Christian Contemplative Prayer:
A Grounded Theory Exploration of Well-Being and Embodiment within Christian Spirituality

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ABSTRACT

Christian contemplative prayer (CCP) is a spiritual and religious form of receptive meditation rooted in scriptural teachings and ancient practices. Despite its growing popularity, there is limited empirical evidence related to CCP long-term practitioners' lived experience. Although scholars suggest CCP influences practitioners' well-being, the importance of embodiment within this practice is under-theorized. CCP scholarship has primarily investigated: 1) psychotherapy intervention, 2) phenomenological investigation, and 3) well-being related to this prayer practice. This thesis examines the lived experience of long-term CCP practitioners, within their prayer practice. Drawing on participant semi-structured interview data, this thesis utilizes a grounded theory methodology to generate a conceptual framework that integrates CCP practice, well-being, and embodiment. This framework suggests practitioners' perspective of well-being, as reflected within a self-reported eudaemonic context. It also suggests an integrated aspect of embodiment within this prayer practice related to: Embodied Self, Embodied in Christian Community, Embodied Space, and Embodied in God. Aspects of Christian spirituality including lived experience, conscious process, holistic development, self-transcendence towards God, and uniqueness of individual's spiritual experience also helped to orient and explore the emergent participant data. The findings further emerged with greater understanding of the diversity found within the actual practice of silent, embodied CCP. Each of these aspects help to develop a substantive grounded theory integrating CCP practice, well-being and embodiment in the lived experience of long-term CCP practitioners.

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DECLARATION

This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.

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STATEMENT 1

This thesis is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. Where correction services have been used, the extent and nature of the correction is clearly marked in a footnote.

Other sources are acknowledged by midnotes or footnotes giving explicit references. A bibliography is appended.

Signed *Kathleen M. Holley* (Candidate)

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STATEMENT 2

I hereby give consent for my thesis, if approved, to be available for photocopying by the British Library and for Inter-Library Loan, for open access to the Electronic Theses Online Service (EthoS) linked to the British Library, and for the title and summary to be made available to outside organizations.

Signed *Kathleen M. Holley* (Candidate)

Date *June 21, 2022*

To me, a dedication represents something devoted to someone out of respect, affection, honour, and gratefulness. They would be someone who has filled my life with joy, support, and love just by being themselves. If I were going to write multiple PhDs, I could dedicate each thesis to the four most wonderful people in my life. But since, for me, one PhD in a lifetime is sufficient, this dedication needs to include all four of them.

DEDICATION

In memory of one, and in family and companionship of the others.

Erna Marie (Heinkel) Southwell (1916-2015)

To my mom: You introduced me to God who loves me more than I could ever imagine. You instilled in me compassion for others, the value of education, the necessity of perseverance, the fulfilment of hard-work, and the joy of a great sense of humour to carry me through the difficulties in life. You taught me to love what I do and do what I love. You have always been my most enthusiastic supporter in all my educational endeavours. One of the most difficult aspects of this thesis was not having you here, in person, to share it with. I miss and love you!

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'Walk with the wise and become wise' (Proverbs 13:20a).

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CCA	Conventional Content Analysis
CCP	Christian Contemplative Prayer
CDC	United States Center for Disease Control
CO	Contemplative Outreach
COVID-19	A global pandemic beginning at the end of 2019
CP	Centering Prayer
EWB	Eudaemonic Well-Being
FACIT-Sp	Functional Assessment of Chronic Illness Therapy - Spiritual Well-Being
GT	Grounded Theory
HLM	Hierarchal Linear Modelling
HWB	Hedonic Well-Being
MA	Meta-Analysis
MBCT	Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy
MECP	Movement-Based Embodied Contemplative Practices
NIV	New International Version
OSB	Order of Saint Benedict
P	Participant(s)
PE	Personal Expressiveness
PMR	Progressive Muscle Relaxation
SHALOM	Spiritual Health Measure (SHM) and Life- Orientation Measure (LOM)
SPWB	Scales of Psychological Well-Being
SWB	Spiritual Well-Being
SWBQ	Spiritual Well-Being Questionnaire
WCCM	The World Community for Christian Meditation

All Scripture references are from the New International Version (NIV), unless they are contained (and referenced) in a quotation or otherwise noted.

'If we come to consider supernatural contemplation as simply natural contemplation turned upward, then the focus would primarily rest on our own technique and ability, and we might make the error of believing that the contemplation of God was something we could generate. Rather, the contemplation of God is made available to the believer in the Spirit. As the Spirit descends to the depths of the believer, groaning with "groanings too deep for words" in intercession (Rom. 8:26), the Spirit is revealing the love and presence of God to the soul (Rom. 5:5). Contemplation is a call to attend to the presence of God that has been made available in Christ by the Spirit'. (Coe & Strobel 2019:6-7)

I think stillness is the place of full naked vulnerable-ness with God, that a lot of us see this as a place to hide. A lot of our frenetic activity is feeling like we are doing stuff, but we do have to pause and be vulnerable with God. So, I think stillness invites that. (Participant 35)

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

In the Christian tradition, contemplative prayer is informed by Scripture and ancient church practices, and it is 'receiving renewed attention in our time' (Keating[1] 1996:26). E. Cuthbert Butler, Benedictine abbot and scholar (2011: xxiii), insisted that the silent prayer practice of CCP is where 'ordinary prayer becomes perfect'. CCP's distinction as a spiritual discipline is reflected in the practitioners' silent, intentional attentiveness within the divine presence. Focusing on CCP as a prayerful silent practice, this study examined the practitioners' lived experience of well-being and embodiment within this spiritual discipline.

This research was an inquiry of Christian prayer, the 'dialogue or conversation between God and a person' (Polan 2003:204), with a particular focus on contemplative prayer as the wordless dialogue with God of 'the believer in the Spirit' (Coe & Strobel 2019:6)[2]. In this thesis, the generation of a constructivist substantive grounded theory depicted the lived experience of long-term CCP practitioners, and helped to illuminate the conceptual interrelation of CCP, well-being, and embodiment.

1.1 Background Context

CCP is a spiritual discipline that helps to centre one in their relationship and communication with God. This prayer practice promotes a silent awareness of God's presence, as one sits surrounded by silence without and filled with silence within (Bourgeault[3] 2004). While it is easier to quiet the noise and distractions of the practitioner's outer world, silencing the inner thoughts can be challenging as it is a process of 'letting go' of the inner talking and thoughts that arise (Keating 1996:35). CCP differs from other concentrative meditative prayer practices, which focus only on one's breath, a spoken mantra, or employing the imagination in a variety of ways. While different approaches might exhibit similar methods of quieting one's self, CCP centres

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[1] Fr. Thomas Keating (1923-2018) was a theologian who was one of the principal developers of the CCP practice known as *Centering Prayer*. He was also a noted teacher within the CCP movement, helping to develop the international organization: *Contemplative Outreach*.

[2] John Coe and Kyle Strobel are noted theologians at the Institute for Spiritual Formation at Biola University.

[3] Cynthia Bourgeault is a theologian and episcopal priest who has taught in Benedictine monasteries, retreats, and conferences on contemplation and CCP. She has also authored books related to CCP and the spiritual life.

primarily on God's presence and the intentional silence that inhabits that quiet space. In this way, it is distinguished from a variety of other forms of meditation, spiritual practices, or the popular cultural understanding of mindfulness.[4] CCP's spiritual element places one's attention and intention on God, which is interwoven throughout this apophatic prayer experience and rests on ancient Christian spiritual teachings and examples (Bourgeault 2016).

1.1.1 Kataphatic[5] Prayer and Apophatic Prayer

Prayers themselves can be distinguished as *kataphatic* or *apophatic*. Kataphatic prayer, derived from the Greek *kataphasis*, 'also known as the *via positive*, or "positive way,"' utilizes the mental aspects of prayer. Kataphatic prayer employs thought process through 'reason, memory, imagination, feelings, and will' (Bourgeault 2004:31). Apophatic prayer is derived from the Greek *apophasis,* recognized as '*via negativa*, or "negative way"' (Keating 2009:126). This type of Christian prayer includes various approaches to shift one's attention away from the external and towards a more internal focus. This can feel a bit 'like emptiness or nothingness', and this prayer ritual is sometimes depicted as '"formless," or the *via negativa (*"the way of negation")'; however, apophatic prayer is not truly empty, but rather it uses one's '"spiritual senses"', which are 'more subtle faculties of perception'(Bourgeault 2004:32). Similarly, via different means, the goal of both kataphatic prayer and apophatic is to bring one to a greater awareness of God's presence within.

1.1.2 History

Scholars recognize the essence of contemplative prayer in writings found within the Old and New Testament, Jesus' teachings, the examples of the Desert Fathers and Mothers, the monastics and mystics of the Middle Ages, and the post-Reformation through to the present time (Ferguson *et al.* 2010a). Although the roots reach back into church history (Keating 1996; Main 2006; Paintner 2012, 2016; Peters 2019), a renewed interest in this prayer practice, as an active Christian discipline, has been developing over the last sixty years. This has been partially promoted through the writings of Thomas Merton,[6] Thomas

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[4] Mindfulness is a practice that is rooted in Buddhist teachings and philosophy, and incorporates theories related to attention to the present and practices which reinforce self-directed attentiveness.

[5] Kataphatic is sometimes spelt as 'cataphatic'.

[6] Thomas Merton (1915-1968) has been noted as 'the most influential American Catholic author of the twentieth century. His autobiography, *The Seven Storey Mountain*, has sold over one million copies and has been translated into over fifteen languages. He wrote over sixty other books and hundreds of poems

Keating, Cynthia Bourgeault, and John Main,[7] and the support of international CCP networks such as Contemplative Outreach (CO)[8] and the World Community for Christian Meditation (WCCM).[9] However, despite the increased interest in this ancient prayer practice, research is limited in its investigation of the influence of CCP in the lives of its practitioners (Fox *et al.* 2015).

1.1.3 Limited Research

Limited studies exist with regards to Christian prayer or CCP, especially as they influence the practitioners' well-being. Herbert Benson[10] M. D. (1984) insisted that medical research has been investigating the impact of prayer in the reduction of stress since the 1960s. He noted that social scientists seem less inclined to study prayer, possibly because of issues related to faith that they appear to be more uncomfortable talking about. This was recognized in other medical studies which have also researched prayer as a means of healing for patients, whom have sometimes exhausted traditional medical treatments (Dossey 2003; Francis & Evans 1995). Baesler (1999:59) also recognized the lack of studies within his own discipline of communication when he contended that: 'It is intriguing that such a pervasive and vital topic as prayer is not more visible in the field of communication given the obvious correlation between human communication and spiritual communication'. While studies of prayer exist both within and without the spiritual disciplines, still understandings of CCP practice are incomplete.

While questions concerning Christian prayer and its potential benefits have guided various research efforts (Koenig *et al.* 2012), investigations on the more meditative CCP practice is limited, especially as it relates to its influence on the

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and articles on topics ranging from monastic spirituality to civil rights, nonviolence, and the nuclear arms race.' (from http://merton.org/chrono.aspx)

[7] John Main is the founder of the World Community for Christian Meditation, headquartered in London, England and Bonnevaux located just outside Poitiers, France

[8] This organization, of which Father Thomas Keating was a founding member and spiritual leader, has served to promote the development and growth of Centering Prayer. 'Contemplative Outreach is a spiritual network of individuals and small faith communities committed to living the contemplative dimension of the Gospel. The common desire for Divine transformation, primarily expressed through a commitment to a daily Centering Prayer practice, unites our international, interdenominational community'. http://www.contemplativeoutreach.org/

[9] This organization, founded by John Main, has served to promote the growth of Christian contemplative prayer. This international organization was developed to nurture the practice of Christian meditation and it '…is now present in 120+ countries. Individuals, weekly groups and centres share the peace and compassion that are the spiritual fruits of meditation'. https://www.wccm.org/content/about-world-community-christian-meditation

[10] Herbert Benson is a pioneer in mind/body medicine, bringing spirituality and healing together in the medical realm. He defined the relaxation response, introducing this mind/body response to relieve stress. (Benson 1984; Benson & Proctor 2010).

practitioner (Finney & Malony 1985b; Johnson *et al.* 2009; Ferguson *et al.* 2010a; Fox *et al.* 2015; Gutierrez *et al.* 2015; Fox *et al.* 2016; Rubinart et al. 2017). Studies have investigated Eastern meditative practices, which can focus more on self-awareness or self-actualization; however, until recently little attention has been given to Christian forms of meditative contemplative prayer (Ferguson *et al.* 2010a; Blanton 2011; Knabb 2012). Plante (2010: preface) noted a slight increase 'in the relationship between science, faith, and contemplative practices such as meditation […] especially in most recent years as new scientifically based research and clinical findings have appeared in the professional and popular press'. As this ancient prayer practice is growing within the Christian community, academic interest and understanding is advancing, yet 'many questions remain unanswered about this meditative path' (Fox *et al.* 2015:804).

CCP researchers have asserted the need for increased study in this area. This is affirmed by such statements as:

- 'Prayer is central to the Christian faith […]. In spite of the importance of prayer, little attention has been given to the scientific study of its effects' (Finney & Malony 1985b:284).

- 'additional research on spiritual interventions is warranted' (Johnson *et al.* 2009:427)

- 'It is my hope that others will continue to research the clinical implications of Centering Prayer. Until now, integration efforts have focused primarily upon the use of cognitive behavior therapy and mindfulness with individuals. However, how effective is Centering Prayer with individuals, couples, and families?' (Blanton 2010:145)

- 'Studies that focus on meditation and stress frequently draw on an Eastern understanding' (Ferguson *et al.* 2010a:306)

- 'there are relatively little data available to social science researchers to answer important questions about how centering prayer functions psychologically and spiritually' (Fox *et al.* 2015:804)

- 'Centering prayer is a widely practiced method of meditation. However, despite its popularity, limited social science research exists examining its effects' (Fox *et al.* 2016:379).

Limited data has been gathered and analysed relating to CCP and the individuals who practise it. As Ferguson (2010b:60) insisted, '[t]housands of people from a variety of backgrounds and ethnicities are gradually becoming aware of the Christian tradition of contemplative prayer as a quieting practice in a fast-paced world'. This magnified the need for understanding this spiritual practice, and further addressing the knowledge gap.

1.2 Research Aim and Objectives

The aim of this study is to address the lacuna within published research examining the lived experience of long-term CCP practitioners, focusing on developing an increased theoretical understanding of this prayer practice and its integrative influence on the practitioner. The study was an investigative qualitative research, employing semi-structured interviews within a constructivist grounded theory framework. Christian Spirituality helped to orient this study through a hermeneutical lens involving: 1) lived experience, 2) conscious process, 3) holistic development, 4) self-transcendence towards God, and 5) uniqueness of individual lived experiences (Schneiders 1989).

Study objectives included:
- gather data via semi-structured interviews of long-term CCP practitioners
- utilize an iterative and constantly comparative process throughout the analysis of the data
- continued comparative analysis to develop a substantive grounded theory of CCP's influence on the long-term practitioner

This thesis' investigation of CCP practice and its influence enhances greater understanding for scholars, Christian leaders and practitioners alike, which can benefit those who study this practice and those who engage with this practice.

1.3 Addressing the Knowledge Gap

A literature review revealed a limited number of scholarly CCP studies, which are more critically addressed in Chapter 3. They are summarized here to present an academic context for this current study. Near the end of the twentieth century, a few studies investigated the potential of CCP as an adjunct to psychotherapy (Finney & Malony

1985b), and also its positive effect on the practitioner (Finney & Malony 1985b; Johnson *et al.* 2009; Ferguson *et al.* 2010a). More recently, a few empirical studies have examined psychospiritual outcomes related to well-being, especially as it related to the particular method of CCP known as Centering Prayer (Fox *et al.* 2016). While studies have served to enhance our understanding of CCP practices, they have also contended with limitations created by such factors as small sample sizes and a lack of qualitative data from long-term practitioners. These limitations emphasized the need for continued exploration of this phenomenon and further contextualized theorization of CCP's influence. This qualitative thesis helped to further explore the lived experience of long-term CCP practitioners.

1.4 Research Questions

This research was guided by the following questions:

Primary question –

What is the lived experience of Christian contemplative prayer (CCP) among long-term practitioners, and how does it relate to the practitioners' embodied well-being and perceptions of embodiment within this spiritual discipline?

Secondary questions –

How is Christian contemplative prayer initiated and practised within the lives of practitioners?

How do long-term Christian contemplative prayer practitioners describe well-being within this practice?

How is the practitioner embodied within their Christian contemplative prayer practice?

These questions led to the development of specific interview questions, while the interview process allowed for the development of more probing questions within participant interviews.

1.5 Defining Terms: Meditation, Contemplation, Contemplative Prayer, Well-Being, and Embodiment

Distinctions made between the terms meditation and contemplation have not always been clear. Was there ever a definite delineation between them? Have their individual

meanings actually changed? Have we in more recent years been unsure how to describe these practices uniquely, even within the academic or religious communities, such that the terms are sometimes used interchangeably? Keating (2009:122) insisted that *contemplation* had a specific meaning during the first sixteen centuries of church history, however '[i]n recent centuries, the word has acquired other meanings and connotations'. Zaleski and Zaleski (2005:195) contended that '[w]ords like all living things – and who can doubt that words have life? – contract or expand in response to their environment'. Over time, or within different cultural and religious groups of people, the meaning or use of a word can change. 'When it comes to the lexicon of prayer, no word has undergone more dramatic alteration, in response to changes in its cultural environment, than contemplation' (Zaleski & Zaleski 2005:195). We are left questioning, what is contemplation and contemplative prayer, and how do they differ from meditation? Defining what is meant by meditation versus contemplation can be a difficult task, yet the distinction needs to be addressed.

1.5.1 Meditation, Christian Contemplative Prayer, and Contemplation

As theologian Glen Scorgie (2019:264) noted, 'the multivolume *Encyclopedia of Religion,* edited in the 1980's […] does not contain a single entry on contemplation'. Instead, it referred readers to entries 'on meditation, or, alternatively, to ones on attention, prayer, and silence'. Similarly, '[t]he *Harper Collins Dictionary of Religion',*[11] provides an entry on meditation and an additional thumbnail definition as: '"*A process of contemplation* usually undertaken in a structured manner" (emphasis added)' (Scorgie 2019:264-265). This exemplifies a tendency to avoid defining contemplation apart from meditation. Augustinian friar and theologian, Martin Laird (2006:4) wrote that the contemplative practice of stillness was indicated as 'meditation, still prayer, contemplative prayer, etc.'. Here meditation and contemplative prayer appear to be equally referenced. Bourgeault (2004:8-9) referred to '"intentional silence" — or to use the generic description, meditation', and then she writes that 'Centering Prayer is a discipline of intentional silence'. Does that imply that Centering Prayer is also generically a discipline of meditation?

Furthermore, two international CCP organizations use different terminologies in their organizations' descriptors. Contemplative Outreach (CO) promotes a CCP practice

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[11] Scorgie (2019) noted that this dictionary was '…a joint endeavor with the American Academy of Religion' produced in the late 1990s (264).

known as the method of Centering Prayer (Appendix 1), and The World Community for Christian Meditation (WCCM) emphasizes Christian meditation in their teachings. Main (2006:1) suggested that 'in the Christian context of meditation' he used the term meditation 'synonymously with such terms as contemplation, contemplative prayer, meditative prayer, and so on'. Except for WCCM's use of a one-word silent mantra, these two organizations' CCP practices are very similar.

Scorgie (2019:268) asserted that 'in instances where Christian writers distinguish meditation from contemplation, contemplation's defining feature is rest or pause from mental concentration'. Of course, this statement implies that sometimes writers do not make a distinction between the two. Scorgie (2019) contended that contemplation 'means one thing in circles that practice the scientific study of religion, and other things in more in-house Christian conversations shaped by the history of Christian spirituality'. He further suggested that contemplation can be defined with 'three main meanings that circulate today' (264). He wrote that categorically these meanings can be recognized as 1) 'A broad umbrella category' (264), 2) 'a godly disposition' (266), or 3) 'a specific practice' (267).

While Keating (2007:144) made reference to contemplation as 'a synonym for contemplative prayer', he further insisted that the practice of Centering Prayer or CCP 'is not contemplation in the strict sense of the term but the preparation for it' (Keating 2009:15). Theologian and philosopher, Ronald Rolheiser (2013:44) pointed to CCP as it helped to lead one towards contemplation; he suggested that '[c]ontemplation is not, first and foremost, a technique for prayer. Sometimes prayer, especially centering prayer, can help us find it, but contemplation is something more. It's a way of being present to what's really inside our own experience'. This study focuses on the specific practice of CCP leading to contemplation.

This interchanging use of contemplation, contemplative prayer, and meditation can create confusion around the potential distinctness and similarities related to these terms. For the sake of clarity in this thesis, I will make a distinction as to what defines contemplation and contemplative prayer, and how they are related to meditation. In consideration of CCP scholars' and participants' definitions of these terms, the following definitions have been developed and will be used in this study:

Meditation: A practice of focusing the mind in reflection through the use of various concentrative, awareness, and receptive methods.

Christian contemplative prayer (CCP): A particular receptive form of meditation, whereby in silence, one lovingly gives their full attention or intention to God, passively releasing all other thoughts, thus leading one towards Christian contemplation in union with God.

Christian contemplation: A silent, inactive state in which one's spirit rests quietly in union and openness to the indwelling Spirit (presence) of God.

1.5.2 Well-Being

The subject of well-being is a multi-dimensional, holistic construct (Ryan & Deci 2001). Participant data was analysed to develop their perspective of well-being within their long-term CCP practice. Based on the participant data, the following definition of well-being was developed, as contextualized within this study of CCP.

Well-Being: Participant well-being is a positive embodied state related to personal, social, environmental, and spiritual holistic health, as one becomes more aware and accepting of their own true self within social, environmental, and spiritual relationships. One's sense of well-being enhances one's connection with others, the environment, and God, helping to develop a greater sense of meaning, purpose, and God's presence.

1.5.3 Embodiment

As this study's data analysis progressed, the participants' perspective of CCP related to *embodiment* emerged as an important element. It was important to determine what is meant by the term embodiment in the context of this study. Perry and Medina[12] (2011:63) referred in part to embodiment as 'the state that is contingent upon the environment and the context of the body'. This placed the embodied individual (body, mind and spirit) as an integral part of their embodied environment. This is different from the concept of simply dwelling within an environment. For example, one could dwell within a neighborhood, that is, one could reside there or inhabit a space and not even know their neighbors or anything else about that locale. Or one's embodied self could be embodied

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[12] Perry (assistant professor of drama/theater) and Medina's (assistant professor of Literacy, Culture, and Language) research has explored the experience of the body in performative pedagogy, especially as it relates to embodiment.

in their neighborhood in such a way that integrates the whole person within and as contingent on their neighborhood and environment. There is certainly a continuum of this type of embodiment, ranging from knowing one's neighbors and interacting with them to being connected within a network of caring people, concerned for one another and their residential environment. In this integrated way, one would reside as an embodied self in relation to their neighborhood.

Similarly, participants discussed embodiment within this study as an integration of an embodied self within their long-term CCP practice. They expressed their embodiedness as it related to themselves (body, mind, and spirit), others, their environmental space, and God. In this way, as Professor of Communications and Women's & Gender Studies, Laura Ellingson (2017:3) contended: 'Human embodiment is mutually constitutive with the world around us'. As participants understood their CCP practice they echoed Vennard's (1998:19) perspective that: 'Learning to pray with body and soul means finding a balanced approach to our embodiment'. Vennard (1998:19) posited that:

> "Body-centered spirituality" is a term frequently used to indicate a positive relationship with the body. I believe the intent of this phrase is to make sure that we know that the body is not excluded from the spiritual life. We are at risk of idolatry, however, if we place the body, rather than God, at the center of our spiritual lives. Paul says: "Glorify God in your body" (I Cor. 6:20). He does not say: "Glorify your body."

Many participants recognized the important role of their embodied self within their CCP practice, yet their body was not separate or elevated in its importance, rather it was their integrated, embodied self within their environment that practised CCP in contemplative union with God. Based on the participants' perspectives, the following depicts a definition of embodiment as contextualized within this study of CCP.

Embodiment: One's embodied self (holistic human being: body, mind, and spirit) as integrated, contingent upon, and interacting with others and one's environmental space in an all-inclusive way, and in the case of CCP the embodied self as embodied in God.

1.6 Assumptions and Reflexivity

One main assumption of this study is that it is possible to gain insights into a private, spiritual prayer realm in which the one praying is encouraged to release all thoughts and to let one's attentive intentions rest solely on God. This research assumes that participants

can actually formulate and communicate thoughts about this prayer experience and its influence in their lives.

As Bourgeault (2004:6) proclaimed:

> What goes on in those silent depths during the time of Centering Prayer is no one's business, not even your own; it is between your innermost being and God; that place where, as St. Augustine once said, "God is closer to your soul than you are to yourself." Your own subjective experience of the prayer may be that nothing happened—except the more-or-less continuous motion of letting go of thoughts.

To be certain, it is difficult to delve into the innermost aspects of this personal prayer practice. However, the substantial number of books represented in this bibliography alone, published by leaders in this field such as Merton, Keating, and Main, suggest the potential to discuss this spiritual experience. The aspects and influence of this practice that participants articulated were analysed in search of the meanings that support CCP practice. Secondly, the assumption was made that participants will tell the truth about this personal experience.

