality result partly from Korean patriarchal, androcentric culture which has oppressed Korean women for centuries. Therefore, as an interpretive stance, the insights of feminist spiritual direction can help me appreciate the spirituality of Korean Protestant women and explore appropriate approaches to spiritual direction for their growth or healing.

D. The Action-in-Ministry Component

In order to investigate how Korean Protestant women experience Christian spiritual direction and how such experience of them affects their God-image and other
aspects of their life, I will find participants, support them in spiritual direction for a certain period of time, and then gather data from them. The detailed outline of the Action-in-Ministry process is as follows:

1) **Preparation** (1 month): I will look for would-be participants, get in touch with them, examine their qualifications, and get consent for their participation in my research. I will look for Korean Protestant female participants through Jubilee Institute for Spiritual Formation for which I work as a staff member. The Institute has contact information for those who have participated in the programs offered by the institute such as introductory seminars to present *Lectio Divina* and *Gospel Contemplation*, bimonthly open seminars, silent retreats, and a spiritual formation program; the number of the participants are about two hundred. With the approval of the Institute (See Appendix A: Administrative Consent Letter from the Institute), I can inform them of and ask them to participate in my research project through emails or announcements at events such as our bimonthly open seminars and the spiritual formation program (See Appendix B: Recruitment Script).

As I find women who are interested in participating in my research project, I will have a brief interview with them and select my actual participants from among them. My approach will use “purposeful sampling”\(^\text{19}\) which is commonly employed in qualitative research. Among various types of sampling strategies, I will utilize a “criterion” type of sampling, in which a researcher selects all cases that meet a particular criterion; this

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sampling type is useful for quality assurance. In my research, the first criterion relates to a participant’s ability to articulate well in both writing and speaking her experience of Christian spiritual direction. I will not include anyone who has recently been receiving regular spiritual direction. My concern here is that there are not many women who have such experience of spiritual direction, and most of them are in fact my current directees. I am also concerned to restrict variables—the experience of experienced directees and novice directees might be quite different—and increase potential homogeneity among the participants; would-be participants for my research will be inexperienced directees. In sum, I will select the participants for my research from among those who are interested in but have rarely or never experienced spiritual direction before. They also should be self-reflective enough to and able to articulate their perspectives on Christian spiritual direction and their own inner experiences including their experience of God or image of God. My hope is to find at least four (no more than six) participants from whose experience I can gather sufficient data for the research. As I find appropriate participants, I will get their consent for their participation in my research using an informed consent form (see Appendix C). I will also need to offer them a clear explanation of what Christian spiritual direction is, what role a spiritual director plays in spiritual direction, and what I want to discover in my research.

2) Execution (2 months): I will practice spiritual direction for these participants for a certain period of time; there will be six sessions per person within two months,
probably once a week. For this practice, I will use a room designed for spiritual direction at the Jubilee institute (200 Racco Parkway, Thornhill, On, L4J8X9).

Spiritual direction in my research will focus on the participants’ God-image and its impact on other dimensions of their life. Considering the nature and process of spiritual direction, I as a spiritual director must not have any agenda about what is to be shared by a directee. Participants will be invited to share whatever they want in each session such as their prayer practice and life experience. My role as spiritual director is to help them recognize how they perceive God. That perception may emerge in their sharing of life and prayer experience. I can also help them reflect on how their images of God may affect other aspects of their life. I can encourage them to bring these topics into their ongoing prayer and reflection. These forms of assistance are what a spiritual director normally does in any spiritual direction. I will attempt to stay with what the participants say, within the focus of this short spiritual direction series on their image of God.

In terms of prayer methods, I will respect and stay with the ways of praying that the participants are using currently. If they are not using any particular prayer method or if they want to learn to pray, I may suggest prayer method such as *Lectio Divina*, the Examen Prayer, or Gospel Contemplation. If I need to suggest some scriptural passages, I assume that the participants have been already introduced to these prayer methods and some of them have used such methods because the participants are selected among those who have participated in programs of Jubilee Institute for Spiritual Formation.