While recognizing these assumptions, it has also been important for me to approach this investigation reflexively so as to minimize interference, especially from my own preconceived perspectives and beliefs. CCP is not commonly practiced within my own Pentecostal Christian tradition, and I have had minimal exposure to this form of prayer. My interest in this study was borne out of my background in theology and the biological-medical sciences. Based on the mind-body benefits of meditation found in the bio-medical research (Benson 1984; Benson & Proctor 2010), I wanted to explore CCP from a Christian spirituality perspective, noting the meanings and influences of CCP in long-term practitioners' lived experience. Throughout this study, I have worked to maintain an open, reflexive awareness of participants viewpoints in an effort to learn from them.

This study was limited to CCP long-term practitioners, in an attempt to discern the influence of this practice in their lived experience. Although participants practised various CCP methods, only those whose prayer experiences incorporate silent contemplation were included in this study. All participants held basic Christian beliefs including the existence of the Trinitarian Godhead and the possibility of a relational communication, in this case a silent communication, with God through prayer.

1.7 Literature Review Timing and Strategy

The timing of the literature review is a contested topic among grounded theory scholars. In their influential work, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory,* noted grounded theorists Glaser and Strauss (1967) recommended postponing the literature review until some of the initial data analysis had begun. Other authors have acknowledged the difficulty in this approach based on the researcher's previous knowledge in the field or even the pragmatic necessity of having familiarity with the research topic (Strauss & Corbin 1990; Thornberg 2012; Charmaz 2014). Other scholars recommended the use of a literature review throughout the research process, yet they did not promote the completion of an exhaustive review before all data analysis is completed (Charmaz 2014; Strauss & Corbin 1990; Kenny & Fourie 2014). Still, the timing of the literature review is debated among grounded theorists and needs to be decided by the individual researcher based on their own methodological understanding of grounded theory.

Based on these philosophical underpinnings, an initial literature review was conducted. This review was conducted in part before initiating the research, and then iteratively throughout this research investigation. This strategy was supported by the need to 1) develop greater initial understanding of the topic area, and 2) avoid ignorance of the relevant academic discourse. However, I also maintained an awareness of being influenced not only by my own biases, but also by the literature being reviewed. As Suddaby (2006:635) warned: 'Constantly remind yourself that you are only human and that what you observe is a function of both who you are and what you hope to see'. In this investigation, an initial literature review supported the development of the research proposal, and the initial stages of data collection and analysis. After commencing the collection and analysis of the first 18 interviews, a more extensive literature review was resumed. This ongoing review included literature in the relevant topics being discovered within the participant, such as those related to embodiment.

Although a limited corpus of CCP scholarship was discovered, throughout the remainder of this research process, the literature review was an ongoing recursive process. As Thornberg (2012:252) insisted, '[a]n ongoing literature review, based on theoretical sampling, can help the researcher to be more sensitive to data, to elaborate his or her constructed themes, concepts and ideas, and to offer new insights into questions and issues'. As theoretical sampling and sensitivity developed, during Phase 1 of the interviews, themes of well-being began to emerge in the participant data. While

embodiment is discussed in the literature review, the theme of embodiment did not begin to emerge until Phase 2 of interviews (beginning after the first ten interviews). Embodiment was not absent from the first ten interviews; however, I was not attentive to it initially. It did not become apparent until the data analysis of subsequent interviews were undertaken. Upon a recursive review of previous data, embodiment became more apparent in the data analysis of the Phase 1 participants as well. At that point, a literature review of related research on embodiment was conducted. As an informed researcher, reflexively positioning myself in this investigation, I believe my approach to this iterative research has helped to further address the research gap of this topic by 'extending, challenging, refining, or revising it' (Thornberg 2012:255). The literature review, and its supporting strategies, have been an integral part of this entire research process.

1.8 Overview of Literature Review Strategy

A literature search was conducted via the University of Oxford, Fuller Seminary, Northwest University and Middlesex University libraries, including the online data bases: PROQUEST, EThOS and Google Scholar. This systematic investigation of CCP and/or meditative prayer literature provided an exploration of research data related to varying aspects of this Christian prayer practice, rather than limiting the search to CCP only.

1.8.1 Inclusion and Exclusion Requirements

Two primary requirements led the initial stage of the literature review. The first was a search for studies in CCP practices only. The second major criterion included studies that revealed data on those practices whose practitioners spent the entire prayer time in silence. Neither the specific Christian tradition nor the term 'meditative' were utilized as a delimiting factor in this search. Studies were found that used the terms contemplative prayer and meditative interchangeably (Fox *et al.* 2016). Others referred to contemplative prayer or Centering Prayer as 'meditative practices' (Gutierrez *et al.* 2015:Abstract), or that '[c]entering prayer is a structured meditation practice' (Johnson *et al.* 2009:421), or that Centering Prayer is 'a form of Christian meditation' (Knabb 2012:Abstract). Other studies insisted that 'the terms contemplative prayer and meditation are used interchangeably in [their] study to convey contemplative prayer's similarity as a quieting practice to the popular cultural understanding of meditation' (Ferguson *et al.* 2010a:386). This study, however, will primarily use the term Christian contemplative prayer (CCP),

except when quoting the literature or referencing specific interview quotations. Although I read other perspectives on contemplation and meditation (for example Benson & Proctor 2010; Kabat-Zinn 2013) to broaden my understanding of meditation, I only included studies in the first stage of the written literature review that matched the main aspects of a silent CCP practice.

1.8.2 Summary of Included Studies

CCP scholarship included: one timed series quasi-experimental design; eight mixed methods; one qualitative; one case study; one heuristic study; and two journal essays. Six of the studies explored Centering Prayer only, two investigated the Jesus Prayer, two examined a mantra form of CCP, and two employed a comparative analysis related to CCP and other meditative practices. These studies evaluated CCP as a psychotherapy intervention, its influence on aspects of well-being, and its effect on the participants' lived experience of this prayer practice. As researchers have noted, continued research is needed to develop a greater understanding of this spiritual discipline and its impact in the lives of its practitioners (Gutierrez *et al.* 2015; Fox *et al.* 2016; Rubinart *et al.* 2017).

1.9 Thesis Structure

This introductory chapter describes the study and its background context. Chapter 2 situates this study within the academic discipline of Christian Spirituality and briefly outlines the historical context of CCP. Chapter 3 presents a literature review of CCP, well-being, and embodiment. This review delineates the scant investigations of long-term practitioners' lived experience of this prayer practice, and the subsequent knowledge gap. The gap reveals the under-theorized relationships of embodiment as it relates to this prayer practice and the practitioners' lived experience. Chapter 4 outlines the theoretical underpinnings of this research process, introducing the methodology of constructivist grounded theory and the appropriateness of its methods in addressing this knowledge gap. This chapter further details the constant comparative method, and the purposive, snowball, and theoretical sampling used in data collection leading to the data analysis development of the substantive grounded theory. In using this philosophical approach, a reflexive approach recognizes the researcher's integral role with the participants in the research process. Chapter 4 further outlines the actual methods of participant data collection and analysis, as data was transcribed, analysed, and organized into a succinct

presentation. Chapter 5 presents the thesis' participants' data, while Chapter 6 integrates that data and findings with supporting theories to strengthen the substantive grounded theory developed from this study. These integrated findings help to further conceptualize CCP, well-being, and embodiment. The theory is diagrammatically illustrated in the conclusion of this chapter. Chapter 7 concludes with an overview of the thesis and an outline of its theoretical contributions to knowledge, limitations of this study, thoughts on future research, the self-implicating aspects of Christian spirituality exploration, and final personal reflections.

1.10 Conclusion

This chapter has introduced the topic of CCP and its increasing interest within the secular and academic realms. It has also indicated its lack of representation within the scholarly literature. By setting the background context for this study, a description was outlined of the knowledge gap of CCP practice and its relation to well-being and embodiment among long-term practitioners. This gap accounts for the under-theorized aspects related to long-term CCP practitioner well-being and embodiment.

CHAPTER 2: SITUATING THIS STUDY

This chapter has two primary aims. First, it situates this study within the academic discipline of Christian Spirituality. Theologian Sandra Schneiders[13] (2005:18) insisted that the emerging discipline of Christian Spirituality is not only multi-disciplinary, but it also supports studies within contemplative prayer and 'practices like centering prayer'. It therefore lends itself to the study of the lived experience of CCP. Although the emerging substantive theory will be grounded in the participant data, Christian Spirituality provides a hermeneutical lens as an orienting framework for this study. Second, this chapter presents an initial focus on this study through an exploration of the history of CCP. This will help to establish CCP on its historical foundation.

2.1 Christian Spirituality

Clarifying the hermeneutical lens through which this grounded theory study of CCP was oriented is important and helps to illustrate the way this thesis' associated findings contributed to Christian Spirituality scholarship. This section begins by delineating five major aspects of Christian Spirituality which helped to orient the emerging theory, and most importantly, as it emerged within the participants' data. These aspects included: lived experience; conscious process; holistic development; self-transcendence towards God, and the importance of each participants' uniqueness as recognized within Christian Spirituality (Schneiders 1989; 2003; 2006). This section also presents the multi-disciplinary aspect of Christian Spirituality, which helped to support this study. However, throughout this study the participants' data were always primary, especially as it reflected upon each participants' lived experience of CCP within their Christian spirituality.

2.1.1 Lived Experience

Christian Spirituality '*denotes experience*', yet, as Schneiders (2003:167) emphasized, it was a term 'that is itself difficult to define'. However, guided by the tenets of constructivist grounded theory, this study examined lived experience of CCP within the long-term practitioners' Christian spirituality. In this way, the meanings that

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[13] Sandra Schneiders is a Professor Emerita of the Jesuit School of Theology and has been a leading theologian in the emergence and development of Christian Spirituality as an academic discipline.

substantiated the participants' individual lived experience were synthesized into a nuanced understanding of this practice and its influence in the individual's life. Schneiders (1989) contended that, analogous to psychology, spirituality understood aspects that were frequently understood through the comprehension of meanings within lived experiences. This was a reflection of the actual spiritual experiences that have guided this study, and not just simply beliefs, assumptions or doctrines.

2.1.2 Conscious Process

Second, Schneiders (2003:167) related this spiritual experience to a '*conscious involvement in a project*', which was an evolving and meaningful life process. This study considered the long-term purposeful engagement of long-term practitioners in their CCP practice. For many, this reflected an intentional commitment to this practice, that permeated aspects of their lived experience of CCP. Their consistent CCP practice was not merely an effort towards developing a habitual prayer practice, but as reflected in the participants' data their CCP was a conscious process and also a purposive involvement in their holistic spiritual growth and development.

2.1.3 Holistic Development

Third, Schneiders (2003:167) emphasized that spirituality was a process of '*life-integration which means that it is holistic, involving body and spirit, emotions and thought, activity and passivity, social and individual aspects of life'*. In this way, it was a unified process of holistic development and change, which emerged in this study as an embodied experience of the practitioner individually, socially, and spiritually. Emerging through the participants' data, CCP practice was often seen as part of an integrated process to live more contemplatively, in ways that encompassed one's whole life.

2.1.4 Self-Transcendence Towards God

Fourth, this holistic pursuit depicted a '*self-transcendence toward [sic] ultimate value',* which for Christians was self-transcendence towards God (Schneiders 2003:167). Schneiders (2003:168) further emphasized that this requires discernment, and that Christians recognize 'the horizon of ultimate value is the triune God revealed in Jesus Christ in whose life we share through the gift of the Holy Spirit'. This was reflected in the meanings that participants ascribed to their CCP practice, and as noted scholar of Carmelite spirituality, Mary Frohlich (2001:71) emphasized, the study of spirituality

further 'consists of *constructed expressions of human meaning*'. Though this practice may be a conscious process, creating a holistic development, the meaning that participants ascribed to this practice overall was in a relational union with God in contemplation. Within Christians' self-transcendence towards God, there was a formation as spiritual beings in the image of Jesus (Willard & Simpson 2005). This further guided self-transcendence towards God and 'living an authentic Christian existence' (Frederick 2008:556), as depicted within the CCP participants' lived experience.

Aspects of lived experience, conscious process, holistic development (life integration), and self-transcendence towards God, were recognized in Schneiders' (2006:210) definition of Christian spirituality as '"the experience of conscious involvement in the project of life-integration through self-transcendence toward [sic] the ultimate value one perceives"'. She also condensed this definition towards the way in which '[t]he first and inclusive referent of the term *spirituality* is the *lived experience* of the faith' (2006:200). This study's location within the academic discipline of Christian Spirituality oriented its focus on the unique lived experience of participants within their own long-term practice of CCP.

2.1.5 Uniqueness of Individual Lived Experiences

Schneiders (2003:166) further emphasized that an individual's spirituality and practices developed in personal and unique ways, 'analogously to the way individuals develop their common humanity into a unique personality. Therefore, the spiritualities of Christians, even within the same denomination, Religious order, or movement, may differ enormously'. As participants' data were analysed, the emergent patterns showed that although for each individual, their ultimate value was found in self-transcendence towards God, their approaches to their CCP practice often reflected their own personal preference and uniqueness. As Frederick (2008:556) noted, '[a]n important aspect of Christian spirituality is the diversity of its spiritual practices'. This predominated in their methods and practices, yet similarities also emerged in the influences related to this prayer practice and the common emphasis on contemplation in union with God.

2.1.6 Christian Spirituality: A Multi-Disciplinary Academic Discipline

This section addresses Christian Spirituality as a multi-disciplinary approach that aligns itself with the study of the 'lived experience of Christian faith and discipleship' (Holder

2005:1). As such, it helps to orient this study of the lived experience of long-term practitioners of CCP. In her essay on 'Spirituality in the Academy', Schneiders (1989:676) insisted that: 'the academy is witnessing (not without apprehension) the birth of a new discipline in its midst'. 'Spirituality has now become a buzz word that defines our era' (van der Merwe 2018a:1), in which laity, ministerial professionals, and scholars are increasingly interested in explorations of Christian spirituality (Schneiders 1989; McMinn and Hall 2000; van der Merwe 2013). While a definitive definition of Christian spiritualty still eludes many, scholars acknowledge various aspects of this as an academic discipline, including its multi-disciplinary approach (Schneiders 1989; Sheldrake 1999; Holt 2017; Higgins 2019).

Schneiders (1989:692-693) argues that: 'Spirituality is the field of study which attempts to investigate in an interdisciplinary way spiritual experience as such, i.e. as spiritual and as experience'. She insists that characteristics aid in the distinction of Christian Spirituality from other related disciplines. First, 'spirituality is essentially an interdisciplinary discipline'. Second, studies in Christian spirituality are more 'descriptive-critical rather than prescriptive-normative', looking to critically understand lived experiences within a Christian's spirituality. Third, it is 'ecumenical, interreligious, and cross-cultural'. Fourth, it is holistic including such dimensions of the individual related to 'psychological, bodily, historical, social, political, aesthetic, intellectual and other dimensions' that may be integrated in the lived experience. Theologian Philip Sheldrake (1999) further notes that this multidisciplinary approach often 'overflows the boundaries of theology into a broader conversation with other fields'. Holt (2017:6-7) contends that this multi-disciplinary approach studies not only the dimensional capacity of the human being to 'integrate spiritual meanings with physical activities' and relation with the 'unseen world', but also a way of relating to God and the world. Higgins (2019:212) argues that Christian Spirituality, as an interdisciplinary discipline, 'has received a great deal of attention'. He recognizes this as a 'post-modern response to the fracturing of the holistic nature of human inquiry in general as a result of the rigid compartmentalization of traditional academic disciplines that have operated largely in isolation from one another'. Accordingly, as he continues, '[i]t is precisely in the instance on the centrality of human experience, as a holistic phenomenon, that has informed the study of spirituality's interdisciplinary posture'. These understandings of Christian Spirituality's multi-disciplinary approach have helped to anchor this study in the

dimension of lived experience, being supported by such disciplines within the realms of well-being, embodiment, and theology.

There is a general consensus that Christian spirituality lies in the realm of 'lived experiences' within Christian faith (Holder 2005:1), yet how are these experiences further delineated? For the Christian, this lived experience 'stems from a personal relationship with God' (Pretorius 2008:158), born out of 'the essence of a dynamic divine-human dialogue – between the divine and the spiritual person' (Van der Merwe 2018a:9). This lived experience is also recognized in 'the diversity of its spiritual practices' (Frederick 2008:556). Within these differing practices one experiences the 'unique manner in which God through the Holy Spirit quickens the truth, communicates, guides and makes the Holy presence known to believers' (Pretorius 2008:159). In this way, Christian Spirituality can be further recognized within the experience of the presence of God (Pretorius 2008), experiencing self-transcendence and 'a life of transformation' (Van der Merwe 2018a:9). In this way, Frederick (2008:553) suggested that Christian Spirituality explores the way one 'lives and practices transcendent beliefs'.

These definitions help to interpret Christian spirituality from the perspective of a Christian's lived experience within a personal relationship with God. A relation in which one engages in distinct spiritual practices in God's presence, leading towards spiritual growth, self-transcendence, and a life transformed by God. Schneiders (1989, 2003, 2006) summarized Christian Spirituality in a way that not only denoted lived experience, but also recognized the ongoing, conscious experience of a Christian life pursued in God. Schneiders (1989:692) noted that 'spirituality wishes to understand religious experience as it occurs'. This went beyond the doctrines, the given methods, the theological principles to the study of the lived experiences themselves and the interpretation of the meanings that participants ascribed to them.

2.2 Brief Historical Survey of Christian Contemplative Prayer

The remaining sections briefly survey CCP's historical foundations, through to the modern day. Scholars contended that the history of CCP extends back to the Desert Fathers and Mothers (Laird 2006; Keating 2008; Paintner 2016), while some recognized its roots in the Old and New Testaments (Bourgeault 2004; Main 2006; Coe 2019). During the first 16 centuries of church history, contemplation appeared to be more common among devout clergy and lay people; however, it still continues to develop today

through contemporary Christian practitioners (Ferguson 2010b). Beginning in the mid-twentieth century, interest in Christian spirituality and contemplation started to gain more interest (Frenette 2008). This momentum was further supported by international networks such as CO and WCCM. Contemplative spiritual director and teacher, David Frenette (2008) contended that it will continue to grow in ways that are yet to be seen.

These themes of silence and stillness, especially in contemplative approach to prayer, are seen within Christian church history, although as the following participant (P26) expressed there has not been a specific method of CCP until more recently:

> *And I can tell you that you will search in history for a method of contemplation. The closest I found was Evagrius […], but they did not write it down, it must have been oral tradition. Then Guigo wrote the steps of lectio divina, and then Teresa of Avila and St. John of the Cross, share insights, but still they do not give a method. The first method was really from Father Keating. (P26)*

Keating (2009:19) contended that '[c]ontemplative prayer enjoys an ancient and venerable history within Christianity'. Practices related to CCP are found in church history and Scripture.

While the method and practice of today's CCP does not specifically appear to be taught in the Bible, some of the themes of this spiritual practice have been identified within scriptural teachings. Themes of solitude, silence, meditation, and contemplation have been recognized in both the Old and New Testament Scripture, with little reference to the specifics of a CCP practice leading to a contemplative union with God.

Old Testament (Psalms) — Meditative demeanour references are found in the Psalms:

- 'Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him…' (Psalm 37:7)
- 'Be still and know that I am God…' (Psalm 46:10)

These verses suggest a contemplative awareness, without directives on how to 'Be still'.

New Testament Gospels — Bourgeault (2004) recognized the basis of Centering Prayer developing out of practices and teachings of Jesus and continuing to develop into present times. The exact way that Jesus prayed when he was alone is not clear, nor can one make a direct assertion to CCP. Bourgeault (2004:59) further insisted that '[i]t would make matters hugely simpler, of course, if we could claim any clear, unambiguous scriptural references to substantiate that Jesus either practised meditation himself or specifically taught it to his disciples. We can't'. However, Jesus showed the necessity of times of

solitude and prayer, as He lived within a keen awareness of his union with God the Father. While his specific prayer methods are unclear, the importance of this focus in His life is undeniable.

Jesus' teachings — Ferguson (2010b:63) asserted that Jesus' profound recognition relating God as *Abba* (Mark 14:36), His teachings related to praying in secret (Matthew 6:6), and the description of 'the divine indwelling (John 17:21-23a)' in the Gospel of John are all foundational aspects of CCP. In Jesus' teaching on prayer in Matthew 6:6, He emphasized that true prayer is offered '"in secret"' (Bourgeault, 2004:59). Jesus states: ˙But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen' (Matthew 6:6). As Bourgeault (2004:60) insisted, this Scripture has been noted in various teachings on contemplation, from the fifth century John Cassian through to the present teachings and, taken metaphorically, the reference to 'go into your room' is similarly acknowledged as the '"cave of your heart" (as the desert fathers would later dub it) and closing the door to "the faculties," or ordinary awareness'. Jesus' lifestyle practice of retreating to quiet, secluded places, apart from the crowds where he could pray also exemplified a contemplative dimension:

- '…he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray.' (Matthew 14:23)
- '…went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.' (Mark 1:35)
- '…he went up on a mountainside to pray.' (Mark 6:46)
- 'But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.' (Luke 5:16)
- '…Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God.' (Luke 6:12)

Bourgeault (2004) contended that for Jesus the place of union with His Father is affirmed in the apophatic level (John 10:30), further lending itself to that of contemplation. Again, no specific mention of contemplation is given, but this practice is supported by Jesus' times of solitude and silence away from others. Ferguson (2010b:63) concurred with Bourgeault (2004) as she identified a 'theological congruence between Centering Prayer and the biblical concept of *kenosis* (Greek for "to let go" or "to empty oneself"), which describes the very nature of Christ, who emptied himself to become human, and again in the Garden of Gethsemane turned his will over to God'. Scholars recognized a contemplative dimension in the Gospels and New Testament letters, that reflected Jesus' own prayer life and his contemplative teachings.

New Testament Epistles — In the following excerpts from New Testament prayers, Coe and Strobel (2019:33) referenced Paul's encouragement that Christians allow the work and presence of the Holy Spirit in that he writes:

- 'I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened' (Ephesians 1:17-18a).
- 'I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being' (Ephesians 3:16).

Coe and Strobel (2019) argued that in contemplative prayer the Christian is obediently responding to the indwelling Spirit, which resonates with Paul's prayer for the believers. They further contended that these prayers speak to the necessity for the Christian to understand what it means to open to Christ, as Christ is in the believer, and that this practice is mirrored within biblical examples (Coe & Strobel 2019). These beliefs among CCP practitioners reflect the roots of this Christian practice reaching back through time, into the New Testament and even the Old Testament teachings. These teachings are further reflected in the lives of the Desert Fathers and Mothers, who contemplatively sought the silence and solitude of the desert to seek after God and 'their own true self, in Christ' (Merton 1960:5). Contemplation is recognized as an important aspect of Christian spirituality found among those who sought the solitude of the desert.

2.2.1 Contemplative Prayer and the Desert Fathers and Mothers

During the third century, within the Roman Empire many Christians were being persecuted. This was part of the catalyst for some Christians to flee to the Egyptian desert and devote themselves to living lives committed to their Biblical ideals. Many of them became known as the Desert Fathers and Mothers. In the fourth century, Christianity found itself propelled from a 'forbidden cult to imperial religion' (Bourgeault 2004:60). This encouraged some to seek the truer expression of their faith by following the footsteps of Jesus into a more solitary place (Frenette 2005). Consequently, from the third through the sixth century, in the desert lands of Arabia, Egypt, Palestine, and Syria, a contemplative way was growing (Paintner 2012). Through this, some found themselves led into the solitary practices of prayer life that they found in the desert, and towards the development of an 'intentional awareness of God's presence' (Paintner 2012: ix). Through their contemplative lifestyle of prayer, they further helped to inform this practice within Christianity (Ferguson 2010b). Frenette (2005:150) argued that how they lived

and the teachings they passed on became 'a living tradition of Christian contemplation'. These Desert Fathers and Mothers incorporated the Psalms, the Scriptures, and a contemplative dimension into their prayers (Merton 1960).

Through these ascetic faithful devotees, the teachings of CCP were further developed and connected within the monastic movement. Of these, Abba Antony (c.251-356) also known as 'St. Anthony the Great' (Merton 1960:21), was an important figure in the early monastic movement (Dunn 2003; Paintner 2012). He denied himself all that is of the world, fought with demons, and lived in solitude all for the sake of knowing God (Paintner 2012). Abba Antony helped to establish a pattern of the contemplative life, setting the way not only for monasticism to be built but for the roots of contemplation to be nourished and developed (Zaleski & Zaleski 2005). Evagrius Pontus (c.345-399) was also among the Desert Fathers who practised a contemplative form of prayer as he believed that prayer should continue towards contemplation: a prayer without words (Coe & Strobel 2019). He recognized, however, that this form of prayer was clouded with the distraction of one's own thoughts (Laird 2005), and as Coe and Strobel (2019) noted, Evagrius was keenly aware of this struggle in dealing with these random thoughts as it became a focus in his developing contemplative method. Laird (2005:144) quoted Evagrius' definition of prayer as 'letting go of concepts'.[14] As Laird (2005:146) insisted, Evagrius suggested meeting thoughts in prayer 'not with commentary but with simple awareness', and he concluded that this is Evagrius' 'way for the contemplative art to develop'. Amma Sarah, as a Desert Mother, also worked to release the thoughts that might distract her focus on God, in the purity of her heart (Paintner 2012). Laird (2006:50) noted that these 'early contemplatives of the Egyptian desert knew all about this obsessive mental activity' which could be so disruptive to their inner state of peaceful prayer. Similarly, although not considered one of the early Desert Fathers, Saint Augustine (c.354-430) insisted that after seasons of contemplative prayer and focusing one's prayerful attention away from these restless thoughts, then 'the fruit is the stillness, inner focus' by which one is lead to contemplation (Laird 2006:52).

During the fourth and fifth centuries, John Cassian (c.360-435), who was a monk in Bethlehem before going to Egypt, eventually moved to France where he founded two monasteries. In the monasteries he taught the wisdom of the desert, which also included teachings on CCP. He wrote *Institutes* and *Conferences*, which were written from

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[14] Laird (2006) quotes from Chapters on Prayer, chapter 70, using the translation of John Eudes Bamberger, *Evagrius Ponticus: The Praktikos and Chapters on Prayer*, Cistercian Studies Series 4 (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publication, 1981).

conversations with Desert Fathers and Mothers. His writings helped to further the growth of monasticism in the surrounding regions (Dunn 2003). Keating (2008:4-5) insisted that Cassian's *Conferences* were developed from his interviews with other desert monks and gave direction to silent, private prayer by insisting:

> We need to be especially careful to follow the Gospel precept which instructs us to go into our [inner] room and shut the door so that we may pray to our Father. And this is how we can do it. We pray with the door shut whenever we withdraw our hearts completely from the tumult and noise of our thoughts and our worries and when secretly and intimately we offer our prayers to the Lord. We pray with the door shut when, without opening our mouths, and in perfect silence, we offer our petitions to the one who pays no attention to words but looks hard at our hearts.[15]

Ferguson *et al.* (2010a) insisted that Cassian's practice and teachings have helped guide the development and practice of Centering Prayer. Benedict of Nursia (c.480-547), often known as St. Benedict, was influenced by the teachings of John Cassian and is considered the father of Western monasticism. He was the founder of a Benedictine monastery and his way of living and praying became known as 'The Rule', which helped to guide monastic living throughout Europe. He also promoted the use of the phrase lectio divina[16] as he focused on developing instructions for his monastic community and worked to build a rhythm of living that included intentional, contemplative attention on the reading of Scripture (Wilhoit & Howard 2012). Lectio divina continued to 'evolve in the monastic milieu' and became a method of prayerful listening to the Scripture, which could lead to contemplation (Keating 2009:94).

During the following century, St. Gregory the Great (c.540-604) defined *contemplatio* as 'resting in God', because it was here that all faculties were quietly aware of the presence of God (Bourgeault 2004:67). For St. Gregory, contemplation was not only a result of reflecting on the Scripture, but it was also 'a precious gift of God' (Keating 2009:123). Sellner (2004:216) insisted that St. Gregory believed contemplation was both an '*experience* of God' that came as a gift not coordinated through human control, but it was also a prayer discipline that can be experienced by all Christians. As a monk, he experienced contemplation, 'with mystical experiences of union with God' (Sellner 2004:214-215). St. Gregory struggled balancing his desire for the contemplative life with his acquired papal position[17] of action. Although preferring the contemplative

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[15] 'John Cassian, *Conferences* (XI), trans Owen Chadwick, Classics of American Spirituality Series (New York: Paulist, 1985)' (Keating, 2008: 311).

[16] The practice of lectio divina is discussed more fully in section 2.4 Contemplative Prayer in the Middle Ages, within the paragraph that describes Guigo the Carthusian's contribution to the development of lectio divina as a specific practice.

[17] '**St. Gregory the Great**, also called **Saint Gregory I**, (born *c.* 540, Rome [Italy]—died March 12, 604, Rome; Western feast day, September 3 [formerly March 12, still observed in the East]), pope from 590 to 604, reformer and excellent administrator, "founder" of the medieval papacy, which exercised both secular

life of a monk, he believed these two aspects of contemplation and action should be integrated, and in this way, they can complement one another (Sellner 2004). St. Gregory believed that Christians should continue to develop their inner life, including the complementary aspects of contemplation and action (Sellner 2004).

Desert Fathers and Mothers continued the growth of CCP, and although they were often isolated without any written Scripture and possibly even illiterate, their passion was to seek God. As online abbess and author, Christine Paintner (2016: xiv) recognized, '[t]he desert is ultimately a metaphor for inner attentiveness, vulnerability, and transformation'. How these Desert Fathers and Mothers actually prayed is not totally clear; however, their total abandon of the world, enveloped in the silence and solitude of the desert wasteland has had a profound impact on many who would, in varying degrees, follow their example. Bourgeault (2004:63) further argued that the intentional, contemplative practices of the Desert Fathers and Mothers are not directly related to forms of contemplation that are practiced today 'at least in the form that it is now understood and taught in both Centering Prayer and Christian Meditation'. Yet, the indirect influence appears to be foundational. As Bourgeault (2004:65) further insisted: 'The stepping from cataphatic into apophatic perception simply by stilling the faculties is such an innate soul wisdom that it's hard to believe it would remain unknown in a spiritual crucible as intense as that first great desert proving ground'. Paintner (2016) further declared that the Christian spirituality that continued to develop found its direction in the wisdom of the desert tradition. The principles of CCP are rooted in spiritual practices of desert life, creating an influence that continued to be recognized and developed in the teachings and practices throughout the Middle Ages.

2.2.2 Contemplative Prayer in the Middle Ages

Contemplation and prayer continued to be emphasized throughout the Middle Ages, as these practices continued to grow without any specific method. Priest and scholar, Greg Peters (2019:60) argued that 'for medieval theologians, contemplation was biblical' and therefore it was practised and gained a stronger presence within monasticism. In reference to the Portuguese cloisters of the Middle Ages, Rodriguez (2015:15) noted that the

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and spiritual power. His epithet "the Great" reflects his status as a writer as well as a ruler. As the fourth and final of the traditional Latin Fathers of the Church, Gregory was the first exponent of a truly medieval, sacramental spirituality.' (author's bold) (https://www.britannica.com/biography/St-Gregory-the-Great)

'terminology of cloister of silence … in Portugal appears quite often'. She continues writing:

> the quietness of the cloister had also a symbolic significance and evoked the eternal silence of God. Hence, the cloister of silence was, both idyllically and theoretically, a place of solitude within a quiet environment, required for meditation and contemplation, i.e. the cornerstones of monastic observance. In this sense, and although sounds were heard in the cloister, the cloister of silence was perceived as the necessary scenery to engage in meditation and contemplation, essential steps in the path towards salvation. (16-17)

Carmelite author, Ruth Obbard (2007) contended that Christian women monastics and mystics felt the calling to union with the divine, waiting on God and surrendering within the grace of God. These spiritual teachers and exemplars, both men and women, have remained a part of the foundation of contemporary CCP practices.

One such leader, St. Bernard of Clairvaux (c.1090-1153) 'was judged by many to be an unrivalled master of the spiritual life' (Dreyer 2007:3). He was considered a pillar of contemplation among monasticism (Cunningham 2001:24). He became known for encouraging a turning of the attention inward (McDonnell 1997). Moskal (2016:34) insisted that he 'embodied the spirit of the Middle Ages'. McDonnell (1997) argued that St Bernard recognized the scriptural reference of Corinthians 3:18[18] as giving a contemplative perspective within the Spirits' work of the Christians' transformation towards the image of Christ. For him, there was a contemplative experience simply beyond the existential meaning.

During the twelfth century, Guigo the Carthusian (c.1114-1193) formalized and documented the method of lectio divina that had been informally practiced for centuries (Polan 2003). He emphasized the components as: a repetitive, slow reading of the scriptural text (*lectio*); meditating on the text (*meditatio*); praying from the text (*oratio*); and contemplating the text (*contemplatio*) (Polan 2003; Wilhoit & Howard 2012). In this, as Polan (2003) insisted, the practice of lectio divina begins with the individual listening to God and only responding after listening. Lectio divina is recognized as 'the most traditional way of cultivating contemplative prayer' (Keating 2009:123). While contemplation can appear to be the end of lectio divina, Polan (2003:205) recognized its importance as 'a new beginning'; the experience of which leads one to recognize that words are inadequate to express the 'sense of divine presence that comes to us'. At this point one comes to realize a deeper communication with God (Polan 2003). In lectio divina, '[t]he word of God plays strongly into the experience of contemplation' (Polan

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[18] 'And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit' (2 Corinthians 3:18).

2003:205). Philosopher James Danaher (2011: xiii) also wrote of the three levels of prayer that Guigo the Carthusian described. First there was 'words and mostly our petitioning God' and next there was 'meditation on a Scripture', as in lectio divina, and finally CCP which involved neither words or ideas but an awareness 'of God's presence and resting in that presence'.

An influential Franciscan friar, Bonaventure of Bagnoregio (c.1217-74) is noted for his ability to balance the awareness of mystical communion and contemplation (Dreyer 2007). 'Bonaventure's deeply incarnational spirituality is "user friendly" to a world that struggles to respect our bodies and the material world, and to a church that needs to be reminded of the Spirit's presence in every atom and molecule' (Dreyer 2007:176). Other spiritually influential leaders helped to promote a contemplative way of prayer. Two such leaders were Meister Eckhart (c.1260-1327) and Catherine of Genoa (c.1447-1510) whose ideas were reflected in '"My deepest me is God"', a phrase which Danaher (2011:26) suggested represents the mystic sense 'that when I am able to be present in prayer, I become aware of another consciousness deeper than my own, yet so present and attentive to me that it feels as if it is a part of me or I am a part of it'.

Contemplation and contemplative prayer continued to be illuminated in lives such as that of Julian of Norwich (c.1342-1420), whom Merton considered to be 'the greatest theologian England has produced' (Obbard 2007:123). She lived a solitary anchoress life, which 'was not the life of the desert fathers but of tempered asceticism' (Obbard 2007:121). She was 'stable in her radical commitment to solitude—a solitude in which she held, with love, all her fellow-Christians' (Obbard 2007:123). Some of her writings 'contained the fruit of many years of meditation' (Obbard 2007:123). While some, like Julian of Norwich, lived solitary lives of contemplation, others such as Catherine of Sienna (c.1347-1380) exemplified a fusion of contemplation and action. These had been recognized as part of one's dedication to God, yet in Catherine's case, she was capable of this fusion 'within the sphere of public activity' (McGinn 1996:201).

A written treatise, further depicting contemplative prayer, was penned in the latter half of the 14th century by an anonymous author. *The Cloud of Unknowing,* as it is known, was obscured until growing interest in spirituality brought increasing awareness to this way of CCP. Little is known of the author except 'that he was a cloistered monk devoted to the contemplative life' (Anon. 2017:8). Presenting a classic treatise of the apophatic method of prayer, the author encouraged readers to release all thoughts, even those related to God. Although such thinking about God is still of value, it is not the work of apophatic

prayer. The author's primary concern is 'with the art of contemplative prayer; "blind intent stretching to God" which, if it be wholly set on Him, cannot fail to reach its goal' (Anon. 2017:9). The important contribution of this work to CCP is in its presentation of the mystical ascent to God, who cannot be fully understood and who is shrouded in a cloud of mystery.

Monasticism and a contemplative way of prayer continued to grow as many Christian orders including the Jesuits, Discalced Carmelites, Franciscans, Benedictines, and Trappists placed a special importance on the practice of CCP. Throughout the Middle Ages, contemplation was a part of the ascetics' discipline, and it remained an important part of one's realization of God's presence (Keating 2009). It is clear that the monastics dedicated a portion of their day to spiritual readings, prayer, and meditation (Rodriguez, 2015). However, as the impact of the Reformation grew, monasticism struggled, and this diminished the practice of CCP within the spiritual disciplines (Luhrmann 2012). Despite the pressures of the Reformation, Scholasticism, the Inquisition, and other Protestant shifts, CCP and related practices continued.

2.2.3 Post-Reformation Contemplative Prayer

Thirteenth century Western Europe witnessed a rise of Scholasticism and there was a progressive shift towards the intellect and away from experiential spirituality. During the Reformation, many European countries saw a repression of monasteries, impacted by the Inquisition's heightened prosecution of Christians who practised forms of silent prayer that were questioned by the church (Ferguson 2010b). The Protestant Reformation's emphasis on the reading of Scriptures, preaching the Word, and church doctrine contributed to the marginalization of contemplative practices and apophatic prayer in the monastic tradition. Despite this resistance, contemplative spirituality continued to hold, and some of these faithful ascetics left an enduring influence on the contemplative tradition.

During this time, St John of the Cross (c.1542-1591) wrote *The Dark Night,* to help depict the soul's journey towards union with God. Although this title did not include 'the soul', still he has become 'the champion of the *Dark Night of the Soul'* (Cunningham 2001:24). St. John of the Cross 'was a […] contemplative' (Cunningham 2001:24), and he encouraged a contemplative approach in 'turning to God in love' and embracing God in one's inner most being (Keating 2008:1). Brother Lawrence (c.1611-1691) portrayed the soul's journey towards union with God in his book: *The Practice of the Presence of*

God. He admitted that the path to this perfect union was not easy, as he spent years disciplining his heart and mind to yield to God's presence. In summary of the ensuing eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Abbot Cuthbert Butler (2011:x), in his book *Western Mysticism,* sums up the generally accepted view that had developed:

> During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the idea had come to be accepted as well established, that, apart from special and unusual calls, the normal mental prayer for all was systematic discoursive meditation according to fixed method: this was taken to be the lifelong exercise of mental prayer for those embarked on a spiritual life—priests, religious, nuns, devout layfolk. Contemplation was looked on as something extraordinary, almost identified with visions, revelations, raptures, even stigmatization and levitation, and other such psycho-physical phenomena. Thus, contemplation and mystical theology had come to be regarded as wonderful, even miraculous; to be admired from a safe distance, and left alone as dangerous and full of pitfalls. Such was the common view, such the common practice, almost taken for granted at the end of the nineteenth century.

Post-Reformation teaching was opposed to earlier monastic traditions, and those who would even seek a contemplative form of prayer were considered in the realm of the miraculous, dangerous, and even arrogant (Keating 1996). This practice and its cautious acceptance remained through the end of the nineteenth century. Peters (2019:59) argued that contemplation continued to be practised because it was not 'a human construct but a theological, spiritual reality'. During the twentieth century, there began to be renewed interest in contemplative prayer. Keating (1996:26) attributed this in part to the historical and theological studies of the ancient 'masters of spiritual life'. Building upon this history, interest in contemplative spirituality has been increasing over the past several decades, in conjunction with an increasing number of books related to this topic, and the development of international networks to support CCP, such as CO and WCCM.

2.3 Modern Contemplative Prayer Practices in 20th and 21st Centuries

During the latter half of the twentieth century, authors such as Merton, Keating, and Main, writing about CCP and the contemplative lifestyle, helped to foster a renewed interest in this spiritual practice. Bourgeault (2004:56) argued that these authors recognized the contemplative aspect of prayer, which had been an important part of Christian spirituality but had become merely a reflection from the past. In 1964, Merton published a book titled *The Wisdom of the Desert,* which helped to reveal foundational insights of this ancient experience and practice (Bourgeault 2004). In his essay, 'Three Contemplative Waves', Frenette (2008:11) argued that God is again, just as He did with the Desert Fathers and Mothers, bringing about 'a living witness to the contemplative dimension of the Gospel'. He saw this divine work progressing in the nature of three waves, as 'each new wave is

formed of the same water as previous waves, yet in a new way' (Frenette 2008:13). This momentum is further developing a growing international network of CCP practitioners.

2.3.1 First Wave of Contemplative Prayer: Thomas Merton (1915-1968)

With the growing popularity especially of Merton's writings on CCP and its complementary contemplative lifestyle, this prayer practice grew and evolved as an impetus for the '"first wave" of a renewal in contemplative Christianity' (Frenette 2008:14). The life of Merton became a surrender to seeking God through the apophatic method of prayer. According to leading cultural anthropologist Tanya Luhrmann (2012), while Christians followed Merton's example, some began to seek out the Eastern practices of spirituality, such as Zen, which offered more specific methods to follow. Merton's life became one of seeking God's presence through the surrender of apophatic prayer. His writings included topics related both to contemplative Christianity as well as to the spiritual exemplars of the past. The essence of Merton's work served to bring contemplation actively into the realm of Christian spirituality again. This further accentuated the need to promote contemplative practices outside of the monasteries. Frenette (2008) argued that the next wave of CCP expansion helped to bring these aspects into clearer focus and served to guide non-monastic Christians into contemplative prayer and its practise. Solitude, silence, simplicity, and a discipline for prayer and action can be supported within the environment of the monastery; however, they are increasingly difficult to live in the world outside that community. The second wave has enabled necessary support and a framework for practising CCP within a broader Christian community.

2.3.2. Second Wave of Contemplative Prayer: Thomas Keating (1923-2018)
and John Main (1926-1982)

In the 1970s, a 'second wave' followed with the development of Centering Prayer as Keating, William Meninger, and Basil Pennington worked to simplify the apophatic method of prayer found in the medieval mystical classic, *The Cloud of Unknowing* (Frenette 2008:22). They condensed the book's seventy-five chapters into three basic steps or rules, proposing an abridged approach to CCP. This method was called *Centering Prayer*, 'to reflect the classical contemplative experience of interior silence described in the sixteenth century by St. John of the Cross' (Ferguson 2010b:62) and in keeping with Merton's use of the word 'center' [sic], as the place of the contemplative encounter with

God. In this way, the Centering Prayer method helped to further promote the development of contemplative prayer, within the Christian tradition.[19] Bourgeault (2004:56) reflected on the initial catalyst of Centering Prayer that took place a few miles away from the Trappist monastery in Spencer, Massachusetts where Keating served as abbot for 20 years:

> A few miles down the road from the abbey, a former Catholic retreat house had closed down and been sold to a Buddhist group. When the facility reopened as the Insight Meditation Center [sic] (it's still very much alive today, teaching the path of Vipassana, or Insight Meditation), suddenly the monks at St. Josephs began to notice an increase of people, stopping by the monastery guest house – asking for direction about how to get to the Insight Meditation Center [sic]! Dismayed but intrigued, Keating began to engage some of these young pilgrims in dialogue. What was it they were seeking at the Insight Meditation Center [sic]? To which the response always came, in the vernacular of the Sixties, "A path, man! We're seeking a path." Discovering that the vast majority of these seekers had been raised as Christians, he asked the sixty-four-dollar question – "So why don't you search for a path within your own tradition?" To which he received the genuinely astonished answer, "You mean Christianity has a path?".

As CCP practices developed, practitioners utilised techniques from Eastern traditions such as Zen meditation, regarding breathing techniques and body postures, without adopting their particular belief patterns and systems. According to Keating (2008:8): 'A certain number of Christian practices have been on the shelf for centuries. By studying the spiritual disciplines of the other world religions, we may be reminded of some that are present in our tradition but which we have not been using'.

With this second wave, the practice of CCP continued to grow, and its momentum was further supported by the organization of CO. Formed shortly after the first intensive Centering Prayer retreat in 1983, this entity has become a communal support system for practitioners, as it has served to support the global growth of CCP. This organization aids in the dispersion of written, audio, and video material related to the practice of Centering Prayer, fostering local and global networks of Christian practitioners and a renewal of the contemplative dimension of Christianity.

Another important influence in the second wave was John Main (1926-1982), who was the founder of the WCCM. Keating recognized Main as an important spiritual leader within CCP and its renewal of the contemplative aspect of the Gospel.[20] As noted on the WCCM website, Main became a Benedictine monk in 1958. In his studies of John Cassian and the Desert Fathers, he found the way of CCP that he began to practise. In 1975, at Ealing Abbey in London, he founded the first Christian Meditation Centre. He believed that people could be led to a deeper spiritual experience through prayer of the

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[19] https://www.contemplativeoutreach.org/sites/default/files/private/method_cp_eng-2016-06_0.pdf
[20] https://www.wccm.org/content/john-main-0

heart. He taught the discipline of practicing this form of prayer in its simplicity. He then became the Archbishop of Montreal and established a Benedictine Priory there that was committed to the teaching and practice of Christian meditation. His influence and teaching led to the formation of the WCCM in 1991.[21] For Main (2006), prayer was not just talking to God or thinking about Him, but it was also about being with the divine. His emphasis was not what was said or done in prayer but being in union and communion with God. He taught that through silence, stillness, and simplicity, relationship with God can be deepened. Keating (2009:130) noted:

> The Benedictine Dom John Main revived a method of cultivating contemplative prayer that he attributed to John Cassian. The method of Centering Prayer based primarily on the fourteenth-century *The Cloud of Unknowing* and the teaching of St. John of the Cross, is a further attempt to present the teaching of earlier times in an updated format and to put certain order and regularity into it.

Since Main's death in 1982, Laurence Freeman has become the spiritual guide of this CCP organization.

2.3.3 Third Wave of Contemplative Prayer: Ammas and Abbas Outside the Monasteries

Frenette (2008:40) contended that there are 'hints of a third wave of this renewal', developing in and continuing to provide further momentum for growth of this practice. They see this third wave as being driven by what they refer to as an Amma or Abba, who is recognized as 'an animator of the contemplative life' (Frenette 2008:41-42). These Ammas or Abbas are living their lives outside the monastery, integrated within a contemplative lifestyle. Frenette (2008) insisted that they will serve as the teachers and spiritual Mothers and Fathers for those wishing to develop a contemplative spirituality. The full development of this potential third wave is yet to be seen. Those involved in the development of CCP practices contend that it is 'incarnational: divine and human activity, intertwined inseparably' (Keating 2008:54), the work of the divinity within humanity.

2.4 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the academic discipline of Christian Spirituality, which has functioned as a hermeneutical scaffolding supporting this study. This chapter has also given a brief survey of the history and development of CCP practice, and its related

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[21] https://wccm.org/content/john-main-osb-2/

themes of solitude and silence that have been a part of Christian church history. CCP foundations are recognized throughout the teachings and practices found within Scripture and the history of the Christian church. This silent prayer practice has continued to develop towards the present-day practices of CCP. Although some of the current CCP approaches and methods may differ slightly, there is a commonality that connects these practices in their focus on the presence of God.

CHAPTER 3: LITERATURE REVIEW

Research on CCP is rather scarce with few empirical studies (Johnson *et al.* 2009; Ferguson *et al.* 2010a; Gutierrez *et al.* 2015; Fox *et al.* 2016; Rubinart *et al.* 2017). However, within these studies, researchers have utilized both qualitative and quantitative approaches, in order to investigate not only CCP as a psychotherapy intervention (Finney & Malony 1985b), but also its lived experience (Fox *et al.* 2015) and its influence on health and well-being (Johnson *et al.* 2009; Ferguson *et al.* 2010a; Fox *et al.* 2016; Rubinart *et al.* 2017). Recent research is presented here with a thematic approach relating to these investigations of CCP and its influence in the lives of its practitioners.

As this current iterative research study of CCP has progressed, participants have ascribed meaning to embodiment as an emergent, integral element of the lived experience of this CCP practice; however, investigations into the role of embodiment within this prayer practice are lacking within the CCP scholarship. A recursive review of the relevant literature has further emphasized the need for continued research as it has emphasized the gaps within this scholarship that limit our understanding of CCP practices. This chapter will analyse the extant literature to illuminate our current corpus of CCP scholarship and demonstrate the existing research gaps, thereby substantiating the need for further investigation. The review will serve to further clarify key aspects of the CCP research and conclude with a review of well-being and embodiment. The final outline of the lacuna within CCP research will help to focus this study, while addressing the gap in understanding of long-term practitioners' lived experience of this spiritual discipline.

3.1 Christian Contemplative Prayer Scholarship

3.1.1 Early Christian Contemplative Prayer Research

Finney and Malony (1985a) conducted a literature review of empirical studies of Christian prayer. They divided their review into four categories: developmental studies of perceptions of prayer, individuals' motivation for praying, verbal prayer effects, and finally the effects of contemplative prayer. At that time, they insisted that '[o]nly a few studies of prayer exist in spite of the fact that prayer is of central religious importance' and they focused primarily on the Christian tradition of prayer as an 'intimate communication with a benevolent deity' (Finney & Malony 1985a:104). They identified

Heiler's (1932/1958) phenomenological investigation of prayer as probably the most comprehensive study. Heiler generalized two types of prayer: prophetic and mystical, with mystical prayer seeking union with God and 'characterized by silent attentiveness to God rather than by words' (Finney & Malony 1985a:105). Heiler further argued that mystical prayer is 'incompatible with the tenets of Christianity'; an argument that as Finney and Malony (1985a:105) noted has been further challenged by scholars. Finney and Malony (1985a:105) argued that this challenge is supported by some theologians who recognized that the different phenomena of both verbal and mystical prayer are still the 'work of the Holy Spirit on the basis of such texts as Romans 8:15-16'.[22] In their review, they further concluded that verbal prayer is recognized within such categories as adoration, petitioning, thanksgiving, and intercession; however, mystical prayer is associated with CCP 'which can be defined as giving one's full attention to God in a passive, nondefensive, nondemanding, open, nonverbal way'. They further proposed that the purpose of CCP is to 'wait on God to deepen one's confidence in his power and love so that one can grow in Christlikeness' (Finney & Malony 1985a:105).

Their review discussed studies within the four categories of prayer. In the fourth category of contemplative prayer, they concluded their study with the only two investigations they located on CCP: Mallory's (1975) and Sacks' (1979). In the forward to her study Mallory (1975: vii) wrote:

> It is all too common today that the westerner knows more about oriental meditation than about the contemplative traditions of his own, western culture. Furthermore, what little the westerner might know is often nothing more than the accumulated pre-conceptions or stereotypes about western mysticism, with little or no basis in empirically tested fact.