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21 *Lectio Divina* is a traditional method of praying of the Scripture in Christianity, which usually consists of four steps such as *lectio* (reading), *meditatio* (meditation), *oratio* (prayer), and *contemplatio* (contemplation). The Examen prayer is a daily spiritual exercise typically credited to St. Ignatius of Loyola [1491-1556], which pursues becoming aware of God’s presence and the Holy Spirit’s movement throughout your day. Gospel Contemplation is an imaginative prayer, often useful for recognizing and transforming our images of God.
I will suggest what I think can be useful for further exploring the directees’ God-image; this suggestion will include at least two passages so that they can have a choice about what they want to pray on. They may also decide not to pray on such suggested passages if they prefer; this option is clearly stated to them in advance.

3) **Completion:** After finishing all the sessions with the participants, I will give them a detailed guideline of what they should do for a process of data collection. This will already have been stated in the informed consent form. I will also make an appointment with each individual for an in-depth interview.

**E. The Qualitative Research Methodology Operative in the Action-in-Ministry**

Considering my research problem, I can use a few research methodologies such as phenomenology, hermeneutical phenomenology, and case study. From available qualitative research methodologies, I would opt for case study, particularly because it encourages various sources of data. In phenomenology and hermeneutical phenomenology, the source of data is limited solely to participants’ own descriptions of their lived experience, which are usually collected by interviewing. But I want to include various data in my research. The methodology of case study allows a researcher to collect data from multiple sources of information such as observations, interviews, documents, audiovisual materials, and physical artifacts.\(^\text{22}\) Also, in case study, there is a space for the

\[^{22}\text{Creswell, 132.}\]
researcher’s interpretations so that I can integrate my interpretations and the participants’
descriptions more freely in the research.

Specifically, my research will employ a multiple or collective case study as a
research methodology. I will research multiple cases (at least four, no more than six)
involving participants who experience Christian spiritual direction by a spiritual director,
that is, myself, for a limited period of time (6 sessions within two months). The detailed
outline of the process that I will follow after the completion of my Action-in-Ministry
using a multiple case study method is as follows:

1) **Data Collection** (1 month): I collect data from multiple sources such as
documents, interviews, and observations. First, before I begin to provide spiritual
direction to the participants, I will ask them to respond in writing to a questionnaire (See
Appendix D). It consists of a few open-ended questions about their faith journey and their
images of God; answers to these questions would provide me general descriptions of the
context of the cases. Each participant’s written response to the questionnaire will be
collected at the first session of spiritual direction for each participant. All the written
responses will be translated into English.\textsuperscript{23} Second, after all the six sessions of spiritual
direction, I will ask the participants to respond in writing to another questionnaire (See

\textsuperscript{23} As qualitative research is increasingly conducted in an international environment, such issues as
how data are translated, how data should be presented to the reading audience, and how analytic
transparency is secured, become crucial. For the validity through transparency and access of the translated
data in my research, I will provide readers with as much information on the original as possible. I will
provide the readers with a parallel transcription using a side-by-side column layout; the English translation
of the data is presented in the left hand column, followed by the original Korean in the right hand column.
See Pirjo Nikander, “Working with Transcripts and Translated Data,” *Qualitative Research in Psychology*,
vol. 5, no. 3 (2008), 225-231.
Appendix E) about their experience of spiritual direction. After receiving all their written responses, I will conduct an in-depth interview with each participant. I may ask clarifying questions about what the interviewees have already written in order to understand at a deep level what they are telling me about their experience. All interviews are audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim (in Korean), and translated into English. Third, I will ask the participants to do “assigned homework” as another way of gathering data from participants. In my research, each participant’s prayer journal is an agreed upon “assignment.” I will design a protocol such a prayer journal (Appendix F) and ask the participants to write prayer journals at least once a week. I will collect them at the time of interview. In addition to all the gathered data from the participants, I will add my observations as a spiritual director. I will design an observational protocol (Appendix G) and fill it in with my observations immediately following each session of spiritual direction. It consists of a “descriptive notes” section for recording a description of how each session proceeds and a “reflective notes” section for reflections on what the directee says and how I, as the director, respond to her.