Based on her recognition of misunderstandings within CCP, she aimed to illuminate and develop greater comprehension of the tradition of Spanish Mysticism. Her focus included a study of St. John of the Cross and an empirical investigation within members of the Discalced Carmelite Order.[23] The study was multi-disciplinary and brought various aspects of CCP together in one investigation, those being: theological-historical, cultural-psychological, and psycho-physiological. Finney and Malony's (1985a:112) critical analysis of her study pointed to inaccurate statistical procedures and results, and a concern that 'her conclusions do not follow from her data in some cases'. The second CCP study they identified was Sacks' (1979) study on the effects of CCP. Sacks (1979) investigated Ignatius Loyola's spiritual exercises and its effect on cognitive integration.

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[22] Romans 8: 15-16 'The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again: rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, "*Abba, Father.*" The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children'.
[23] Mallory (1975) noted this Order as being founded by St John of the Cross and Teresa of Avila.

Study participants engaged in a 30-day retreat; however, Sacks (1979) concluded that it was impossible to determine which facet of the retreat had actually influenced the results.

In conclusion of their review of empirical prayer studies since 1872, Finney and Malony (1985a:112) concluded that the studies had been 'meager (sic), to say the least, both in number and substantial findings'. However, they also noted that in relation to both verbal prayer and CCP's potential to 'enhance psychological health' a start in investigations had been made, and they also insisted that '[t]here is opportunity for much further empirical investigation of prayer' (Malony 1985a:113). They emphasized that:

> It should be remembered that Galton (1872) evoked a great deal of resistance from the religious community in studying prayer. This may still be the fate of the contemporary researcher. To some degree prayer is a sacrosanct subject. Some religious persons are reluctant to subject it to empirical investigation. Nevertheless, the subject is of such import that prayer research should proceed'.

Finney and Malony (1985a) brought prayer research together in their review of the literature and also emphasized the need for further investigations in both prayer and CCP.

Following their initial exploration of empirical prayer studies, they then presented a study which developed a theoretical model of CCP and its use in psychotherapy (Finney & Malony 1985b). They based their model on literature related to prayer, mysticism, and meditation, contending that CCP is connected to all three. Their model emphasized that CCP should only be used in psychotherapy when 'selfless love of God alone is a treatment goal of both therapist and client' (Finney & Malony 1985b:179). They noted that while the essence of CCP is a technique of meditation relating to one's spiritual development, it is also a Christian spiritual discipline relating to God and must be practiced in a way consistent with that spiritual meaning. They recognized within their study, that while CCP might have value in psychotherapy, one cannot fully account for the working of the Holy Spirit in an individual. Their model was not an attempt to explain God's transcendent ways within the spiritual discipline of CCP; however, their model suggested the possible benefit of contemplative prayer in psychotherapy.

Following their literature review (1985a) and the presentation of a theoretical model relating CCP's use in psychotherapy (1985b), Finney and Malony (1985c) then conducted an empirical study further investigating the benefit of CCP as an adjunct to psychotherapy. In this time series quasi-experimental design, each of the nine volunteer psychotherapy outpatient participants[24] served as their own control. Each individual indicated that they were Christian, and that religion was important in their lives. After six weeks of psychotherapy sessions, the participants were trained in CCP by listening to

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[24] None of the participants were psychotic or had diagnoses of either schizophrenia or borderline personality disorder.

three hours of pre-recorded John Main based instruction on contemplative prayer. Following this training, the researcher met and prayed with the participants and reviewed the content of the tapes with them. Finally, the participants were encouraged to follow the written take-home instructions, which included 20 minutes of CCP daily to complement their weekly psychotherapy sessions. Clients were asked to keep a log of their daily CCP, as well as comments on God's presence and their experiences. Various dependent measures assessing psychotherapeutic improvement were done throughout the study.[25] Participants engaged in weekly psychotherapy and were encouraged to continue in their daily CCP.

This study was one of the initial empirical studies of CCP, and therefore it illuminated some aspects of CCP. As the authors' concluded, the data were 'suggestive' of CCP's positive effect in psychotherapy and its 'enhancement of spirituality' (Finney & Malony 1985c:287). However, in summarizing their findings, the authors noted only 'weak circumstantial evidence' of CCP's usefulness as an adjunct to psychotherapy, and its possible enhancement of Christian spirituality (Finney & Malony 1985c:289). The authors also recognized that CCP's impact was not necessarily distinguishable from other co-varying influences, and they further emphasized the difficulty of quantitative intervention studies to delineate the specific impact of this prayer practice on practitioners. Their conclusions recognized that although not impossible, prayer presents difficulties in quantitative studies especially due to its personal nature and its interpersonal dynamics with God.

The findings of this pioneer study were limited, in part due to the small, select sample size of psychotherapy patients (N=9), and a minimal three hours of training participants new to CCP. Despite their clear emphasis on 'relationship with God' in their definition of CCP, and the importance of 'selfless love of God alone as part of the treatment plan' the authors chose not to attempt to incorporate this emphasis more directly into their research design (Finney & Malony 1985c:179). However, the participants do not appear to reflect God's selfless love alone in their comments, as presented in the following participant quotes from their study:

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[25] Three dependent measures were used to assess psychotherapeutic improvement: (1) Patients rating of distress; (2) trait Spielberger anxiety scale (state- trait anxiety indicator STAI), and (3) Barron's ego strength scale adaptation, which measures one's sense of well-being. Three spirituality measures were also used: (1) Batson's inventory of religiosity; (2) Hood's Mysticism Scale; and (3) the Pauline Comparison Scale. The trait complaints target areas the client hopes that therapy will help and are recommended by the NIMH taskforce to measure psychotherapy outcomes. These dependent measures were taken at the outset of psychotherapy and at the 6, 12 and 18-week intervals.

'The comments which suggested that CP[26] enhances spirituality are these: "As a result of CP, I find I can hurt now and still believe God is on my side, that God has not let me down, has not abandoned me" (Subject 1). "CP is a way to get in touch with grace. It gives me a sense of receiving from God his acceptance rather than earning it" (Subject 2). "My search for who I am and my identity found its roots in communion with the Lord during CP. The week I did no CP I found it much easier to stray from the Lord" (Subject 5). "CP put a different perspective on approaching God. I had been studying different theologies and this was just letting God be God and me be me" (Subject 7)' (288).

There appeared to be no mention of 'selfless love of God alone' as it related to participants or therapists in this current empirical study. Why not? Neither the study nor the participants' comments reflected this focus on selfless love either. Thirdly, there is mention of the participants' 'target complaints' (285), yet there is no further definition of those. There was a decrease in target complaints; it would have been helpful to know what those were and how they were related to their successful psychotherapeutic intervention and their spiritual development. Were these decreases related to any increase in their well-being? Lastly, there is very little explanation of the participants' use of CCP. Researchers indicate that the CCP was based on John Main's (2006) teachings, therefore it would seem that participants were encouraged to use a mantra. Was a mantra actually utilized and how successfully? Although some of the early research was in the discipline of psychotherapy, which is not directly related to this current study, still it is important to recognize this initial work. Finney and Malony (1985c) were some of the pioneer researchers of CCP and psychotherapy interventions, and through their work greater understanding was gathered related to positive influences of CCP. Continued efforts have added to our limited understanding of CCP and its influence on the practitioner; however, endeavours in empirical research with carefully planned research designs continue to be warranted.

3.1.2 Christian Contemplative Prayer and Phenomenological Research

Fox *et al.* (2015) conducted one of the first phenomenological investigations in order to increase understanding of the phenomena of CCP. Employing semi-structured interviews involving three separate focus groups (N=20), the qualitative data were investigated using conventional content analysis (CCA).[27] The basic goal was to describe the lived experience of Centering Prayer practitioners. Five questions guided the aim of this research, focusing on: the spiritual experience of the practitioner, perceived health

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[26] The author uses CP here as an abbreviation for Centering prayer.
[27] Conventional content analysis (CCA) falls under the broad category of phenomenological qualitative research methods. It uses inductive logic, that is used when little is known about a phenomenon and it aims to avoid using any prescribed categorical, systematic interpretation on the data.

benefits, sustaining motivation, experiences of the 'dark night of the soul', and changes in practitioners' self-perceptions.

Within the CCA approach, the data were finalized in the development of five categories to describe the phenomenon of Centering Prayer. The first was *The Divine*, which the authors described as '"the manifestation of God in all complexity"' (Fox *et al.* 2015:809). This category reflected the participants' experience of God both during CCP time and outside of that time. It considered ways in which they expressed a greater awareness of God's presence, and a oneness or centredness with God. The next category was *The Mystical,* which was further described as '"the unity of spiritual experience"' (814). This category helped define the sense of connectedness that participants felt with 'themselves, God and their world' (814). This also reflected participants' sense of '*praying without ceasing* for other people' (816). The third category, *Spiritual Development* was defined simply as '"growth in faith over time"' (816). The fourth category represented '"how centering prayer is made manifest in tangible ways"' and those various codes were all gathered under the category: *Action-Contemplation* (818). These categories represented things related to greater concern, regard, and gratefulness towards self and others and general stress reduction (820). Finally, they captured similar codes under the category *Contemplative Life*, which described '"the greater context of centering prayer within the lives of those individuals who are devoted to prayer"' (819). Some participants shared that a positive aspect of Centering Prayer was bringing them into a greater awareness and participation of a contemplative community. They found these additional communities within other prayer groups or monasteries, which were outside their research study participation.

In conclusion, the authors reiterated that their phenomenological focus was to study the lived experience of Centering Prayer practitioners. They detailed their findings within fifty codes and five major categories. They found that the experience of Centering Prayer was 'multidimensional' with an increased awareness of God (821). They noted decreases in anxiety and stress, which they recognized as being consistent with previous research (Ferguson *et al.* 2010a; Kruse 2012) and meditation in general (Wachholtz & Austin 2013). In response to their third question, they found the perceived influences helped to sustain a continued practice. They also suggested that Centering Prayer helps the practitioner continue to move forward during 'periods of spiritual dryness' (822). Their final consideration expressed the participants self-perception of themselves as less judgemental, more compassionate towards self, and that Centering Prayer's influence

'inevitably involves an acceptance of self' (822). Participants recognized greater intimacy in a less guarded relationship with both God and others. They also sensed a greater balance of emotions in life. This study provided data on the Centering Prayer experience, especially as it is understood within the dynamics of the prayer focus group experience.

The study brought forth many aspects related to this phenomenon, yet a few limitations should be noted. The study is homogeneous, thereby eliminating any possible comparative analysis within the CCP experience. Interviews were only conducted within focus groups bringing insights into the communal experience, yet it does not necessarily allow for the rich depth of an individual's personal experience, beyond the group discussion. There is also no indication of the daily commitment to this practice, just that participants were 'dedicated' practitioners (807).

In 2004, Kuiper conducted a heuristic study within a specific CCP group,[28] exploring both the researcher's and the twelve participants' experience of Centering Prayer, and the importance and influence it had in their lives. This study included personal reflections of Kuiper's (2004) own two years of experience with the Centering Prayer group. These practitioners, with one to twenty years of experience, brought greater longitudinal qualitative data to view on this phenomenon. This study brings forth some aspects of the experience of Centering Prayer such as the participants recognizing being loved by God, developing a greater 'awareness of God's presence', 'peace', 'openness to others', 'self-acceptance', 'letting go' of control, 'joy', the 'courage to change', and experiencing 'Divine therapy', including 'the process of shedding the false self', 'with an always greater acknowledgement of the true self within' (Kuiper 2004:57-67). This study broadened understanding of long-term practitioners lived experience of this prayer practice.

Some limitations are noteworthy in this study. By the author's own admission, Centering Prayer was of passionate interest to her. This level of enthusiasm combined with researcher participation, especially in a heuristic study, could serve to somewhat cloud the data with the researcher's own interpretive and experiential bias. The author also admitted that she felt limited in her ability to adequately delve into the spiritual depths of practitioners' prayer experience, for example she admits: 'when I met Gary, I could not always grasp what it was he meant, but later, as I listened to the tape of the interview, I was better able to understand him' (Kuiper 2004:99). In her inability to

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[28] A heuristic study is one related to both the researcher's experience and the participant's experience of the phenomenon being investigated.

understand during the interview, she gives no indication of asking any further probing questions to discover in fact what he did mean. In this study, valuable data were gathered, although her own limitations may have somewhat impacted the rich descriptions of the experience of Centering Prayer in the lives of the participants.

3.1.3 Christian Contemplative Prayer and Well-Being Research

Johnson *et al.* (2009: Abstract) conducted a 'descriptive pilot study', which explored the preliminary usefulness of Centering Prayer to enhance spiritual well-being, mood, and quality of life in chemotherapy outpatients experiencing recurrent ovarian cancer (N=9). Once participants were selected for the study, a professional minister and qualified Centering Prayer instructor led three one-hour teaching sessions with the participants. Following this introduction, as the individuals came in for chemotherapy treatment the minister/instructor met with them. During this meeting, prayer sessions began with 20 minutes of preparation, 20 minutes of Centering Prayer, and a 20-minute Centering Prayer debriefing at the end. An even smaller sample (N=5) actually participated in Centering Prayer in between the three teaching sessions. Data were collected during the nine-week long treatment time, as well as a three-month and six-month follow-up data collection. Various descriptive statistics were implemented to represent the data. According to the findings, five participants found Centering Prayer of value, and the study concluded that Centering Prayer may have some intervention feasibility to positively influencing mood, spiritual well-being, and quality of life. As hypothesized, participants' stress level decreased as they related with God in healthier ways. Five participants used Centering Prayer between chemotherapy sessions and also found it beneficial.

This study was limited in its small convenience sample (N=9) and lack of control group. As the researchers note 'in the absence of a control group, the authors sought comparative insights from other studies' (426). The study sample had a high frequency of prior personal prayer practice (90 per cent), which may have motivated them to participate and also impacted the final results. The authors noted the difficulty in assessing how much the participants' social support added to the favourable outcomes in this study, for example, family, friends, or the attention of the research leaders. As noted, anger and depression decreased initially, but this was not seen at the six-month follow-up. They did observe improvements in spiritual well-being during the study and also at

the six-months. This pilot study brought greater insights, yet it emphasized the need for further explorations into Centering Prayer and its influence on practitioners.

Unlike previous studies, Ferguson *et al.* (2010a) incorporated a control group into their exploration of the impact of ten weekly, two-hour long Centering Prayer group sessions paired with individual Centering Prayer two-times daily, and an opening and closing retreat. There were 15 Catholic participants in both the study and the control group. 'The weekly session consisted of opening chant of a psalm, Scripture reading, Centering Prayer period, meditative walk, and a 30-minute segment of a videotape series depicting Keating's teaching the essentials of the prayer. Video viewing was followed by facilitated sharing in small and large groups. Sessions began and ended 'with a chant of a psalm' (317). A comparison/control group was formed after the closing retreat. This was in response to the unexpected 'valid statistical results from participants' responses to the study's quantitative measures (315). The control group comprised parishioners from the same parish, who had no previous CCP practice. Pre- and post- measures were taken over an 11-week interval. The design involved an introductory workshop, opening and closing retreats, and 10 weekly sessions. The focus of the study was to explore Centering Prayer's potential to deepen one's relationship with God, and also the effect on the individual's anxiety.[29] This mixed methods study utilized quantitative and qualitative questionnaires, journaling, and observations of participants at the opening and closing retreats.

The findings point to statistical results that support a change in the Centering Prayer group participants' 'Relationship-with-God Styles of Coping', which the investigators felt was to be expected by 'centering prayer's theological grounding' (318). This is reflected in the intimate and experiential interaction with the divine in Centering Prayer, which coincides with the Collaborative Style of relating with God. Many of the participants also reported decreased stress and anxiety. The study reported reductions in stress among participants, although as the authors note, Centering Prayer enhanced one's relationship with God, which can potentially reduce stress as a side effect. The internal dynamic of releasing thoughts and expectations in the prayer also became a habit outside of the prayer period. Many of the participants additionally reported less conflict and greater intimacy, especially in their relationships with family members and in their work

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[29] 'Hypothesis 1 The effects of a Centering prayer practice will increase the Collaborative Style, which is associated with reduced stress, and will decrease the Self-Directing and Deferring Styles. Hypothesis 2 The effects of a Centering prayer practice will decrease Trait-Anxiety. The hypothesis is that a regular practice of resting in the arms of a loving God may inspire an unburdening of emotional wounds from the past, which in turn may lower a person's susceptibility to stress'.

environments as a result of the effects of Centering Prayer. The study looked at 'Lazarus' scientific, emotion-based understanding of stress and Keating's psycho-spiritual understanding of the divine therapy to show how the effects of Centering Prayer practice contribute to healing the underlying emotional roots of stress' (325). This study furthered insights into this prayer practice's influence on their participants, yet other possible concomitant factors can also be recognized.

Ferguson *et al.*'s (2010:317) study did not seem to simply focus on CCP, as the 10-weekly sessions included an 'opening chant of a psalm, Scripture reading, Centering Prayer period, meditative walk, and 30-minute segment of a videotape series depicting Keating's teaching the essentials of the prayer'. Additionally, there was also an opening and closing retreat, which is not detailed, therefore the focus on CCP at the retreat is a bit uncertain. While the focus of this study is on Centering Prayer, it appears that there were other spiritual practices integrated into the participants' experience, which could potentially have had an impact. A limitation therefore seems to coincide with the breadth of spiritual practices in use, beyond just CCP.

Fox *et al.*'s (2016) mixed methods pilot study was a six-week long exploration of Centering Prayer's effect on anxiety, depression, religious crisis,[30] spiritual transcendence, faith development, mindfulness and stress. The study comprised two workshops, including 22 participants, with nine participants completing the full study. This investigation also involved a more diversified denominational sample of Catholic, Baptist, Methodist, and Episcopalian participants, of which six had previous experience in CCP. Of those who already practised some contemplative method, three used Centering Prayer, one used lectio divina, one used the Examen (a Jesuit prayer), and one reported using meditation books. Five participants were also students at the lead author's academic institution and four participants were members of the community. The workshops consisted of three sessions, based on CO training curriculum, over the course of three consecutive weeks. The workshops entailed about 12 hours of training and group prayer time, and presented teachings surrounding the method, history, philosophy, theology, and psychology of Centering Prayer. After the final workshop, participants were encouraged to join a local CO prayer group. Participants completed assessment measures as a baseline, one more before each of the second and third workshops, and a

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[30] A religious crisis is a measure used in factoring Religiosity. One aspect of Religiosity is Religious Involvement which measures the importance of religion in one's life. Religious Crisis measures the 'tension that exists between the person and their relationship to the God of their understanding and their faith community' (Fox *et al.* 2016:384).

final one three weeks after the training. Participants were subsequently encouraged to spend 20 minutes per day in Centering Prayer, followed by a post-assessment that was emailed to them.

The authors noted several changes, including increased faith development and mindfulness, and decreased stress and anxiety. They concluded that while depression showed no significant changes, anxiety and stress levels did decline during the six-week study. The results suggested that the participants experienced noteworthy tension in their relationship with God. Consistent with this description, participants in this study experienced a religious crisis during the six weeks of observation with the expected decline in aspects of their spirituality. The authors noted that these religious crises support the unloading of the unconscious (Keating 2007), which can bring into reflection difficult emotions, memories, images, or other psychological material that has been repressed. While some participants experienced these, they did not coincide with declines in mental health. On the contrary, participants experienced significant improvement in anxiety and stress, suggesting that Centering Prayer may actually prevent the pathological effect religious crisis can pose. Thus, despite experiencing declines in their spirituality, the participants made significant gains in faith development. This study provides initial evidence of Centering Prayer's significant influence on psychological and spiritual health. Part of the goal of this study was to provide empirical data related to the 'influence of religion and spirituality, combined with meditation' (382). As the author's suggested, this is a preliminary study and the small sample size and local geographical representation limited the author's analytic power. Additionally, there was no control group and the study did not allow for interdenominational comparative analysis. However, this study on psycho-spiritual outcomes brought greater insights related to CCP.

Rubinart *et al.*'s (2017) mixed methods collaborative inquiry pilot study explored the psychological impact of a 2-month intervention with the Jesus Prayer[31] among a purposeful snowball sample (N=9) from a community of Catholics in Spain.[32] The primary question that they explored was one that touched on the influence of the Jesus Prayer to generate a positive psychological effect in Christians who were not affiliated with the Orthodox tradition. The study further assessed the adherence and the impact of this prayer practice among Catholics who were introduced to the Jesus Prayer for the first

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[31] The Jesus Prayer is a specific type of CCP within the Orthodox church, usually prayed as: Lord Jesus, have mercy on me.

[32] The authors further differentiated the participants as '…seven people from these groups plus three people not linked to any religious group, consisting of a catechist, a long-term Zen meditator, and a not very active religious woman' (490).

time. The authors wanted to explore personality changes and also the potential benefits to psychopathology. Significant personality changes were not anticipated, but the authors were looking for indications that certain personality traits might be affected by a longer Jesus Prayer intervention. The participants gathered for three-hour sessions on four different Sundays, with various interval times between sessions. The sessions consisted of teaching time and some group practice in the Jesus Prayer. In between the sessions the participants were encouraged to practice the Jesus Prayer 'for the amount of time each one felt comfortable with' (493). Participants were also instructed to read *The Way of the Pilgrim*. The study collected quantitative data on psychological states[33] at three different times including baseline, post-intervention, and 5 months after the 2-month intervention. The study also collected quantitative data[34] before and after a 25-minute intervention with the Jesus Prayer, plus additional data on adherence 2 years after the inquiry. The 2-year follow up found that one third of the final sample had completely adhered to a daily practice of the Jesus Prayer. Overall results indicate that the Jesus Prayer may be a relevant practice among Catholics both for well-being and spiritual purposes. Rubinart *et al.* (2017:499) found that this short-term intervention showed participants strengthened their relationship with God, and experienced considerable 'improvements in anxiety and mood states'. One third of the sample was still practising the Jesus Prayer two years post intervention study, although the authors recognized that those participants were already more committed to their spiritual practices before the study.

This study was limited by a small study sample (N= 9). Prayer time was only monitored for the short-term intervention. In summarizing their findings, the researchers indicated that their study provided evidence that the Jesus Prayer was a positive influence on psychological and spiritual well-being, indicating that these 'tentative data' exemplified the need for further studies of larger populations with 'controlled long-term longitudinal trials' (501).

Stavros (1998) also explored the Jesus Prayer,[35] which although it is not a CCP participated in silence, still it has value within the limited number of studies examining CCP. This study investigated CCP's effect on an individual's spiritual well-being, relationship with others, and perceived relationship with God. The treatment group was directed to pray the Jesus Prayer continuously for ten minutes a day, while sitting in

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[33] The author's utilized a Revised Symptom Checklist 90 (SCL-90-R) and on personality traits with the Revised Temperament and Character Inventory (TCI-R).

[34] on transient mood states with the Profile of Mood States (POMS)

[35] The Jesus Prayer is a specific type of Contemplative Christian prayer within the Orthodox church, usually prayed as: Lord Jesus, have mercy on me.

stillness. The final self-report scores indicated a decrease in measures related to depression, anxiety, interpersonal sensitivity, and hostility, as compared to the controls, who did not engage with the Jesus Prayer.

There is no clear indication, from this study, what the control group did. They were all from Eastern Orthodox parish communities, and they were instructed to '"do whatever it is you normally do"', yet it is not clear if some type of regular prayer practice was already a part of what the controls normally did (80). This study included a large homogeneous sample size, with consideration of the study's practical theological focus examining a particular practice within a tradition. The researcher sought to bring the thick descriptions into interdisciplinary discussion and then returned the informed practice back to its original tradition. Therefore, this homogeneous focus can also be seen as a necessity related to this study rather than a limitation, thereby adding to the knowledge of this specific spiritual practice within the Orthodox tradition. However, the use of questionnaires and participants' self-report seem limited to fully investigate the impact of prayer in one's life. Furthermore, prayer's use was evaluated from a social action perspective, although this may not be an emphasis within that particular religious tradition. This was a short-term study of only thirty days, with no longer follow-up and no ability to evaluate long-term effects.

Kruse (2012) explored Centering Prayer and Progressive Muscle Relaxation's (PMR) differential effects in the control and management of anxiety symptom reduction. This study recruited 93 university students, who were subsequently given academic credit to participate in the study. They were divided into three groups: A Centering Prayer, a PMR, and a control group. Kruse (2012:39) noted that the Centering Prayer group 'showed greater decrease in physiological anxiety' supported both by the relaxing nature of Centering Prayer and the 'participants belief system'.

This study, while developing insights of CCP, also had some limitations. University students new to Centering Prayer and possibly motivated by academic credit seem like weak participants in representing Centering Prayer practitioners. Additionally, as the authors noted, the control group actually engaged in a relaxing activity, and their instructions were rather vague, which could have contributed to their lower anxiety test results. The data could also have been skewed as the authors noted that Centering Prayer can actually be a more relaxing activity than PMR, although the actual goal of PMR is relaxation.

Lysne's (2012) mixed methods study explored effects of a mantra form of CCP on such aspects as Protestant practitioner's felt sense of God's presence, relation to self and others, and emotional well-being. Participants had little or no prior experience with a CCP practice. The study included a one-hour teaching session as follows: The group read the words of a prayer out loud 15 times followed by reading the prayer silently to themselves 15 more times, while counting the repetitions on their fingers. The prayer used was: '*God, You are love, And You love me. You hear me and see me. You know my needs. I open my heart. Teach me your way, guide me today' (58).* After reciting the mantra for a total of 30 times they sat for another 3 minutes quietly listening to their breath. This one teaching session preceded six weeks of participant 'unguided practice' of CCP (46). Study results indicated that a mantra form of a CCP practiced over a six-week period for 20 minutes a day improved the practitioners' spiritual and psychological well-being.

This study was limited in its short duration, making it difficult to assess long-term impacts of a mantra CCP. Because of the study design some participants in the control group expressed their 'disappointment and anger at having to wait to learn the prayer' (57). This introduced conflicting emotions of members within the control group, potentially impacting the data collection from that particular group, although this issue was eliminated with other study groups by changes in study design. Additionally, this study's use of a spoken mantra/prayer sets it apart from other CCP studies that have focused on CCP in silence with unguided thoughts. This limits the comparative analysis between this study and other CCP practice investigations.

Asbill's (2015) comparative exploration of the anxiety reduction effectiveness of mindfulness and Centering Prayer included seventy-nine university students who completed the study and the post-treatment evaluation, and then subsequently received academic credit for their participation. The study included a short 20-minute informative treatment intervention, along with a six-week long requirement for participants to spend 20 minutes three times per week in either mindfulness meditation or Centering Prayer. Overall the author noted that they had found limited evidence indicating that mindfulness practice had greater reduction on anxiety than Centering Prayer.

A few limitations are worth noting. First, the participants' data could be skewed due to the motivation again for academic credit. Secondly, participants received audio recordings of treatment intervention instructions, with a brief 20-minute introduction to Centering Prayer or mindfulness. There appears to be little follow through to ensure

participant understanding of the intervention or actual correct participation in either of the techniques. Although the author noted limitations, they still conclude that 'the results do suggest that Centering Prayer is an effective practice for reducing anxiety for individuals with varying levels of anxiety' (87).

Table 3.1 Literature Review on Christian Contemplative Prayer

Author/Year	Study design	Setting/Participants	Data	Outcomes
Finney & Malony 1985 ~Journal article	~essay ~presented a theoretical model of contemplative prayer's use in psychotherapy	~model based on literature review of prayer, mysticism, and meditation	~therapeutic benefits of desensitization and anxiety reduction are possible	~due to its nature as prayer, CP in psychotherapy should be used only when spiritual development is a Tx. goal
Finney & Malony 1985b ~Journal article	~time series quasi-exp. design, with each subject serving as their own control -nine volunteer outpatient psychotherapy patients -exploratory goal focused on data related to CCP effects in psychotherapy and enhanced spirituality	~after 6 wks. of psychotherapy, CP training was begun. ~after 2 six-week intervals of CP participation, data were collected ~P received 3 hours of John Main CP instruction contained on cassette tapes ~P were instructed to maintain 20 min/day of CP practise ~9 current psycho-therapy patients ~age: 21-58	~patients rated their own distress; evaluations using various statistical measures	~some decreased distress in target complaints ~enhancement of spirituality was suggested
~Stavros 1998 ~Doctoral dissertation (Doctor of Philosophy)	~mixed methods ~questionnaire/ various scale measurements/ ~Jesus Prayer* 10 min./day for 30 days	~88 subjects randomly placed in treatment and control group	~various statistical measures were analysed	~experimental gr. compared to control gr. on post-test meas.: perceived relation. with God was higher and depression, anxiety, hostility, and interpersonal sensitivity were lower
~Kuiper 2004 ~Doctoral dissertation (Doctor of Philosophy with a concentration in Clinical Psychology)	~heuristic study ~the author described the CCP experience of others in conjunction with her own CCP experience ~P already in CP groups	~CP practitioners, with a CP practice of 1-20 yrs. - 7 female and 5 male co-researchers ~age: 48-72 yrs.	~many themes were found centring around God's love, peace, presence, acceptance, positive health changes & joy	~CCP & greater awareness of God's loving presence, led to peace, personal growth, assistance in making life changes

Author/Year	Study design	Setting/Participants	Data	Outcomes
Johnson *et al.* 2009 ~Journal article	~mixed methods ~descriptive pilot study ~instructor led introduction to CP	~Mayo clinic outpatient chemotherapy treatment suite in a large cancer centre in the USA ~convenience sample of woman in chemotherapy ~questionnaires, interviews, medical chart review ~statistical instruments used ~3 one-hour sessions over 9 weeks, with 3- and 6-month follow-ups ~only 10 of the 20 woman approached agreed to the study ~age: 51-74	~descriptive statistics ~only 5P used CP between chemotherapy sessions and found it beneficial	~most participants identified CP as beneficial in emotional well-being, anxiety, depression and faith scores, however some gains not maintained at 3 &6-month follow-up ~7P reported ease of CP increased throughout the study
Ferguson, *et al.* 2010a ~Journal article	~mixed methods ~self-evaluation questionnaire/ inventories -CP	~10 weekly 2 hr. sessions (including instruction and participation in CP) +2X/day CP by each P ~15 adults Christians who never practised CP were part of the initial study group ~a comparative group of 15 who never practiced CP, and who did not participate in CP through the study^ ~age: 35+	~quantitative statistical results were assessed ~qualitative results indicated decrease in stress/anxiety	~quantitative results were beyond the scope of this current study ~ the author described CP as reducing stress' side effects, by increasing aspects of relationship with God.
Blanton 2011 ~Journal article	~presentation of a case study to illustrate one aspect of integrating CP and psychotherapy ~explored clinical implications	~this article explores the clinical implications of CP, developing models for integrating CP and psychotherapy ~presented one case study	~comparative review of CP & mindfulness ~identified 3 ways to integrate CP with psychotherapy: 1. therapist maintains mindfulness during session, 2. CP informs therapist's practice, 3. Therapist practises CP and engages in CP with client during session	~the article concludes with affirmation of the use of CP in psychotherapy

Author/Year	Study design	Setting/Participants	Data	Outcomes
Knabb 2010 ~Journal article	~article argued for relevance of CP, and its overlap with MBCT, ** as a treatment for Christians and prevention of depression relapse	~no P., just comparative essay	~presented history of MBCT** and CP	~argued for a CP/MBCT overlap, making CP a viable Tx option for many Christians in depression remission.
Kruse 2012 ~Doctoral dissertation ~ (Doctor of Philosophy)	~mixed methods ~physiological measures and self-report on anxiety reduction	~93 P, random assign to CP or PMR or control ~university students had never done CP before, who earned course credit for participating in a one-time event	~some statistical measures ~self-report on anxiety	~author reported that CP led to significant decrease in physiological anxiety compared to PMR and control^^
Lysne 2012 ~Doctoral dissertation	~mixed methods ~mantra form of cp, therefore Catholics were excluded ~quantitative 6-wk pre /post-assessment ~questionnaires ~10 week ~1 hr. of instruction ~6 wks. of unguided CP practise	~P given a prayer instruction sheet, followed by reading the words of the prayer 15 times: ~enrolled 164 Protestants (52 met 75% participation requirement) ~age: 31-88	~statistical measures ~qualitative thematic analysis from questionnaires	~ qualitative results were assessed ~mantra form of cp 20 min/day for 6 wks. improved spirituality and psychological well-being
Asbill 2015 ~Doctoral dissertation	~ Mixed methods ~6-week Tx ~pre and post assessment (self-report and physiological measures)	~87 P enrolled with only 79 P completing the post-assessment ~random assignment to CP or Mindfulness group ~University students had never done CP or mm before, who earned course credit for participating	~statistical measures ~Qualitative analysis from questionnaires	~both the mindfulness and the CP groups indicated decrease in state anxiety as measured by quantitative and qualitative
Fox *et al.* 2015 ~Journal article	~qualitative ~phenomenological investigation ~semi-structured interviews of focus group for 90 min. ~analysed data using conventional content analysis (CCA)	~purposive sample of 20 CP practitioners with at least 5 yrs. exp. in CP	~ analysed the interviews using CCA ~ identified 50 codes into 5 categories	~50 codes were collapsed into 5 main themes: the divine, the mystical, spiritual development, action-contemplation, and contemplative life) related to the experience of CP

Author/Year	Study design	Setting/Participants	Data	Outcomes
Gutierrez *et al.* 2015 ~Journal article	~essay ~brief overview of 3 meditative practices: CP, Jyoti meditation, & Acem meditation ~focused on presenting this information to counsellors	~essay only	~essay only	~provided overview of 3 meditative practices, pointing to uniqueness of each type of practice
Fox *et al.* 2016 ~Journal article	~mixed methods ~6-week study	~P from a pastoral counselling program and from CO ~Fall/Spring workshop 9 P completed the study ~intro to CP on 3 Saturdays (lasting 3-6 hrs.) ~pre and post assessment ~average age: 48	~statistical measures, ~self-report instrument used for spirituality and religious sentiments	~ 'significant influence on psychological and spiritual health' ~including decreased anxiety and stress, and increased faith development & mindfulness.
Rubinart *et al.* 2017 ~Journal article	~mixed methods ~collaborative inquiry examining the Jesus Prayer phenomenon ~purposeful sampling ~2-month intervention ~P also instructed to read *The Way of the Pilgrim****	~ four Sundays, for three hours each session. ~P could practise the Jesus Prayer during the wk. on their own ~10 Catholics ~age: 43-53 yrs.	~This study obtained data supporting the idea that praying the Jesus Prayer for 25 min may deeply reduce participants' states of anxiety and fatigue, however P actual time in prayer in-between sessions was not monitored.	~a short-term intervention with the Jesus Prayer produced considerable improvements in anxiety and fatigue mood states. ~relationship with God was enhanced through the Jesus Prayer.

Table 3.1 Key:
* The Jesus Prayer: 'Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me'.
**MBCT — mindfulness-based cognitive therapy
*** 'Apparently, the Jesus Prayer fostered modesty, humbleness, and responsibility among participants. However, it is not clear to what extent the Jesus Prayer affected participants' personalities or whether *The Way of a Pilgrim's* main character had a modelling effect on them. In any case, these are only tentative data' (Rubinart *et al.* 2017:501).

CCP — Christian contemplative prayer	mm — Mindfulness meditation
CP — Centering Prayer	P — Participants
exp. — Experiment	PMR — Progressive Muscle Relaxation
gr. — Group	Tx. — Treatment
min. — minutes	

^ 'A comparison group was formed after the closing retreat as a response to the unanticipated, scientifically valid statistical results from participants' responses to the study's quantitative measures' (Ferguson *et al.* 2010a: 315).

^^ 'inconclusive results; author indicates control group too small, self-report ineffective measure, and variation in CP and PMR results compared with author's own pilot study' (Abstract).

3.1.4. Christian Contemplative Prayer Literature and Well-Being

Early streams of research described CCP as a waiting on God, as the 'Christian contemplative orients his attention' on God (Mallory 1977:84), 'in a passive, nondefensive, nondemanding, open, nonverbal way' (Finney & Malony 1985a:105). Bourgeault (2004:116) argued that attention can be multi-faceted, and it is important to realize this in order to understand 'Centering Prayer's unique integrity and effectiveness as a path'. In his chapter on *Spiritual Attentiveness* Keating (1996:71) contended that this attentiveness is one of receiving and 'consenting to God's presence'.

Research further suggested, within a CCP practice one's 'experience and concept of God changed from being a distant and remote figure to an intimate presence within' (Fox et al. 2016:381). It is the receptive attentiveness to God's presence which is a foundation of CCP. As Merton (2007:5) insisted, '[c]ontemplation is the awareness and realization, even in some sense *experience,* of what the Christian obscurely believes: "It is now no longer I that live but Christ lives in me."' Within this spiritual discipline, one becomes aware of their contemplation in union with God.

Fox *et al.* (2015:810) recognized this 'sense of divine union' as a centredness, in which Keating (1996:74) contended '[t]he moment of full union has no thought'. In that union 'When you are in perfect prayer, the Spirit is praying in you' (Keating 1996:91). As Gutierrez *et al.* (2015:238) suggested, this 'deeper awareness of God's union with the human spirit through grace' is what Keating (1994) referred to as *divine therapy*. Keating (2007:145) recognized the divine therapy as 'a paradigm in which the spiritual journey is presented in a form of psychotherapy designed to heal the emotional wounds of early childhood and our mechanisms for coping with them'. Fox *et al.* (2015:810) further described the divine therapy as '[e]xperiencing healing of one's psyche and spirit through the presence and action of God within'. In a continuing analysis, Ferguson *et al.*'s (2010a:325) study indicated that divine therapy helps to show 'how the effects of a regular Centering Prayer practice contribute to healing the underlying emotional roots of stress'. Scholars have noted this healing of the emotions and enhancing of spiritual development and relationship with God (Finney & Malony 1985a; Stavros 1998; Kuiper 2004; Johnson *et al.* 2009; Ferguson *et al.* 2010a; Kruse 2012; Fox *et al.* 2015; Gutierrez *et al.* 2015; Rubinart *et al.* 2017). This current study built upon understandings of CCP

and well-being, in an effort to further develop these concepts in the lives of long-term practitioners and to theorize the interrelationship of CCP, well-being, and embodiment.

3.1.5 Conceptual Development of Embodiment in this Investigation

Within this study's concurrent data collection and analysis, the concept of embodiment began to emerge within the participant data. As this concept continued to evolve within the data collection and analysis, the recursive research plan (Figure 3.1 below) was followed. This led to a subsequent literature review of embodiment, along with continued data collection and analysis (as indicated by the methods notation in Figure 3.1). This concurrent cycle continued until the data were saturated and no new data were generated from subsequent interviews. This completed recursive plan allowed for the development of conceptual categories and ultimately the substantive grounded theory development beyond the final recursions of data collection and analysis. This recurrent process also created a need to amend the primary question. Charmaz (2014:26) argued that '[g]rounded theory methods increase your flexibility when gathering data' and she further insisted that by using these flexible methodological tools, you must 'be willing to alter your research questions when you discover that other questions have greater significance in the field'. This was the case in this grounded theory study. The original research question had been: *What is the lived experience of Christian contemplative prayer (CCP) among long-term practitioners, and how does it relate to the practitioners' well-being?* As conceptual categories related to embodiment began to emerge within the participants' data, the primary question was altered to reflect its importance within this study. Therefore, the new primary question (as referenced in this thesis' introduction chapter) became: *What is the lived experience of CCP among long-term practitioners, and how does it relate to the practitioners' well-being and their perception of embodiment within this spiritual discipline?* This amended question allowed for greater development of embodiment within this study. The concept of embodiment gives consideration to the body's integral influence within the whole individual (Hall & Thoennes 2006) and the role of the embodied self in centring the individual (Varela 2003). As data analysis continued, an understanding of participants' embodied practice of CCP became an integrated concept of this prayer practice, helping to address the lacuna related to embodiment within CCP scholarship.

Figure 3.1 Recursive Research Plan

| Prima facie question(s) | literature review | new question(s). | method(s) | analysis |
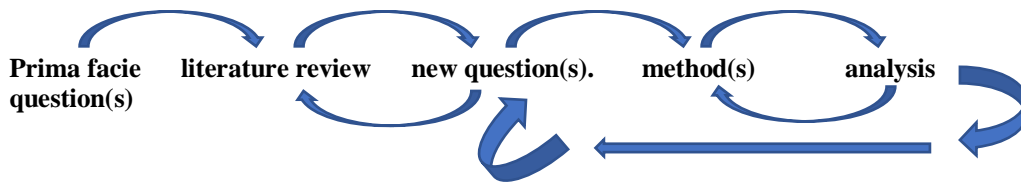
(adapted from Thomas 2013)

3.1.6 Summary of Limitations of Christian Contemplative Prayer Scholarship

Studies have begun to discover some of the influences of CCP in the lives of practitioners. While these studies appeared to show positive effects of this prayer practice, it is difficult to make assessments in the lives of long-term practitioners, since many of the studies have involved people new to CCP (Finney & Malony 1985b; Johnson *et al.* 2009; Ferguson *et al.* 2010a; Fox *et al.* 2016). A second limitation found in the CCP scholarship is the lack of follow-up, especially during the study, on the participants' daily CCP practice (Ferguson *et al.* 2010a; Fox *et al.* 2016). Additionally, some of the groups have had small, homogeneous samples (Finney & Malony 1985b; Johnson *et al.* 2009; Ferguson *et al.* 2010a; Fox *et al.* 2016). Some only engaged the participants through focus group interaction, or prayer time led by a trained CCP leader, thereby limiting the exploration of the impact on an individual personal prayer practice. Many studies have involved only a short-term investigation of six months or less (Finney & Malony 1985b; Johnson *et al.* 2009; Ferguson *et al.* 2010a; Fox *et al.* 2016), limiting understanding of long-term practitioners lived experience of CCP (Appendix 4). In summary, research on CCP and its influence on the practitioner has increased our understanding of the effect of this practice on the lived experience of practitioners; however, more research is warranted (Finney & Malony 1985a,1985b; Johnson *et al.* 2009; Fox *et al.* 2015; Rubinart *et al.* 2017).

3.1.7 Research Gap

The research gap related to the lived experience of long-term CCP practitioners has been revealed through a review of the extant literature, giving clarity to the need for further research. This current research focuses on addressing some of the gaps that limit our understanding of this spiritual phenomenon, especially in the lives of its long-term practitioners. Robison *et al.* (2011:1325) insisted that a research gap arises '[w]hen the ability of the systematic reviewer to draw conclusions is limited'. This gap can be created

when 'insufficient information' is available related to a topic, arising when issues such as: limited studies exist, sample sizes are small, populations are not adequately represented, or incomplete conclusions are made (Robinson *et al.* 2011:1327). Yet at least a partial resolution can also be found in further research (Müller-Bloch & Kranz 2015), and in this way a research gap can serve as a beacon for future investigation. Those aspects of a topic that are incomplete, under-developed, or under-theorized create a deficit in understanding which can direct the development of subsequent research and the methods necessary for advancing investigation. Studies have explored CCP practice, yet a research gap remains. The three primary dimensions of his gap, which this study will address, are outlined in the following paragraphs and graphically represented in Figure 3.2 below.

First, empirical studies are limited that explore the lived experience of CCP practices among long-term practitioners. As this section has argued, studies have investigated this prayer practice with participants who are new to this form of prayer, but a scant few have explored the lived experience of long-term CCP practitioners or their utilization of various methods of CCP. This gap is also created by some of the limitations discussed above. These limitations and lack of studies on long-term practitioners has created gaps in our understanding of some of the specifics of this practice and its influence. This is represented in Gap #1 in Figure 3.2 below.

Second, although research has begun to investigate the interrelationship between well-being and CCP, the practitioners' lived experience and well-being is under-developed and requires further exploration. Participants' understanding of well-being, from a holistic perspective of body, mind, and spirit, needs to be more thoroughly explored to understand the influence of this spiritual discipline. Studies have shown well-being to be an important outcome of this prayer practice, yet well-being needs to be further conceptualized and delineated as it pertains to CCP lived experience, especially for the long-term practitioner. This is represented in Gap #2 in Figure 3.2 below.

Third, CCP scholars have given little attention to the possible connections between this prayer practice, well-being, and embodiment. Embodiment was not recognized in the previous studies, yet it became an important element within this thesis' participant data. As this study's data collection and analysis developed concurrently, the concept of embodiment began to be generated from the participant data. During this study, embodiment became recognized as a largely under-developed and under-theorized element within CCP scholarship, suggesting that our understanding of embodiment and

its interrelationship with well-being and this prayer practice is incomplete, thus warranting further research. This is represented in Gap #3 in Figure 3.2 below.

Figure 3.2 Conceptual Model Addressing the Christian Contemplative Prayer Research Gap
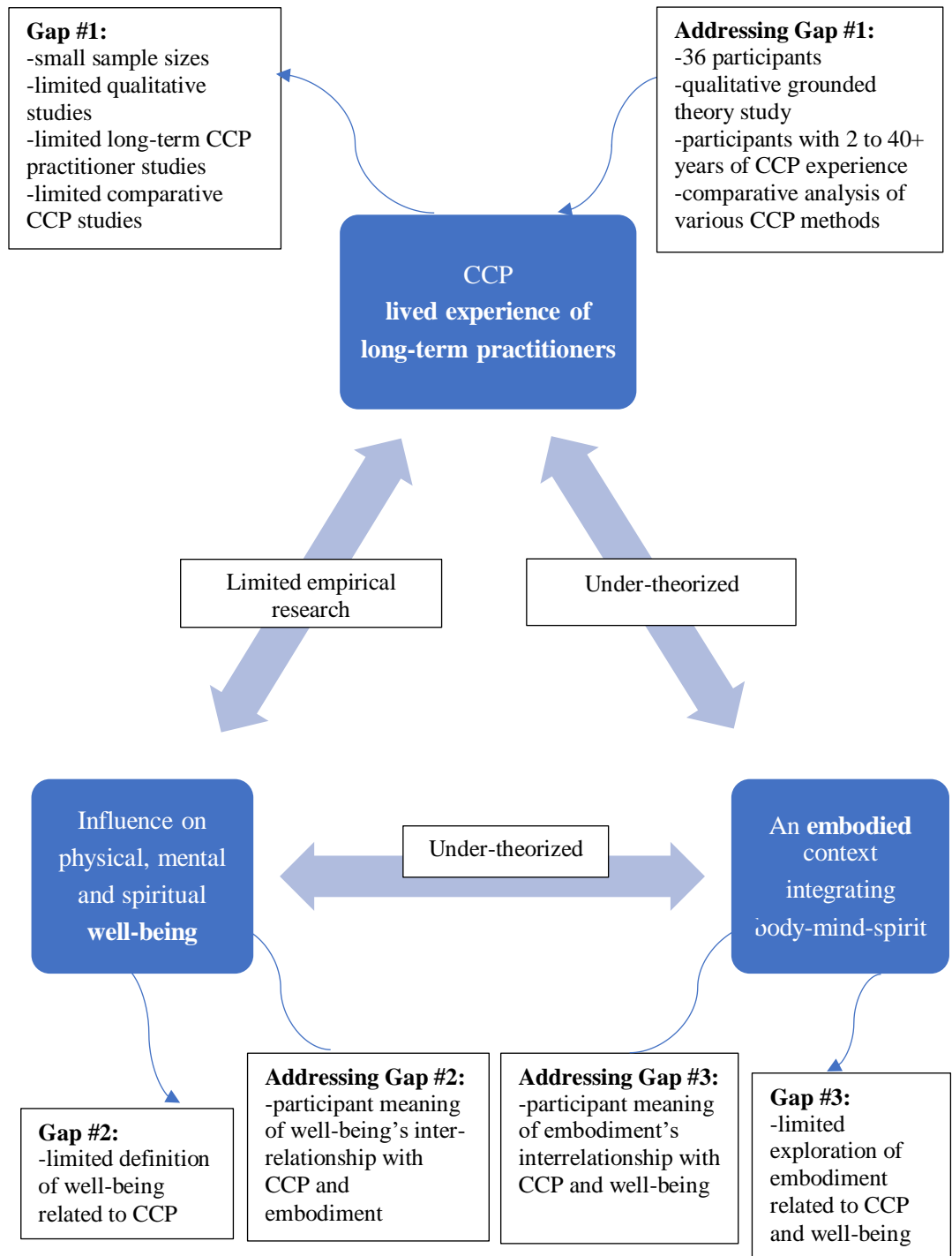
These three major gaps focus this study on CCP and its interrelationship with well-being and embodiment, as illustrated in Figure 3.2. The figure also indicates the way in which this study will address each gap. While research has been shown relating CCP and well-being, still the investigations are limited. Connections between well-being and embodiment are also under-theorized. Illuminating greater development to the interrelations of CCP, well-being, and embodiment can continue to build greater understanding of this prayer practice. It is important not to over-emphasize the role of well-being and embodiment in this prayer practice, as they are not the sole factors involved, but rather they are the focus of this research within CCP practices and its influence on the lived experience in long-term practitioners.

Thus far, the literature review has analysed CCP scholarship to demonstrate findings which have further developed our understanding of CCP. It has also located the existing research gaps thereby substantiating the need for further investigation. In this grounded theory study, the participant data will help to define well-being and embodiment, yet it is valuable to have an understanding of the line of academic inquiry that supports our current understandings of these themes.

3.2 Well-Being

The subject of well-being is a multi-dimensional construct, which considers physical, mental, and spiritual aspects of functioning and experience within the whole person (Ryan & Deci 2001). However, according to the United Kingdom Mental Health Foundation (2015):

> But once we look beyond the definition it is difficult to drill down into what well-being really means to people day to day, the factors that may influence it (both internal and external), how we can best measure it and how we can support people to improve it. Yet that doesn't mean we should shy away from it either.

Although debate is ongoing, researchers have recognized two general well-being perspectives: *hedonic* which helps to define well-being in terms of seeking pleasure or happiness and avoiding pain, and *eudaemonic* focusing on self-realization and meaning in life, and defining well-being in terms of a fully functioning individual (Ryan & Deci 2001; Waterman 2008). Assessing well-being has become an important aspect of positive psychology (Gillham & Seligman 1999). Within the concept of spiritual well-being, instruments have been further developed to assist in the conceptualization and assessment of spiritual well-being (Fisher 2010). While quantitative measures have been used to

evaluate well-being (Peterman *et al.* 2002), qualitative methods have also allowed researchers to define well-being from the perspective of the participants' life expectation and considerations of control and balance in life (Helvik *et al.* 2011). This grounded theory qualitative study focuses on the CCP participants' subjective definition and assessment of their physical, mental, and spiritual well-being, within the lived experience of their prayer practice.