2) Data Analysis (2 months): Data analysis in qualitative research usually consists of preparing and organizing the data for analysis, then reducing the data into themes through a process of coding, and finally representing the data in figures, tables, or

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Based on these basic steps of analysis, I present a detailed process of data analysis of my multiple case studies.

First, I will organize and classify all the collected data by creating “locator codes.” I will begin this classification with making word processing files for all the data. I will label the names of the files with locator codes. For example, I may use “W” for written responses to the questionnaire, “I” for verbatim from transcribed interviews, “J” for prayer journals from the participants, and “O” for my observations. I may use numbers to indicate each person’s data; 1 for the first case, 2 for the second case, etc. For instance, the file of the second case’s interview can be named “I2.” These locator codes can be used to indicate the exact location of the data throughout my research; for example, if I quote a verbatim from page 14 of the second case’s transcribed interview, I can write down “I2-14” as a locator code for the data. Second, I will read through all the data while making margin notes and forming initial codes. Third, I describe each case and its context mostly based on the written faith story of each person. Fourth, coded data can then be compared, contrasted, moved around, and eventually organized into “themes” within each case. To establish themes, “categorical aggregation” is used, in which the researcher seeks a collection of instances from the data, hoping that issue-relevant meanings will emerge. However, if I discover a single instance which in itself is not

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26 Ibid., 148.
27 Myers, 75.
28 Ibid.
29 Creswell, 163.
enough to establish a theme and yet this single instance seems significant, I can appropriately draw meaning directly from it without looking for multiple instances (“direct interpretation”). Also, I will establish “patterns” by looking for a correspondence between two or more categories. In addition, I will develop “naturalistic generalizations,” generalizations that I can learn from each case. Fifth, in addition to the “within-case analysis,” I will need to do “cross-case analysis” in which I will look for similarities and differences between multiple cases. I can produce generalizations to be applied to multiple cases.

Throughout the process of data analysis, I will interpret the data in conversation with significant literature on spiritual direction including some from feminist perspectives to supplement my previous experience of giving spiritual direction to Korean Protestant women.

3) **Data Representation**: I will present an in-depth picture of the cases using narratives, tables, or figures.

4) **Confirmation**: I will discuss the result of my data analysis with all participants individually in order to confirm or revise it. Then I will be ready to write my thesis.

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30 Ibid.
31 Ibid.
32 Ibid., 172.
33 Ibid., 157.
F. Ethics Review for Research with Human Subjects

I will attach my ethics review protocol submission form to my thesis proposal separately.

G. Risks and Limitations of the Study

One possible risk of my study relates to the issue of power differentials, which could harm the credibility of the data. I do not look for participants among my current directees because I want to minimize possible power differentials between researcher and participants. My plan is for participants to receive spiritual direction from me for a short period of time with no particular intention that would continue receiving spiritual direction from me after the research project. Therefore, they are likely to feel freer to describe their experiences of spiritual direction and evaluate my practice of spiritual direction than my current directees might. Nevertheless, it is still possible that they would have difficulty frankly sharing what they think because Koreans tend to find it difficult to criticize or evaluate what other people have done in front of them. In addition, the fact that I (spiritual director and researcher in my research project) am a male, ordained minister, may make it difficult for female participants to openly share their experiences in and evaluations of spiritual direction and interviews. In a Korean context, laywomen are likely to follow a male minister’s lead. The female participants could even try to adjust their opinions to match mine without much critical thinking. Consciously or not, they might try to provide me what they think I want to hear. Therefore, I must help
participants recognize these possibilities in advance. I need to help them keep in mind that only candid, accurate descriptions of their experience can make the research valuable and meaningful. Throughout the research process, great care must be taken to ensure that the participants are encouraged to present their opinions as openly and freely as possible. Also, I must remind them that if they find the experience uncomfortable, they are free to drop out at any time with no negative consequences. These points can be clearly indicated in the informed consent form.