3.2.1 Positive Psychology and Well-Being

Until recent decades, psychology focused on pathology more than it did on health or well-being (Myers 2000; Faller 2001; Boiler *et al.* 2013; Weiss *et al.* 2016). This located attention primarily on the negative aspects of psychological health. However, as Faller (2001:9) noted, in 1998, Seligman *et al.* advanced concepts related to *positive psychology*, which offered a new scientific context for the study of 'human strengths and virtues'. Gillham and Seligman (1999:169) further insisted that a new positive psychology was 'desperately needed' to bring clarity towards building 'virtues like creativity, hope, future-mindedness, interpersonal skill, moral judgment, forgiveness, humor [sic] and courage and how to enhance happiness and life satisfaction'. They argued that bias in prevailing psychological research was on negative emotions and treatment of mental illness. Their work helped to pioneer a psychotherapy approach towards improving not only symptoms, but also focusing on the individual's well-being (Aghaie *et al.* 2018).

3.2.2 Defining Well-Being

Well-being is an expansive construct used to describe an individual's psychological functioning (Ryan & Deci 2001; Kragh *et al.* 2016), while recognizing healthy well-being as a state of optimal functioning (Boiler *et al.* 2013). According to the United States Center for Disease Control (CDC 2018): 'Well-being is a positive outcome that is meaningful for people and for many sectors of society, because it tells us that people perceive that their lives are going well'. Within these definitions there are various ways to explore well-being; however, academic investigations are debating and developing two conceptualizations: hedonism/subjective well-being (HWB) and eudaemonic well-being (EWB) (Ryan & Deci 2001; Weiss *et al.* 2016).

Hedonic well-being (HWB) is found in happiness that comes from achieving pleasure coupled with pain avoidance, supported by the presence of positive affect and

the absence of negative affect (Ryff & Keyes 1995; Ryan & Deci 2001; Pritchard *et al.* 2020). This structures well-being around a central core in which the pursuit of positive realities is primary (Weiss *et al.* 2016), recognizing that the ultimate goal is pursuing pleasure and happiness (Ryan & Deci 2001; Waterman 2008). Psychologist Alan Waterman (2008:235) insisted that there are a variety of actions that may contribute to HWB as pleasure can be related to the 'satisfaction of personal needs, whether physiologically, intellectually, or socially based'. Waterman (2008) further contrasts hedonism's focus on pleasure with an eudaemonic focus on pursing a virtuous and excellent life.

Eudaemonic well-being (EWB) promotes the realization of one's potential, and the recognition of one's true self that leads to a meaningful life (Ryff & Keyes 1995; Ryan & Deci 2001; Pritchard *et al.* 2020). EWB recognized that some pleasure producing outcomes are not good for people, and while a hedonic assessment tends towards experiences, eudaemonic relies more on the fully functioning individual (Pritchard *et al.* 2020). Although some, like Ackrill (1973) and McDowell (1980), support Aristotle's recognition that eudaemonia is an objective condition, Waterman (2008) also recognized EWB with its affiliation of the subjective experiences developing self-realization and the sense of acting in accordance with one's true self. Waterman (2008:236) further identified this as personal expressiveness (PE), and uses this term to infer eudaemonia, recognizing these subjective experiences as creating a 'positive affective condition'.

EWB has been measured using psychologists Carol Ryff and Corey Keyes' (1995) scale of psychological well-being. This scale has six subscales: 1) personal growth relating to one's openness to new experiences and ideas and realization of one's potential, 2) purpose in life related to one's goals and a sense of meaningfulness, 3) autonomy relating to one's independence and self-determination, 4) environmental mastery indicating the command of one's environment, 5) self-acceptance resulting in a positive awareness of one's self, and 6) positive relations with others (Ryff & Keyes 1995; Ryan & Deci 2001). A questionnaire was further developed to assess these six core dimensions referred to as the: Scales of Psychological Well-Being (SPWB) (Waterman 2008). Research continues to be debated within the contexts of well-being (Kashdan *et al.* 2008; Waterman 2008), with investigations also focused on social well-being.

Gallagher *et al.* (2009:2) addressed the concept of social well-being, related to a 'primarily public phenomena, focused on the social tasks encountered by adults in their social lives'. He further contended for the necessity of a multidimensional approach in

developing a model that integrates these various aspects of well-being; however, this pursuit has been especially plagued by 'methodological inconsistencies, psychometric limitations, and inconsistent results'. Gallagher *et al.* (2009) proposed a unifying hierarchical structure integrating hedonic, eudaemonic, and social well-being as a perspective on flourishing mental health, yet he does not directly include an assessment of spiritual well-being in the hierarchical structural model.

3.2.3 Spiritual Well-Being

Spiritual well-being (SWB) is also a multi-dimensional construct, which is not easily assessed without complex measures (Fisher 2016). Simply describing one's spirituality differs from addressing their SWB and detecting the 'exact meaning or scope of spirituality' is also difficult to determine (Fisher 2016:1). There is a growing interest in studying spiritual well-being as it relates to health promotion (Abhari *et al.* 2018), yet there is a 'dearth of well-validated, psychometrically sound instruments to measure aspects of spirituality' (Peterman *et al.* 2002: Abstract). Thus, the difficulties found not only in defining spirituality, but also assessing the SWB of an individual.

In 1999, well-being and education scholar, John Fisher (2013) developed a spirituality instrument, the Spiritual Health and Life-Orientation Measure (SHALOM), that would assess four domains. These four domains were recognized as: 1) *personal*, relating to oneself as regards purpose, meaning and values in life; 2) *communal*, reflected in quality interpersonal relationships; 3) *environmental*, in which one has a sense of awe and wonder for the physical and biological world around them, experiencing a sense of harmony with the environment; and 4) *transcendental*, which is that relationship with 'some-Thing or some-One beyond the human' (Fisher 2016:2). Table 3.2 further delineates these four domains, indicating the five items in each of the four domains that are scored using Likert scale responses from 1 = very low to 5 = very high.

Table 3.2 SHALOM Four Domains

Personal	Communal
Sense of identity	Love of other people
Self-awareness	Forgiveness towards others
Joy in life	Trust between individuals
Inner peace	Respect for others
Meaning in life	Kindness towards other people
Environmental	**Transcendental**
Connection with nature	Personal relationship with the Divine/God
Awe at a breath-taking view	Worship of the Creator
Oneness with nature	Oneness with God
Harmony with the environment	Peace with God
Sense of 'magic' in the environment	Prayer life

(Fisher 2010:109)

As Fisher (2016:44) noted, it is not easy to assess SWB, but one of the unique features of SHALOM is its ability to assess an individual's '"lived experience" with their "ideals" for SWB'. The lived experience component of the test is the Spiritual Well-Being Questionnaire (SWBQ). In this way, spiritual harmony or dissonance in each of the four domains can be investigated while assessing the difference between lived experiences and ideals (Fisher 2016:3). In assessing aspects of SWB, the SWBQ/SHALOM has been shown to be a reliable and valid instrument (Fisher 2016; Abhari *et al.* 2018), yet as Fisher (2010:116) noted: 'no 20-item instrument can hope to capture perfectly the multi-dimensional nature of spiritual well-being'. Although Fisher's SHALOM does not have a specific category for embodiment, his assessment looks at the whole individual, as they are embodied within a community, the environment, and in their relationship with God. Although his assessment does not directly discuss the dimension of embodiment, aspects of the individual's inner peace and joy for example relate to the whole individual (body, mind, and spirit).

3.2.4 Difficulty Defining Well-Being

As this field continues to develop, various aspects of well-being are being researched. Although investigations of well-being make distinctions between eudaemonic and hedonic happiness, contrasts between these two philosophies have also created debate (Kashdan *et al.* 2008; Waterman 2008; Henderson *et al.* 2014). The criterion dividing eudaemonic and hedonic are questioned, as is the long-standing philosophical basis that has supported them versus the more nascent scientific investigations of well-being (Henderson *et al.* 2014). Kashdan *et al.* (2008) argued that the philosophical views do not translate well into the realm of science.

The contrast between these two philosophies has provoked much debate as to the best ways to conceptualize and measure well-being (Kashdan *et al.* 2008; Waterman 2008). In particular the validity of conceptualizing well-being solely as *happiness* has been questioned by scholars (Ryff 1989; Waterman 2008), who advocated the importance of defining well-being in terms of optimal psychological functioning. Additionally, as Fisher (2013:333) contended, SWB is difficult to assess especially in the investigation of one's 'relationship with a Transcendent'. These debates further emphasize the complex task of researching well-being.

3.2.5 Investigations of Well-Being

Varying academic disciplines have examined the relationship of factors on an individual's well-being, in which well-being as an intervention outcome is important (Weiss *et al.* 2016). A small sampling[36] of these well-being studies are listed in Appendix 2, indicating the researcher's contextual definition of well-being or the focus of the well-being research. This is important as an indicator of the variety of perspectives that are taken in studies on well-being, which further reflects the complex multidimensional aspect of researching well-being.

3.2.6 Grounded Theory Investigations of Well-Being

Qualitative methods have also focused on various aspects of well-being (Utriainen *et al.* 2009; Mokgatle-Nthabu *et al.* 2011; Helvik *et al.* 2011). Grounded theory methods are a powerful tool in determining meanings of well-being among differing populations in particular settings (Helvik *et al.* 2011). Through the process of grounded theory, participants can describe their own thoughts and experiences in their own words, which in the case of well-being can help researchers develop understandings. These findings are beyond those prescribed by previous definitions and measured outcomes. As Mokgatle-Nthabu *et al.* (2011:67) noted in their study, through the process of grounded theory, they were able to probe more fully and more comprehensively into 'authentic interpretations of well-being grounded in the context of the lived experiences'. Helvik *et al.* (2011:10) referenced the importance of their grounded theory method as '[t]he chosen approach helped the participants to share their experiences and reflections with the interviewer and helped [the researchers] to achieve good descriptions of the selected categories'. These categories were then used in developing an understanding of participants' strategies reflecting optimal well-being, with respondents defining what well-being meant to them. Utriainen *et al.*'s (2009) study design, utilizing a grounded theory method, helped them to discover core processes of well-being related to participants (nurses) real experiences. In the research interviews, participants were asked to share about their 'conception of well-being at work' (149). The researchers discovered that 'feelings about doing well and doing good things were important to a sense of well-being' (149). These examples demonstrate the potential of grounded theory well-being studies to explore this concept

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[36] Only a sampling of studies is listed, as an exhaustive search of investigative well-being research is not the focus of this literature review. It is only presented here to indicate the diversity of academic interest in well-being, and the definitions and constructs surrounding well-being.

as a lived experience in the life of the participants, taking into consideration participants' definitions of well-being (Appendix 3).

3.2.7 Conclusion

Despite the complications surrounding analysis of well-being, studies continue within varying disciplines amidst differing definitions. As Ryan and Deci (2001:146) insisted, these varying descriptions of well-being have generated diverse investigations regarding 'causes, consequences, and dynamics of well-being'. Furthermore, hierarchal linear modelling (HLM) has allowed studies to include not only an individual focus on the participants' well-being, but rather to explore why their well-being appears to be improving (Ryan & Deci 2001). Using various definitions of well-being, and therefore measuring different constructs, has sometimes developed a partial versus a more holistic view of well-being (Kragh *et al.* 2016). As Ryff and Keyes (1995) contended, studies which only include eudaemonic measures leave out hedonic indices of pleasures of life. Additionally, studies have defined well-being differently, measuring different constructs, which have sometimes only included certain aspects of well-being instead of taking a holistic approach.

Precision in one's definition of well-being is important (Weiss *et al.* 2016). This study aims to present a multidimensional approach to well-being, recognizing as Myers (2000) insisted that ultimately the final word on one's well-being comes from the individuals themselves. This is certainly the perspective of this grounded theory study. The focus on the participants' meanings and perspectives will further integrate embodiment in this investigation of CCP practice and well-being.

3.3 Embodiment

Embodiment, along with well-being, became a central theme within this investigation of CCP. However, this theme was not recognized in the initial ten interviews of Phase 1. It began to emerge within the data analysis of Phase 2 interviews. At that point a recursive review of Phase 1 helped to generate the theme of embodiment throughout the participants' data. Subsequently, a literature review of embodiment was conducted and is discussed in the following section.

This section introduces studies within the field of embodiment, which have helped to integrate the individual in body, mind, and spirit, in contrast with Cartesian dualism (Ellingson 2017). Embodiment helped to further conceptualize participant's

awareness of their body's knowledge and embodied self (Hall & Thoennes 2006). Christian theology further integrates the mind, body and spirit, in the teachings of the creation of humankind, the Incarnation, and the Christian as the temple of God (Hall 2010). This section will further argue that embodiment is interrelated with the lived experience of CCP through a coalescing of body, mind, and spirit as the coordinated harmonious whole of the person is integrated and influenced within this prayer practice.

3.3.1 Foundational Principles of Embodiment — Terminology

Since the 1980's, conceptual understandings of embodiment have developed from landmark studies on embodied cognition[37] (Wilson & Foglia 2017). These studies have helped to advance the ideas of embodiment, as they reflect upon concepts related to an individual's actions being 'centered [sic] in' one's physical body (Varela 2003:125). This has challenged the idea that the body's role is to supply input to the mind, which operates independently in the body as the sole processor of information (Marshall 2016). In the mid 1900's, French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty espoused ideas related to phenomenology and embodiment, as a way to explain the interaction between the mind and the body. He recognized the importance of the physical body's knowledge and awareness within its environment, and the subsequent influence the body enacted on the consciousness of the individual (Hall & Thoennes 2006). Cognitive embodiment was further expanded within the field of cognitive science to describe the ways in which cognition is dependent on the physical body, in such a way that the body's influence extends beyond the brain in shaping the mind (Greenwood & Delgado 2013; Wilson & Foglia 2017). As Häfner (2013) insisted, experiences are influenced by signals from the physical body, before those signals become engaged in the cognitive complex. In tandem with these increasing cognitive scientific developments, the concept of embodied cognition is also widely debated, with fundamental arguments surrounding what is actually meant by situating an embodied mind (Häfner 2013; Kiverstein 2012; Ziemke 2013). These debates are beyond the scope of this thesis. However, in a general sense, embodied cognition is supported in a way that the rational mind is influenced by the

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[37] Although the concepts of embodied cognition relate back to work done by Maurice Merleau-Ponty who postulated the idea in the early 1900's, three more recent works have advanced the ideas: 1) *Metaphors We Live By* (1980), George Lakoff and Mark Johnson presented ideas that specific language, and especially metaphors, helped to structure cognition that was previously thought to be isolated from the metaphor and 2) *The Embodied Mind* (Varela, Thompson and Rosch 1991) attempted to re-focus the cognitive sciences by connecting the phenomenological perspective developed in the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1945), and 3) Andy Clark's *Being There: Putting Mind, World, and Body Back Together* (1997) (Wilson & Foglia 2017).

physical body's actions within its environment, recognizing a connection between cognition and the body's influence (Glenberg 2010; Flusberg 2016). While this is a greatly debated topic, there is a way to understand that embodiment recognized the physical body's interactive influence on not only cognition but also on the subjective self within its environment.

In his article, 'What's that Thing called Embodiment?', Ziemke (2013) further related embodiment in various ways to environmental self-locality, including such aspects as historical, physical, and social embodiment as reflected in Table 3.3.

Table 3.3 Examples of Perspectives on Embodiment

Historical Embodiment: Effects of historical interactions within one's environment
Social Embodiment: Proceeding from one's social interactions within one's environment
Physical Embodiment: Relating to the physical body's sensorimotor connection within one's environment

These perspectives reflect upon an individual's sense of knowing, especially as it relates to their physical body and understanding, within one's environment. Ziemke (2013:1305) continued his argument by insisting that while many researchers conclude embodiment is an important factor in cognition, there is still debate as to 'exactly what that means'. In the study of embodiment, it is difficult to give a definitive definition of what the term actually means, yet the concept helps to recognize the body's influence in and interrelation with cognition and the self.

3.3.2 Body/Mind/Spirit, Cartesian Dualism, and the Enlightenment's Influence

Although embodied cognition and related ideas might be difficult to define, concepts related to embodiment are in contrast to other dualistic characterizations of the rational processes of the mind and the subservient body. Rene' Descartes' Cartesian dualism held that the mind was a non-physical and therefore non-spatial entity that was identified with the individual's consciousness and awareness. While distinguishing it from the brain as the centre of cognition, he recognized the mind's control of the body (Ellingson 2017). Throughout the Enlightenment, philosophical thought continued to promote mind-body dualism through ideas of separating mental thought from the physical body and also by noting the separation and distinctness of the mind versus the body (Hall 2010).

Theoretical reflection developing out of the Enlightenment further supported these presumptions by empowering the mind's independent control over the body. This philosophy has lasted for many years. Only recently has there been greater understanding of the body's influence on cognition and the understanding of the self in its environment (Glenberg 2010; Hall & Thoennes 2006; Marshall 2016). Bailey (2016) asserted that Merleau-Ponty pointed to the body as one's grounding for meaning-making in the world, and that Merleau-Ponty's philosophy supported a view of embodiment which supported one's conscious awareness in life. As Bailey (2016) insisted, this perspective does not simply transfer thoughts from the mind to the body, rather cognition becomes centralized within the embodied self in the world. In the separation of the mind, cognitive processes were further emphasized over other possible manners of knowing, for example, that of the body's own potential knowledge (Hall & Thoennes 2006). However, scientists are increasingly acknowledging the embodied characteristic of mental processes, which contrast the dualistic Cartesian separation of the mind and body (Häfner 2013; Marshal 2016). It is not the intent of this discussion to engage in the arguments surrounding terms such as embodied cognition or embodiment, but rather to make broad connections to theories which embody the self as it relates to body, mind, and spirit.

The Body's Knowledge — The past few decades have seen a shift from primarily information processing views of a rational, independent mind to a more embodied view which recognizes the interconnectedness of cognition to the individual's body and the environment in which they are experienced (Schmalzl *et al.* 2014). These ideas have helped to develop a notion that the body has a knowledge of its own, which develops and is embedded within the physical self (Willard & Simpson 2005). Ellingson (2017:166) referenced a 'kinesthetic [sic] mode of knowing', which is used to express a thought or emotion. These ideas of embodiment are not built upon notions that the body acts and the rational mind tries to make meaning out of the actions, but rather as Ellingson (2017:16) insisted, 'our whole body-selves making sense of the world and producing knowledge'. This holistically complex awareness of embodied knowledge relies on experiencing the environment through one's physical body. Furthermore, one's social interactions cannot be realized apart from the physical body, nor can the body be fully understood apart from social interactions (Willard & Simpson 2005). As Marshall (2016: Abstract) noted: 'We are recognizing increasingly that the study of cognitive, social, and emotional processes

must account for their embodiment in living, acting beings'. In these ways, the entire self becomes embodied in lived experiences.

3.3.3 Movement-Based Embodied Contemplative Practices (MECP)

As the field of cognitive science has seen a shift towards more embodied views of the situated self in its environment, there have also been increasing developments in the understanding of the body in seated meditation and mindfulness (Schmaltz 2014). These studies bring attention to the important aspect of embodiment in meditation. Studies have examined the influence of Movement-Based Embodied Contemplative Practices (MECP), while recognizing the connection of embodiment, integration of movement, and the interrelatedness within the contemplative practice (Schmaltz 2014). One aspect of movement in these contemplative practices focused on the intentionality of the action as it is hypothesized that this aspect of MECP is part of the 'restructuring an individual's sense of agency', thus further influencing the changing 'sense of self' (Schmaltz 2014:2). Although the idea of movement can involve the entire physicality and locality of the practitioner, it can also comprise 'a very small and subtle motion, to a purely internal or imagined movement' (Schmaltz 2014:2). While these studies have led to greater understanding in the field of cognitive science, CCP practitioners have not been included in these studies relating contemplative practices to embodiment.

MECP and Yoga: A Christian Perspective — With a focus on movement and posture, some practitioners have incorporated yoga into their CCP practice. However, Schmaltz (2014) noted that a limited number of scientific studies have explored MECP such as yoga. Kiecolt-Glaser *et al.* (2011:10-11) noted that yoga can influence a 'participant's positive affect', further demonstrating that '[i]f yoga dampens or limits stress related immunological, endocrinological, and cardiovascular changes, then regular practice could have substantial health benefits'. Singh and Chaurasia (2020:88) insisted that as an ancient Hindu custom originating about 5,000 years ago, yoga's 'standard is to integrate all parts' of the self, 'to achieve the ultimate satisfaction of a healthy lifestyle'.

With regards to Christians incorporating this Hindu practice, Klassen (2005:378) argued that some liberal Christians,[38] 'seeking spirituality that acknowledges and works through the body […] have poised Asian and Christian traditions in "ritual proximity"—

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[38] Klassen (2005:389) considers liberal Christians as referring to 'those who with pluralistic views open to wisdom from other religions'.

a proximity saturated with the tensions, confusions and harmonies implied by the historically laden opposition of "East" and "West"'. Jain (2014:429-430) proposed the 'Christian yogaphobic position and the Hindu origins position' with yogaphobics convinced that 'religious conflict is inevitable if they embrace yoga, given the irreconcilable differences between them (i.e., Hindus) and us (i.e., Christians)'. The Hindu origins position criticized the popularizing yoga and ignorance of its Hindu origin. Gunther-Brown (2018:661) further elevated concern in suggesting that 'naïveté about how practices can change beliefs may undercut evangelical doctrines as Christian yoga practitioners potentially experience subtle shifts in worldview, and Christians may impede their evangelistic goals by making themselves vulnerable to charges of cultural appropriation and cultural imperialism'. Yet, despite these concerns, some CCP practitioners complement their prayer practice with yoga that is primarily focused on postural elements.

Jain (2012:4) contended that '[i]n popular discourse across much of the world today, yoga is virtually synonymous with postural yoga. But postural yoga is only one thread of modern yoga, which, throughout its history, has itself been characterized by a vast and diverse array of systems'. Opponents still criticize this postural yoga and claim that it is 'compromising Christianity (the Christian yogaphobic position) or corrupting Hinduism (the Hindu origins position)' (Jain 2014:458). However, Christian proponents of a Christian yoga 'argue that yoga itself is not a religion, but a universal set of techniques that can be used to strengthen a Christian's relationship with Christ', as it supports postures. 'Christian yoga, which emphasizes posture and breath control as a means of focusing on Christ, evidences yoga's malleability' (Jain 2012:6). Gunther-Brown (2018:670-672) affirmed that 'Christian yogis react defensively to criticism because they get something from yoga that they do not get from other forms of exercise or church', and in the end, '[i]t is difficult to refute testimonial claims'.

3.3.4 Embodiment and Christianity

Cognitive embodiment recognized the interrelation between the mind and the situated body, yet Christians further understood concepts of embodiment within the relation of the body, mind, *and* spirit. Christian theology asserts that concepts related to embodiment within an individual are grounded in such doctrines as creation and the Incarnation (Bailey 2016).

The Creation of Humankind — The idea of *imago Dei* integrates the body, mind, and spirit within the creation of human beings and as reflecting the totality of the individual (Greenwood & Delgado 2013). Theologian Gregg Allison (2009:5) insisted that God's creative design was that of an embodied human being, and therefore one should recognize 'embodiment as a gift from God'. In the Book of the Psalms, the Psalmist recognized their own being as created by God: 'For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made' (Psalm 139:13-14). The total created human being embodies a physical form through which all of life can be experienced.

The Incarnation — Theologians further recognize the importance of the body as witnessed in the Incarnation of Christ, which exemplifies the profound confirmation of the sacredness of the physical world (Hall & Thoennes 2006). Biokinetics scholar Tracey Greenwood and theologian Teresa Delgado (2013) asserted, as the *Word* became flesh and dwelt among humanity in the person of Jesus Christ, humankind become keenly aware of the interconnection of the indwelling spirit within the human body. This manifestation depicted the intimate relationship with God and humanity. God's revelation through the body of Jesus allowed a different perspective of intimacy with the divine and in a sense, as Reagan (2013:1) asserted, God became 'genuinely touchable' in a physical form. The embodied Jesus, as God incarnate, embraced the body's importance in God's creation of humankind and also as the situated experience of encountering the Spirit of God. The Incarnation is the perfect example of glorifying God in a physical body, reflecting importance of one's body within one's spiritual disciplines.

The Embodied Self as the Temple of God — In this sense, humans relate with God in and through their bodies, even as Scripture declares: 'For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple' (1 Corinthians 3:17). Not only is the physical body one's attendance in the physical world, which is part of an integrated existence (Willard & Simpson 2005), but for the Christian the body is realized as the indwelt 'sacred place of God's presence' (Hall 2010:169). The body can also be recognized as an important element of spiritual formation, as the body is part of the process and can be, as Willard and Simpson (2005:31) insisted, 're-formed to become [one's] ally in Christlikeness'. Hall (2010) insisted that various other ways that the body is referenced in the Scripture emphasize relationship, such as being a part of the Body of Christ or the nature of the indwelling Spirit. Hall

(2010:170) pointed to the scriptural declaration in 1 Corinthians 6:20 to "'Glorify God in your bodies"' as part of a Christian's relationship with God to demonstrate God's presence in the world and further follow Jesus' example through the Incarnation.

3.3.5 Embodiment Conclusion

Research on embodiment, although contested, is helping to generate understanding regarding the holistic functioning of human beings. Embodiment is also being further recognized within theological aspects of creation, the Incarnation, and the individual's reality as the temple of God. Yet, embodiment is still under-theorized in the lived experience of CCP practice. This is part of the broader perspective of the research gap on long-term CCP practitioners, which this study is addressing.

<div align="center">

3.4 Conclusion

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This chapter began by identifying and reviewing the limited literature on CCP. In this review, research gaps were discovered within the corpus of CCP scholarship, especially related to long-term practitioners. Some studies have explored well-being's relation to this particular prayer practice, and yet further exploration of well-being among long-term CCP practitioners is warranted. Additionally, there has been minimal investigation of interrelated aspects of embodiment within long-term CCP practitioners' lived experience. This literature review and the subsequent research gaps have supported the development of a primary or overarching question which asks:

> *What is the lived experience of Christian contemplative prayer (CCP) among long-term practitioners, and how does it relate to the practitioners' embodied well-being and perceptions of embodiment within this spiritual discipline?*

Three separate secondary questions, presented in the introduction, further divide this primary question into more specific areas of investigation. These questions aim to support the empirical and theoretical development within the interconnectedness of CCP, well-being, and embodiment.

This chapter further reviewed well-being and embodiment literature in an effort to present perspectives on these concepts as they might relate to this study and to develop subject vocabulary. By delineating current insights and determining the potential research questions to ask, futile methodological approaches were avoided. The literature review also gave support for a constructivist grounded theory method, which could ground the

developing theory in the participant data. Randolph (2009:2) insisted that '[w]ithout establishing the state of previous research, it is impossible to establish how the new research advances the previous research'.

Despite the fact that research in the area of CCP practice is on the rise, there are still many unanswered questions. In their conclusion, Fox *et al.* (2016:390) insisted that 'centering prayer is a unique form of meditation with limited research'. Fox *et al.* (2016:381) further concluded that studies even 'with other forms of meditation suggest that centering prayer is a method deserving further study while acknowledging that it is also a unique method (i.e. use of a sacred word) that requires questions and research methodologies wholly its own if it is to be truly understood'. As a constructivist grounded theory qualitative investigation, this study will provide insights into participants' understanding of their long-term CCP practice, its lived experience, and its influence on their well-being in an embodied context. It is important to recognize that aspects of well-being and embodiment are not the only over-arching themes within CCP practice, but they are the specific focus of this research through its grounded theory investigation of this study's participants.

CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY, METHODS, AND THEORY DEVELOPMENT

This chapter begins by outlining paradigms and the philosophical framework of ontology, epistemology, and methodology, within this constructivist grounded theory study. Initial consideration is given to paradigms and paradigm shifts, and their influence on developing theories. Paradigm shifts are also recognized in the development of research methodologies themselves, such as in the case of grounded theory. The grounded theory methodology was first presented in the 1967 seminal work of sociologists Glaser and Strauss. Their approach described methods for developing theories conceptualized from the data rather than working to deduce verifiable hypotheses from existing theories. Further paradigm shifts have guided the development of differing philosophical perspectives to grounded theory, such as the constructivist approach to grounded theory (Charmaz 2014). This methodology recognizes the interpretive role of the researcher and emphasizes the need for maintaining researcher reflexivity and a willingness to address one's own philosophical positioning.

The remainder of the chapter details the grounded theory methods used regarding the process of fieldwork, including participant sampling, data collection and analysis methods, and the attention to reflexivity throughout this research. The final sections emphasize this study's trustworthiness, transparency, and authenticity. This supports the emerging, substantive grounded theory in this study of the lived experience of long-term CCP practitioners.

4.1 Philosophical and Methodological Framework

Underpinning this research and substantive theory development is a paradigmatic framework of axiological (values and ethics), ontological (the study of reality and what can be known about that reality), epistemological (the study of knowledge, or the researcher and what can be known) assumptions, and specific methodological approaches to qualitative research (Patton 2002; Punch 2014). Addressing the paradigm in defining one's philosophical and methodological stance is important for the researcher, as this aids in understanding, explaining, and justifying the research design, which helps the researcher to build upon an established and developed approach to the research (Merriam

2009). Before undertaking a research project, one must examine one's own view of reality, the aims of the research, and associated theory development, yet remain open to related theoretical scholarship. Table 4.1 summarises the philosophical and methodological framework which support this study. Ponterotto (2005:128) contended that 'a research paradigm sets the context for an investigator's study'.

Table 4.1 Philosophical and Methodological Framework of this Investigation

Supporting Element	Element Defined	Specific to this Study
Axiology	What role do values play?	Reflexively acknowledged
Ontology	What is reality?	Reality is co-constructed
Epistemology	What and how can one know about reality?	Findings are co-created
Methodology	How can one discover knowledge about reality?	Qualitative, inductive
Method	What specific procedures can be used for discovering?	Grounded theory methods
Source of data	What data are needed?	Long-term CCP practitioners, literature, and teachings

Adapted from Krauss (2005); Ponterotto (2005); Kivunja & Kuyini (2017)

In his influential book, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions,* Kuhn dramatically altered the use of the word 'paradigm' (Hacking 2012: xvii). Kuhn (2012) insisted that paradigms were interwoven within pervasive thought, and that they were the grouping of perspectives, principles, and standards that helped to define a philosophical way of thinking. Kuhn challenged the general assumption that researchers were not limited by pre-conceived notions and beliefs, and that they were not persuaded by biases or presuppositions (Patton 2002). During the second half of the twentieth century, paradigm and paradigm shift continued to develop as common words and concepts within the scientific, corporate, and societal communities. Kuhn's (2012) focus, however, was predominantly directed towards the scientific community. Within research, differing paradigms have been recognized as positivism, interpretivism/constructivism, pragmatism, and critical. This present grounded theory inductive research study recognized that social realities are not singular or objective, but rather they are influenced by lived experiences, meanings, and social contexts (ontology). Therefore, this research will focus on context as coordinated with participants' subjective interpretation (epistemology). The paradigm of this research is best recognized within the interpretivism/constructivism paradigm, which was used to support this research and is highlighted in Figure 4.1 below.

Figure 4.1 Paradigms in Qualitative Research
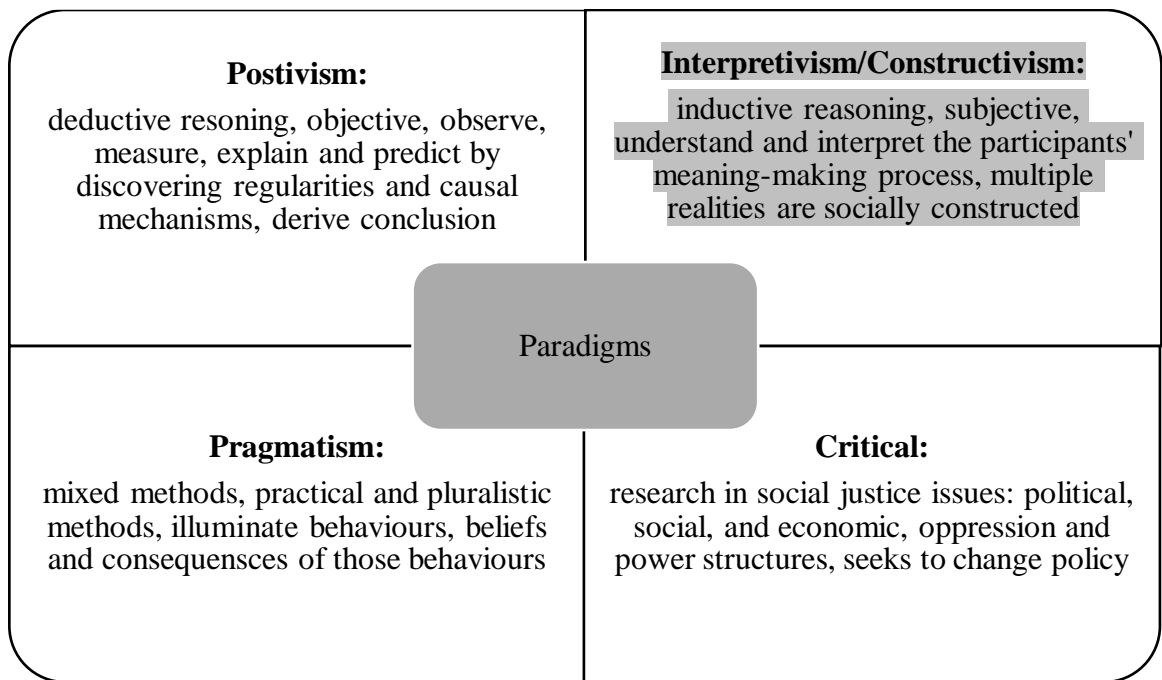
Adapted from Krauss (2005); Kivunja & Kuyini (2017)

4.2 Theory, Qualitative Research, and Grounded Theory

4.2.1 Theory and Qualitative Research

Qualitative research is recognized for its ability to focus on the complexities of the social world, the contextual actions and processes that take place, and the meanings which people ascribe to those lived experiences. Accounting for the influence of participants' cultural, historical, and social perspectives is important and can aid in describing, translating, understanding, and contrasting various phenomena (Patton 2002; Bryman 2004; Merriam 2009; Maxwell 2013). Interpretive qualitative research looks to the social constructs of reality and recognizes that there is not necessarily a unique, distinguishable reality (Merriam 2009). Though qualitative research is an investigation of typically subjective experiences, it is seen as valid, reliable research in that it focuses on the data and the experiences of the participants themselves.

Various strategies for qualitative research have been suggested, of which six of these methods are outlined in Table 4.2 below (Blaxter *et al.* 2010; Thomas 2013; Creswell 2014; Punch 2014). It is beyond the scope of this thesis to discuss all design strategies; however, these six potential methods helped to provide a variety of strategies to select between for this current investigation. Table 4.2 outlines these research methods and distinguishes the research problem, design of inquiry, analysis units necessary to

conduct the research, and the data analysis strategy involved (this thesis selection is shaded in grey).

Table 4.2 Comparative Features of Six Qualitative Research Methods

Feature	Grounded Theory	Phenomen-ology	Narrative Inquiry	Action Research	Case Study	Ethnography
Research problem	Ground a theory from participant perspective	Describe the essence of lived phenomenon	Tell stories of individual experience	Community issue needs to be addressed	Provide an in-depth understanding of case(s)	Describe and interpret cultural group shared patterns
Design of inquiry	Theory grounded in participant data from the field	Descriptive re: lived experience of phenomenon	Study based on stories of individuals' lives to further explore their life experience	Research a particular problem or issue within the community	In-depth analysis of a case(s), bounded by time and activity	Study shared patterns, beliefs, actions of cultural group over time
Analyses unit(s)	Individual(s) with shared experience	Individual(s) with shared phenomenon	Individual(s)	Entire community	Individual(s), event(s), program(s)	Cultural group
Data analysis strategy	Open coding, axial coding, selective coding	Textual and structural description, units or themes of meaning	Elements of a story, chronology	Community involvement in data analysis	Description of case(s) and themes within the case(s)	Analyse document, actions, beliefs

Adapted from Creswell *et al*. (2007); Creswell (2014); Creswell & Poth (2018)

Reviewing the various research methods, grounded theory emerged as the most suitable qualitative approach for this investigation. Within qualitative research, grounded theory is a systematic inductive method, which focuses on the developing theory that is grounded in the data. The tenets of grounded theory will be further delineated in subsequent sections; however, other designs were less appropriate for this study. For example, a strictly phenomenological approach would have provided rich details and descriptions of the lived experience of CCP, yet that data would not have lent itself to the construction of theory (Punch 2014). Narrative inquiry would have focused on individuals' stories to interpret the world and their experiences (Creswell 2014), which also would not have been as useful to develop theory. The same would be true of the other methods of which a case study would have provided in-depth info on a case(s), participatory/action research would have focused on a specific problem or issue to alleviate (Punch 2014), and ethnography would have provided in-depth data on a specific cultural group (Creswell & Poth 2018). Yet none of these would have contributed to

theory generation. Grounded theory seemed best suited to compliment and focus this research inquiry on theory development within this investigation.

4.3 Why Grounded Theory?

With consideration of the choice of method, the research design, the methodology, and the inferences supporting those methods, again, the question needs to be asked: Why grounded theory? The decision of methods and methodology depends on various factors, with one of the most significant factors being the research question being asked (Blaxter *et al.* 2010). One must be aware that choosing an appropriate research method is important in answering the research questions (Starks 2007). While grounded theory is compatible with both qualitative and quantitative research, this study is based primarily on a qualitative inquiry of long-term CCP practitioners. For me, when choosing a methodology, the importance of *grounding* theory in the personal life experience of others became evident. I chose to analyse the lived experiences of those for whom a long-term CCP practice had become a regular part of their spiritual discipline. Therefore, grounded theory with its qualitative, systematic approach allowed me to move comparatively between the participant data and various levels of abstraction, back to the data again (Charmaz 2014). In this way, I furthered my understanding of long-term CCP practice while gaining insight into the practitioners' lived experiences. Grounded theory established a framework which supported further understanding in this investigation of well-being grounded in the lived experience of CCP.

This method and its reliance on an inductive approach will benefit this study's aim to capture the meanings, experiences, and perceptions of CCP practitioners, which will be further developed in the substantive theory. With a continued reflexive awareness of my own paradigms and philosophical perspective, this research focused on the generation of substantive theory, as it was guided by this systematic, qualitative grounded theory approach. I have conducted semi-structured interviews and grounded my findings in the analysis of the subsequent data. In exploring the experiential perceptions of practitioners related to their CCP practices, I have chosen to use a grounded theory methodology and methods, which allowed me to more fully examine the practitioner's experiential relation of well-being within contemplative prayer. This study can then add to the limited data in this field of study.

4.3.1 Origins of Grounded Theory

In their 1967 influential book, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research,* Glaser and Strauss illuminated their concern that sociological qualitative research was focusing too much attention on verification of theory, rather than on actual theory generation. They insisted there had been a trend in sociology that emphasized continued verification, which assumed that the forefathers of sociology had already developed a substantial number of theories related to the vast areas of social life. When Glaser and Strauss (1967) published their *Discovery* book (as it came to be known), they proposed a methodology that would challenge the contemporary research methodologies and focus qualitative research on methods of analysis *and* the generation of new theory. They proposed 'the discovery of theory from data', which they called *Grounded Theory* (Glaser & Strauss 1967:1). Grounded theory was counter intuitive to some qualitative approaches, especially those that had been working to verify theories from the past. This 'innovative new inductive method' was a 'dramatic departure' from the standard deductive methods of inquiry in the middle of the twentieth century (Nathaniel 2011:187). Strauss and Corbin (1990:24) contended that grounded theory's focus was 'to build theory that is faithful to and illuminates the area under study'.

Grounded theory also served as a major method for conducting emergent qualitative research. The formation and development of grounded theory, and its use of emergent reasoning, was part of the larger methodological developments in the field of sociology. Charmaz (2008:155) suggested a 'working definition of an emergent method as inductive, indeterminate, and open-ended'. She further insisted that 'emergent methods are particularly well suited for studying uncharted, contingent, or dynamic phenomena'. This grounded theory inductive method meant the researcher did not begin with a hypothesis about a phenomenon to be studied, but rather they remained open to theories that would emerge through the data analysis process (Glaser & Strauss 1967; Strauss & Corbin 1990; Charmaz 2014). Their focus was on how the discovery of theory from the data could be further understood.

Within their concepts of grounded theory, Glaser and Strauss (1967) proposed that theories were beneficial in sociology to:

- predict and explain people's behaviour
- aid sociological theoretical progress
- support the practitioner in understanding their own situations
- illuminate perspectives on behaviour and guide related research

They further described theory as being understandable and also verifiable in future studies. Theories should also be able to *fit* 'the situation being researched', being relevant to and directly related the research data, and they should *work* when they are applied to the situation, being 'meaningfully relevant to' and able to explain the investigated behaviours (Glaser & Strauss 1967:3). These concepts of fit and work highlight theory generation which is relevant to understanding sociological phenomenon. They further recognize that grounded theories are not replaced through future research, since they are derived directly from the data; however, they can be modified and further developed.

Glaser and Strauss presented a new way of systematic qualitative research analysis that had its own reasoning in generating theory (Charmaz 2014; Kenny & Fourie 2015). Another unique characteristic of grounded theory is the fact that the data collection and analysis are carried out in a comparative and simultaneous manner (Glaser & Strauss 1967; Strauss & Corbin 1990; Sarker *et al.* 2001). Thus, grounded theory became a 'qualitative tradition built on compared concepts' (Scott 2004:113). This comparative analysis of concepts led to a richness of their developing interrelationships and became known as *conceptual density*, as it 'helps us to uncover as much variation as possible' (Strauss & Corbin 1990:109). They opposed the entrenched research philosophies of the time, by insisting that positivist quantitative research was not the only legitimate form of inquiry. They further argued for objectivist methods, as they positioned the researcher as impartial and detached (Glaser & Strauss 1967; Charmaz 2014; Kenny & Fourie 2015). This predominantly objectivist approach, with the researcher as an impartial observer, guided the initial developments of grounded theory as it aimed to improve research by linking the theory more dependently to the data. This was coupled with moving away from verification or the descriptive realm and into a more systematic methodology of theory generation. Further paradigm shifts have continued to guide the development of differing philosophical approaches within grounded theory. One of those shifts is the constructivist approach to grounded theory (Charmaz 2014).

4.4 Constructivist Grounded Theory

4.4.1 Social Constructionism and Constructivists

Another influence in the paradigm shifts found within grounded theory is social constructionism. This perspective helps to describe the constructing of knowledge about reality, but not necessarily universal knowledge about the reality itself (Patton 2002).

'Charmaz argues that classical GT localizes categories to data and ignores social reality relevant to the process of the logic of discovery' (Fram 2013:2). People interpret and construct their reality in such a way that their perception of reality is not necessarily the absolute truth about *that* reality, but rather it is shaped by their cultural and linguistic constructs of reality (Licqurish & Siebold 2011).

Social construction, also referred to as *constructivist* philosophy, is associated with *ontological relativity,* which describes the way in which all reasonable assertions about existence depend on a particular worldview (Charmaz 2014). Furthermore, worldviews can be unique and determined through an experiential sense about social life (Patton 2002). This is in opposition to objectivism which depicts the world as it is, and not as one perceives it to be. From this perspective, our understandings can be contextually bound being created interpersonally and therefore necessarily limited by external factors. Constructionism, on the other hand, is related to the generation and transmission of meaning as people construct knowledge about their reality, but not necessarily the reality itself. This constructivist approach to epistemology recognises the active process of the researcher in constructing knowledge rather than simply capturing an objective social reality (Anyan 2013). With the advancing of constructivist grounded theory there was the adoption of 'the inductive, comparative, emergent, and open-ended approach' within the classic grounded theory method, including an 'emphases on action and the meaning' found within pragmatism (Charmaz 2014:12-13). For Charmaz (2014:13), constructivist grounded theory 'highlights the flexibility of the method' rather than a more rigid application of it. Within this approach, both the participant and the researcher bring their assumptions, perspectives, and interactions into the midst of the research arena, and they cooperatively co-construct the data together.

Charmaz's (2014:13-14) choice of the term *constructivist grounded theory*, began in 1993 when she 'brought relativity and subjectivity into epistemological discussions of grounded theory'. She was discontent with researchers who were using social constructionist approaches, and yet they regarded their analysis as factual rather than constructions of them. These analyses were devoid of any recognition of the researcher's impact on the construction. They also did not utilize a reflexive stance, which would help to highlight subjectivity the researchers brought to the situation. Therefore, Charmaz (2014:14) used the term *constructivist* to distinguish the researcher's subjectivity and 'involvement in the construction and interpretation of data' and to delineate her approach from the 'conventional social constructionism of the 1980s and early 1990s'.

The constructivist grounded theory approach employed induction, comparison, emergence, and the open-ended method, which was originally proposed by Glaser and Strauss (1967). It included Strauss' 'iterative logic', and the 'dual emphases on action and meaning inherent in the pragmatist tradition' (Charmaz 2014:12-13). This more flexible approach avoided the more fixed practices of earlier versions. The recognizing of a construction of the research, rather than a simple discovery, illuminated the researcher's role in acknowledging their own subjectivity, and emphasized the need to be more reflexive in relation to their actions and the data analysis. The constructivist approach insisted that the researcher's 'perspective will direct their attention but not determine their research' and help them recognize that they are 'embedded in the research process rather than as distanced observers of empirical phenomena' (Charmaz 2008:160). Despite this new constructivist perspective, Charmaz (2008:161) insisted that the framework of grounded theory constituted a 'constellation of methods rather than an orthodox unitary approach'. This highlights the different viewpoints within grounded theory today, yet recognizing that they all follow an inductive, constant comparative approach, focusing on grounding the theory in the data. The grounded theory strategy can be utilized by various researchers, because the methods of coding, constant comparative analysis, and theory development can be applied within differing epistemological and ontological perspectives, in which the researcher recognizes their own particular stance (Charmaz 2014). As theories are generated from and grounded in the data, these insights can further aid in developing explanatory and predictive statements of the social world.

4.5 Grounded Theory Strategy

The strategy of grounded theory guides the research as the participant data begin to emerge in the developing codes through the data analysis. Through the continuing data analysis process, the properties ('characteristics or attributes of a category') and dimensions ('locations of a property along a continuum') of concepts are delineated (Strauss &Corbin 1990:69). These concepts advance the final conceptual categories, which lead to the inductively derived theory. In this way, the theory is grounded in the data rather than being deduced logically or hypothetically (Merriam 2009). The inductive methodology can be of an inherent advantage, because it helps the researcher focus on the data, accounting for implied meanings within a phenomena's intricacies. This

inductive process can direct an approach to researching 'the worlds we study and a method for developing theories to understand them' (Charmaz 2014:17).

This thesis is based on the idea that theory can emerge from the data as it unfolds into various patterns of experiential thought, behaviour, and meaning, giving greater insight into social phenomena. Grounded theory as a strategy systematically guides the collecting, analysing, and constant comparison of the qualitative data to develop theories (Glaser & Strauss 1967; Strauss & Corbin 1990; Charmaz 2014). Throughout the research design, there must be coherence between the aim or rationale of the research, the methodological approach, the methods utilized, and the philosophical position of the researcher. That congruence is also recognized 'between the research question (that is a researcher's assumptions about the nature of reality and how one might know reality) and the methods used to address the question' (Suddaby 2006:636). These philosophical perspectives not only guide the methods in conducting the research and the development of the subsequent theory or concentric work of idea development, but they must be recognized and reflected upon in meaningful ways throughout the entire investigation.

4.6 Theory Development

Developing theory through the grounded theory process can be seen in three primary stages of working with the data (Moghaddam 2006). The first stage illustrates how the data were gathered, why and with whom, in the progression of the developing initial codes. This stage involves the gathering and the interpretation of the data. The next stage begins to develop the theoretical and abstract concepts that are emerging from the data and beginning to point toward the developing theory. The final stage is the culmination of the data analysis, the emergent codes, and conceptual categories, with their subsequent interrelationship to the developing theory. This creates, as Moghaddam (2006:10) suggested, 'the explanatory power within the context of the research'. In this way, theory can be developed which is grounded in the participants' words and meanings related to their experiences. This research project will be based on the idea that theory can emerge from the data unfolding into various patterns of experiential thought, behaviour, and meaning.

4.6.1 Theory

In this investigation of the lived experience of long-term CCP practitioners, the aim was the grounded inductive generation of substantive theory. In qualitative research, theories contribute to such things as: answering questions about the social world, making predictions about future occurrences, illuminating social interactions, and developing propositions about society (Charmaz 2014). Theory is further characterized as:

- useful for describing 'observed regularities' (Bryman 2004:5)

- 'the aim of social science' (Punch 2014:9)

- 'an argument, a discussion, or a rationale, and it helps to explain (or predict) phenomena that occur in the world' (Creswell 2009:51)

- being 'developed through research and are understood as useful ways of describing the investigated social world' (Maxwell 2013:50)

Patton (2012:215) insisted that '[t]he most prestigious contribution to knowledge takes the form of a *theory* that explains the phenomena under investigation' and further that 'theories encapsulate the knowledge of a tradition'. Charmaz (2014) contended that discussions of theories themselves are rather abstract within the discourse of grounded theory methodology, and this reflected the vagueness as to what theory means in the social sciences. One could contend that a concise definition of theory is difficult, partly because a thorough explanation of lived social realities remains fluid. Data analysed through investigations and interpretations of a lived reality are sometimes the most accurate explanations available, and useful in the ongoing process of theory development.

4.6.2 Grounded Theory

In consideration of theory, which is inductively developed or grounded in the data, Charmaz (2014) insisted that positivist (which assumes there is a reality out there somewhere) and interpretivist (reality is socially constructed) orientations are the most influential. Punch (2014) insisted that rather than viewing these perspectives as separate, they should more appropriately be viewed as a continuum. So then, one might ask: *what is theory* if not a collection of abstract thoughts related to perspectives, thoughts, and meanings about the world which are verified, or in the case of grounded theory generated, directly from the data. The value of a theory 'is to explain the data, not just to collect the data and not just to use the data to describe things' (Punch 2014:9). These abstract ideas support theory development and provide a conceptual framework for exploring a phenomenon, situation, or behaviour. Additionally, there is a hierarchy within theory

development, which allows for the advancement of a theory within a gradient level of abstractness. This furthers developing theory, to create varying degrees of complex explanations of phenomena that occur in the social world.