Based on my previous experience of giving spiritual direction to Korean Protestant women, I assume that if I practice it in accordance with the nature of spiritual direction in which a director does not control his/her directees and carefully listens to and affirms their experiences, they may gradually become more comfortable candidly sharing their thoughts and feelings. On the other hand, if they have a constant and ongoing difficulty with candid sharing with a male spiritual director, this fact itself could be significant data for my research and offer me a valuable point for understanding spiritual direction for Korean Protestant women.

Another possible limitation of the research is that it does not deal with extensive (statistically significant) data about Korean Protestant women’s experiences of spiritual direction, so conclusions of the research are not necessarily generalizable. In addition, this research deals with only one spiritual director’s practice of spiritual direction. Even though I am interested in how spiritual direction itself affects Korean Protestant women, it should be noted that spiritual direction is a personal encounter between two persons, so
it seems unavoidable that a specific spiritual director’s character and method of spiritual direction uniquely influence his/her directees’ experience of spiritual direction. However, given that the basic intent in qualitative research is not to generalize the information but to elucidate the particular, the specific, this limitation may not be a big problem. If I clearly present my perspectives on spiritual direction in theory and practice, this research can provide significant specific data which can ultimately generate valuable meanings.

Finally, my research deals with a limited experience of spiritual direction, only 6 sessions of spiritual direction within two months, due to the time limit of the research. This may not be enough for the participants to experience spiritual direction deeply and to experience a developed transformation of their God-image. However, this research will still give me valuable information about my research problem.

H. Contributions of the Study

First of all, this study may be of great help to my own practice of spiritual direction for Korean Protestant women. Even though I have my own assumptions about Korean Protestant women’s spirituality, how they may experience spiritual direction, what kind of God-image they usually have, and how to give spiritual direction for them, the study will provide me with deeper, richer, more objective (statistically significant) understanding and interpretation of these issues. I will be able to refine my own practice of spiritual direction for directees in the future and perhaps revise my assumptions.

34 Ibid., 126.
Despite the fact that my study is limited to Korean Protestant women, I do not think that its beneficial outcome will be restricted to that group. I imagine that male and female Protestants share many things in common in terms of spirituality because both spiritualities have been formed in the same Korean Protestant religious and cultural context. Therefore, I believe the outcome of this research can still be helpful if only indirectly for envisioning how Korean Protestant men might experience spiritual direction and for discovering ways to practice spiritual direction for Korean Protestant men. The study can be of great help for me in my efforts to become a more competent spiritual director capable of meeting Korean Protestants’ present need for spiritual growth.

My study may also help other Korean spiritual directors improve their practice with Korean Protestant women by providing them deeper understanding of Korean Protestant women’s spirituality. The study can also give valuable information to non-Korean spiritual directors who may direct Korean Protestant women. In this way this study may contribute to cross-cultural spiritual direction.

My specific concern is with a feminist perspective. In this study, I want to explore how the ministry of spiritual direction may be helpful to Korean Protestant women who want to be healed and liberated from the androcentric traditions of their faith. In this sense, I see my study as part of the wider feminist project of reclaiming and describing in their own terms women’s religious experience. Furthermore, my research may be a challenge or serve as an invitation for Korean Protestant women to write or
speak their own experience and thus liberate more voices into this feminist conversation. In closing, my study may help complement, challenge, widen and enlarge the androcentric faith traditions and spirituality we have inherited.

Finally, my study may call the attention of other Korean Protestants not presently familiar with spiritual direction to this much-neglected area. It may spread the ministry of spiritual direction among Korean Protestants. Through interaction with the ministry of spiritual direction, Korean Protestant spirituality may become enriched and more balanced.
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