The consideration of theory development, within grounded theory, is to produce theories that explain social phenomena, with these explanations being substantive (micro) or formative (macro) (Glaser & Strauss 1967). A substantive theory is grounded in data within a certain area of investigation, coding for patterns amongst specific cases wherein it is more focused on theory about substance or content found within the emerging concepts and patterns. Formative theories continue to rise out of the developing substantive theories and aim to provide more of a generalized conceptualization. As Glaser and Strauss (1967) insisted, continued analysis of substantive theories is required to move onto formative theory. These theories can become more generalized as they are developed through continued research and exploration of studied phenomenon in the context of the social world. Figure 4.2 below depicts how through the research process formative theory becomes the end point, as it is developed through various substantive theory investigations. Other substantive theories, presented in the literature, can impact the explorations of subsequent investigations, which can mutually influence the more generalized evolution of the formative theory (Maxwell 2013). Not only does theory become the end point, but through careful qualitative research the theories and perspectives of the participants also come to be valued. They become part of the final grounded theory, rather than becoming isolated by simply relying on accepted theoretical perspectives or the researcher's own philosophical views (Maxwell 2013; Charmaz 2014). The goal of this research, within Christian spirituality, is the development of a substantive theory of the lived experience of long-term CCP practitioners. This can contribute to the continued academic development of formative theories and paradigm shifts, regarding this prayer practice.

Figure 4.2 Theory Development
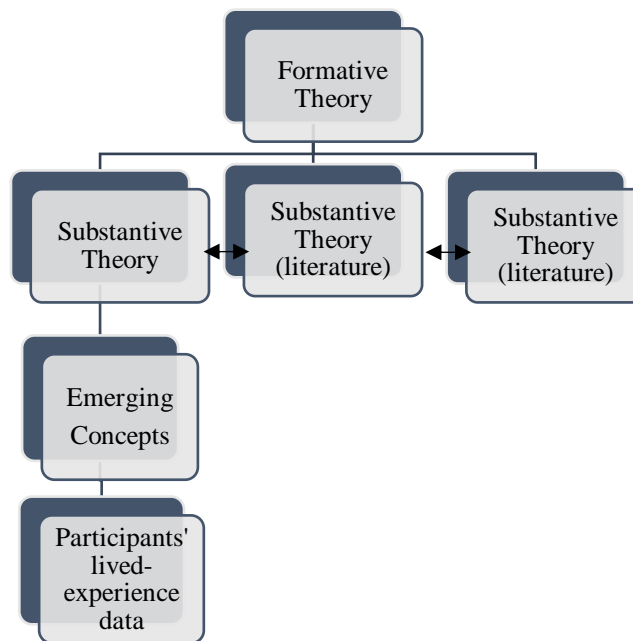
Adapted from Glaser & Strauss 1967

4.7 Assessing Theory Development

This section focuses on the conceptual aspects of theory development which guided this study. It is important to be aware of what theory is not, so the research does not become clouded by extraneous information that might be interesting, and yet does not contribute to the greater theoretical understanding within the investigation. The focus must remain on key elements of theory development, in order to continue in the grounded theory process from data collection and analysis to the advancement of theoretical insights.

4.7.1 Data is Not Theory

The grounded theory method of gathering and analysing data was a vital aspect of this study; however, the data, references, and figures included in the findings chapter, while helping to delineate observable patterns, are not actually the theory (Sutton & Staw 1995). Analysing these patterns is an important tenet of the grounded theory process and is imperative for theory development (Glaser & Strauss 1967). The data describe the empirical observations and interpretations of that data, but the theory explains these patterns and subsequent relationships among the patterns (Sutton & Staw 1995). Through a process which DiMaggio (1995:393) referred to as '"strategic reduction"', data have

been refined to develop the insights which are critical to the developing theory. Furthering these data through the explanation of relationships and connections are 'the domain of theory' (Whetten 1989:493). As these connections are being developed, it is also important to integrate theoretical arguments with the extant literature. These connections have been vital in the continuing research process of this substantive grounded theory development.

4.7.2 Building Upon Extant Literature

As the theory progresses, Sutton and Staw (1995) suggested that single research ideas are foundational in developing strong theories, yet the researcher must remember that however substantial the new ideas are it is equally important to recognize the influence of current scholarship. Researchers need to link developing concepts and arguments from cited references to the new theory being developed. DiMaggio (1995:392) emphasized the importance of 'defamiliarization', which is a process that can allow others to see their 'world with new eyes'. Good theory can help to generate new perspectives and insights related to the subject matter. As Weick (1989:519) insisted, this process must also allow a 'little appreciation of the often intuitive, blind, wasteful, serendipitous, creative quality of the process'. Through this creative process of building upon the literature with new theoretical ideas, this current research can contribute to the corpus of Christian spirituality scholarship in this exploration of CCP.

4.7.3 Developing Strong Theory

Theories can be advanced as they demonstrate how the new concepts are re-orienting current understanding (Whetten 1989). Based on these abstract developments, strong theory can further explore relationships and processes within a phenomenon, presenting interconnected arguments which advance understanding. As Sutton and Staw (1995:378) suggested, the theory 'can have implications that we have not seen with our naked (or theoretically unassisted) eye. It may have implications that run counter to our common sense'.

4.7.4 The What, How, and Why of Theory Development

Theory needs to incorporate aspects related to the questions of what, how and even more importantly why. Developing answers to the why questions are imperative for building theory. The *Why* questions will aid in the understanding of the meanings and dynamics

which underlie the phenomena (Whetten 1989). Whetten (1989) emphasized the importance of comprehensiveness with the data, related to the *What* questions. Additionally, the *How* question asks about relationships. The Why questions explain the interconnectedness of the What and How. These relationships are depicted in Figure 4.3 below.

Figure 4.3 What, How, and Why of Building Theory
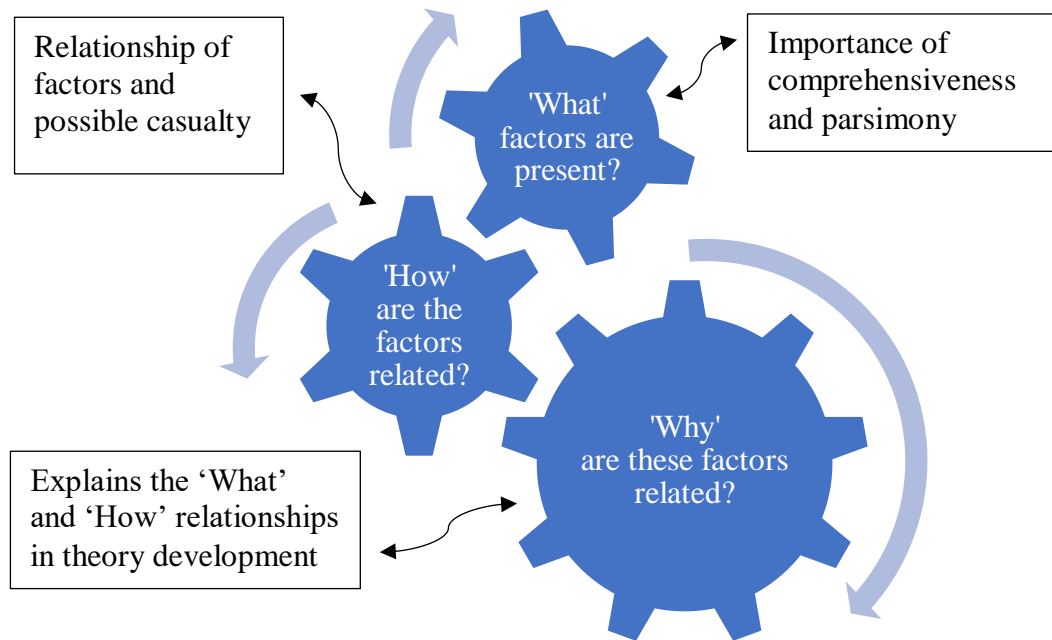
Adapted from Whetten 1989

4.7.5 Conclusion of Theory Development

The presentation in Chapter 6 will delineate the factors and their relationships within the data that have served to develop the theoretical understanding of the lived experience of CCP among long-term practitioners. Through the analysis, the data have been comprehensively and strategically reduced to aid in the development of the substantive grounded theory. The critical factors and their relationships will be interconnected in building the theoretical understanding of underlying dynamics within this phenomenon, especially as it relates to long-term CCP practitioners. While some studies have investigated the experience of CCP practitioners, research involving the lived experience of long-term CCP practitioners is scant. The theoretical understanding will be built upon literature which has brought insights to light within this practice. As Sutton and Staw (1995:383) insisted, future research serves to indicate 'whether the theoretical statements hold up under scrutiny'. Whetten (1989:491) argued that '[i]f the theoretical model is a

useful guide for research, by definition, all the relationships in the model have not been tested. If all links have been empirically verified, the model is ready for the classroom and is of little value in the laboratory'. Future research can continue to verify, expand, challenge, and build upon this investigation's substantive grounded theory.

4.8 Data Collection Strategy

The interview is recognised as an important element of qualitative research data collection strategy (Blaxter *et al.* 2010; DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree 2006; Qu & Dumay 2011; Anyan 2013; Thomas 2013; Charmaz 2014; Punch 2014). As noted, qualitative researchers Barbara DiCicco-Bloom and Benjamin Crabtree (2006:314) insisted: 'The purpose of the qualitative research interview is to contribute to a body of knowledge that is conceptual and theoretical and is based on the meanings that life experiences hold for the interviewees'. Kvale (1983:1740) further contended that the objective of the interview is 'to gather descriptions of the life-world of the interviewee with respect to interpretation of the meaning of the described phenomena'. Qualitative interviews are generally categorized as structured, semi-structured, or unstructured (open-ended, discursive style), with in-depth semi-structured interviews being the most widely utilized with either individuals or in focus groups (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree 2006). Utilizing semi-structured interviews within this investigation provided an approach that was more flexible in helping to guide the process of gathering data and allowing the participant to share various aspects of their CCP lived experiences (deMarrais 2004; Qu & Dumay 2011). While the interview can seem to be an opportunity for dialogue and questioning, a skilled, prepared, and reflexive interviewer can collect data beyond the casual conversation. In this way, the interviews can be useful for research purposes of a particular phenomenon (Qu & Dumay 2011).

4.8.1 The Interview
The setting of the interview, the perspectives and openness of the interviewee, and the approach of the interviewer all help to create the distinctness of each interview. Recognizing the potential for power imbalances, the mutualistic approach of the interview identifies 'that the research process is an interactive one between interviewers and interviewees as dyadic relationships through discourse are developed' (Qu & Dumay 2011:261). In this grounded theory study, the participant interview was recognized as an

interactive opportunity to receive data from the participants' perspective and to explore their CCP lived experiences.

Power imbalance — The qualitative interview can also be seen as an asymmetry of power in which the researcher directs the discourse and asks the questions, with an expectation that the participant will be open and honest as they give their responses (deMarrais 2004; Qu & Dumay 2011). As the interview progresses, under the interviewer's direction, the interviewee may also elicit counter measures such as: hesitancy to answer a question, resistance, and determent of a question (Kvale 2006; Anyan 2013). Without controlling the focus on the interview, there is the risk of not gathering data necessary for the research. A prepared interviewer can help minimize power shifts by building rapport and a sincere sense of trust with the interviewee as quickly as possible.

4.8.2 The Interviewer

The interviewer must be responsive and sensitive to allow for the interviewee to respond fully to each aspect of their experience that is discussed (Qu & Dumay 2011). A prepared interviewer needs to recognize skills that can be beneficial in interviewing, for example: developing rapport with the interviewee, understanding ways to keep discussion going, recognizing opportunities to probe an answer more deeply, active listening, patiently allowing for silence that can give opportunity for the interviewee to consider the answer more fully, and adopting a non-judgemental attitude.

Being prepared — A prepared interviewer is vital to a successful interview to make efficient use of the time allotted in the interview and to create the most fertile opportunity to gather rich informational data.

Developing Rapport — Developing a positive interaction quickly is an important characteristic of the interview process (deMarrais 2004; DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree 2006). Rapport can help instil trust and respect into the relational aspect of the interview. This approach helps to provide a safe and comfortable space for the participant to feel secure in sharing their personal experiences as well as the associated feelings and meanings (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree 2006).

Active listening — Being an active and attentive listener is an important aspect of the research interviewer, being attentive to subtle messages or hesitancy from the participant (deMarrais 2004; Qu & Dumay 2011). These hesitancies can reveal something more to be shared or the need to allow a pause for the participant to gather their thoughts on the topic (Qu & Dumay 2011). Techniques such as 'rephrasing a statement, or simply through semi-verbal sounds, nods or body language' can encourage further elaboration (Qu & Dumay 2011:250). The interviewer needs to recognize that relevant issues are not always right at the surface and sometimes utilize other styles of questions to continue more information sharing (Qu & Dumay 2011).

Allowing silence — Brief moments of silence can provide the interviewee an opportunity 'to reflect and gather energy' in order to answer a question more fully, or to gather their thoughts to elaborate on their answer (Qu & Dumay 2011:251). Interviewers need to develop an ability to create space for silence if the interviewee seems to appreciate it (Qu & Dumay 2011).

Utilizing other question styles — Semi-structured interviews often begin with the questions that were prepared and thought out ahead of time. It is important for the interviewer to be able to appropriately utilize and reflect upon other types of questions, such as the probing questions (Appendix 5). This can allow further developments related to the specific participant's experience, interests, and knowledge (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree 2006).

4.8.3 Interviewer Reflexivity

In looking to the genuineness of the investigation, attention needs to be given to a strategy sometimes referred to as the *researcher's position* or more recently *reflexivity* (Merriam 2009; Charmaz 2014). The aspect of a researcher's influence on the study is often highlighted as a factor that reaches well beyond the choosing of a topic to study or the research design, to the research questions themselves, the interaction with the participants, and even the thoroughness of the research (Blaxter *et al.* 2010; Roulston 2010; Charmaz 2014). The theoretical assumptions and biases, whether explicit or not, inform the overall design, analysis, and final data representation. Researchers can import their own biases into a study, but 'engaging in reflexivity and invoking grounded theory strategies can challenge their previously taken-for-granted actions and assumptions'

(Charmaz 2008:163). We need to realize, as Frohlich (2019:133) argued, 'that everyone, without exception, has a standpoint and biases that inevitably affect one's research'. The research process is not neutral, and it is important to remember values, opinions, beliefs, social background, and religious affiliation are all part of what the researcher can bring to the research process. I appreciated the insights gained from those of a different Christian tradition from me, and I believe this process allowed me to be continually open to their perspectives, meanings, and experiences.

Holmes (2020:3) argued for the importance, especially for new researchers, to recognize ways in which 'their positionality not only shapes their work but influences their interpretation, understanding, and ultimately, their belief in the truthfulness and validity of other's research that they read or are exposed to'. Recognizing 'the multifaceted ways in which identity' can influence the research process, the complexities of positionality also need to be considered Secules (2021:20). Vanner (2015:10) insisted that positionality in the reflexive process is a 'fundamental undertaking' for all researchers. Secules (2021:23) argued that Contextualizing Methodology positionality statements are 'rooted in the social sciences' and are useful to contextualize the researcher within the research topic and the methodology.

Therefore, from a positionality perspective of Contextualizing Methodology, I am reflexively aware that I can influence this research process through the complexities of my own multi-faceted positionality. I am also aware that it can be difficult to realize the exact ways in which my own positionality influences the research process or changes throughout the research. As Holmes (2020:2) insisted, [i]t is important for new researchers to note that their values can, frequently, and usually do change over time'. Within my positionality, I recognize myself as an American, Pentecostal woman researching primarily among American Christians on the topic of CCP. As a Christian, I have always valued prayer and perceived it as an important part of my own spiritual discipline and relationship with God; however, just as Luhrmann (2012) noted prayers' association in relation to talking with God, I too understood prayer as primarily a way to talk to God, without an emphasis on listening to God. Through my scientific exposure to meditation's potential influence on well-being,[39] I became interested in looking at this influence from a Christian spirituality perspective, and I discovered CCP. Although I had not been exposed to CCP within my own religious tradition, I proposed a research project

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[39] I share more about this initial introduction in Section 7.6 Personal Reflections on Self-Implication.

that focused on the lived experience of CCP in the long-term practitioners' life. I also found this topic was not well received among some within my own Pentecostal tradition. Yet, one Pentecostal scholar encouraged me with these words: 'Wow, this is a striking topic as a Pentecostal. I am pleased that you have courageously taken this into rigorous academic research. Good for all of us'. I approached this study with the willing, open-mindedness of a novice in CCP and have learned greatly from my research participants. I have tried to maintain a reflexive, academic perspective throughout this research, and as Holmes (2020:2) contended: 'Reflexivity informs positionality'. The findings in this investigation have further informed my own religious positionality, helping to create an openness to adopt this practice into my own spiritual discipline.

Considerations of reflexivity include the fact that the researcher's understandings and biases can also be informed by the research itself. As qualitative research scholar, Kathryn Roulston (2010) insisted, the qualitative researcher can learn by what they do and also by what they reflect upon throughout their study. This emphasized the importance of taking a reflexive stance throughout the research process, being open to learning about oneself and recognizing changes that may even take place within the personal space of the researcher. That private realm within the researcher including attitudes, preconceptions, thoughts, cultural influence, and background, needs to be recognized as an important part of the research work being done. As Charmaz (2014:240) insisted: 'Conducting and writing research are not neutral acts'. This recognition should guide one to become a reflexive researcher, and to be aware of the value in considering one's impact on the study itself. Though qualitative research is an exploration of values, biases, and the subjective experience of participants, it is also important for the researcher to be willing to evaluate their own personal views as well (Suddaby 2006). This will allow the researcher to have a clearer lens with which to analyse and give greater authenticity to the views of the participants found within the emerging data.

Another important aspect of qualitative research is the fact that the researcher is the primary instrument for the data collection and subsequent analysis. Charmaz (2014) insisted on the importance of recognizing the construction that is present within the research process and not simply the discovery, which can stimulate greater reflexivity of the researcher's efforts and decisions. Researchers need to be transparent enough to express and evaluate their own assumptions, experiences, worldview, theoretical orientation, and biases related to the research being undertaken. Reflexivity has become an important element in qualitative research as it generates greater self, other, and cultural

awareness, and additionally helps the researcher to better acknowledge their own perspectives (Patton 2002).

As the researcher is willing to recognize their own position, they can acknowledge 'the need for constant reflexivity instead of denying prior knowledge, perspectives and privileges, and pretending to be without preconceptions and theoretical influences' (Thornberg 2012:255). In this way, there is a reflexive allowance of the emergence of concepts forming from the data, such that the thoughts, actions, experiences, and the associated meanings are clearly represented. As one moves further along the continuum towards theory development, there is value in recognizing the iterative and comparative aspects, and additionally the interactive component within the analytic space.

The following techniques aided in my own reflexive positioning throughout this investigation. They were not always executed in any particular order, but they were part of an open, fluid approach to understanding the meanings behind the participants' CCP practice. These included:

- recognizing the difficulty in eliminating subjectivity completely although the effect was minimized by a continued reflexive awareness

- maintaining an open, listening demeanour throughout the interview, even if their perspectives on God, faith, prayer, and lifestyle differed from mine

- remembering I was not there just to interrogate them, but to listen, learn, and develop an understanding of what *their* prayer practice meant to *them*

- using memos to help guide the investigation towards the meaning of actions and experiences, in an effort to gain greater depth and understanding of participants' CCP practice.

- taking care to not allow my coding practice to become too general or to only summarize the data rather than analyse it

- identifying processes and actions in the way which participants constructed them

- looking carefully at the data to not overlook details that might have seemed to me of lesser importance, in an effort to not interpret through my own biased lens

- comparing data throughout the analysis, with similar uses of phrases or incidents, to help maintain an awareness of any biases appearing through my interpretation

In this study, a reflexive focus was maintained throughout the research design, data collection, analysis, and theory generation, as it was recognized that this reflexive approach needed to be an integral active awareness throughout the course of this research.

The focus of the analysis was to make sense of and interpret the phenomena, looking for the meanings that the individuals brought to them. These are some of the principal responsibilities of the qualitative researcher (Swinton & Mowat 2009). This is not only a progressive evolution of the research process, but also as a part of the development of a nascent researcher. As I maintained a reflexive approach, the meanings and experiences of the participants were able to be interpreted more clearly, rather than simple being translated through my own biased perspective. Through this investigative work, I have come to understand and appreciate CCP not only as a beneficial prayer practice in the lived experience of practitioners but also as a spiritual discipline in my own life.

Continued reflexive work throughout the data analysis brought an increasing awareness of significance to be found within the data. Through the process of constant comparison in the analysis, the goal was to develop greater concepts and theories through the process of 'comparing data with data, data with code, code with code, code with category, and category with concept' (Charmaz 2014:342). Being aware of my own perspective and the efforts involved to set those aside helped to bring clarity and understanding to the participants' lived experience of their CCP practice. These efforts and awareness furthered a greater depth of meaning within the data, and ultimately within this phenomenon.

4.9 Data Analysis Strategy

Through the use of inductive and abductive reasoning, the data analysis begins to recognize patterns within the emerging data. This is further supported by the processes of theoretical sampling, theoretical sensitivity, and theoretical saturation. These strategies help to provide a supportive framework for the data analysis process.

4.9.1 Analysing the Data

Grounded theory is based on inductive reasoning which begins with observations about the data. Through the coding methods, the researcher advances the iterative process of working towards the developing theoretical insights and understandings within the study (Charmaz 2014). These codes emerge inductively from the data in such a way that helps to interpret what is going on within the data. This process differs from deductive methods which apply preconceived categories or codes to the data, whereas grounded theory inductive codes emerge based on what is seen in the data. This inductive method is

utilized throughout the coding process (Strauss & Corbin 1990). Then as the data are dissected through the coding process, they are also abductively reintegrated back together (Charmaz 2014). This is a constant comparative process that allows for a continual interactive approach to data analysis, as the conceptual categories leading to theory become more fully developed.

This abductive logic is applied to the inductive data and used to facilitate the analysis of any surprising findings (Charmaz 2008). Abduction begins with the observations in the inductive data, and then through this abductive process the researcher seeks greater theoretical explanations that relate back to the data. 'The Latin etymology of *abduction* suggests a leading away. In the context of research, *abduction* refers to an inferential creative process of producing new hypotheses and theories based on surprising research evidence. A researcher is led away from old to new theoretical insights' (Timmermans & Tavory 2012:170). Abduction brings a level of creativity in which the researcher, in analysing the data, begins to look for plausible explanations of the patterns that are emerging. In this way, the researcher proposes useful inferences from the observations in the data. Grounded theory's inductive logic 'moves into abductive reasoning as the researcher seeks to understand emergent findings' (Charmaz 2008:157). Possible theoretical explanations are considered. Through constant iterative, careful work, these abductive codes and categories are utilized because of their ability to illuminate more fully what is going on in the data. This process continues towards theory generation. As Eaves (2001:658) noted, the process of grounded theory is not a linear but rather a recursive process where 'at any one time the grounded theorist is in various stages of the process depending upon the concept, category, or pattern under examination'. Through this process, grounded theory continues to work towards the generation of plausible theoretical explanations for the surprising data.

4.9.2 Theoretical Sampling and Coding Perspectives

Theoretical sampling — According to Charmaz (2008:166), [t]heoretical sampling keeps a study grounded'. For grounded theory researchers, theoretical sampling occurs as possible concepts are beginning to develop and are in need of further clarification. Abductive reasoning is also a valuable influence in theoretical sampling. Once findings are discovered that do not seem to fit the emerging pattern, then the process of abduction is employed. Through this process, new and greater theoretical inferences emerge. Theoretical sampling strategy can be used to help examine these new concepts and their

properties and dimensions, and to refine and develop them more fully (Charmaz 2008:166). Theoretical sampling develops out of the process of always working with and challenging the developing abstract, emerging thoughts (Glaser & Holton 2004; Moghaddam 2006). Theoretical sampling can help elaborate the developing concepts, and it can also link different categories together (Glaser & Strauss 1967; Tuckett 2004; Kenny & Fourie 2015). At this point, the researcher needs to push the boundaries of the substantive findings and ask the question: So, what? (Charmaz 2014). Theoretical sampling strategy can include interviewing or re-interviewing participants (Moghaddam 2006), but it can also utilize processes like examination of documents or conducting participant/observations, to bring greater clarity to the developing categories (Charmaz 2014). This process is shaped by developing ideas, as it furthers the refining of those concepts. Theoretical sampling can help illuminate theoretical understandings, delineate the variations, and further develop the meanings within categories of data. These variations can be further investigated through the awareness of theoretical sensitivity.

Theoretical sensitivity — The aspect of theoretical sensitivity is an important element in theory construction. This is recognized in a constant interaction with the data and 'the ability to recognize what is important in data and to give it meaning' (Strauss & Corbin 1990:46). Charmaz (2014:245) suggested that researchers can increase their theoretical sensitivity through the use of gerunds,[40] as these words can influence thinking beyond the 'static topics and into enacted processes' that are embedded in the participant data. Theoretical sensitivity maintains the ability to explain the data abstractly, seeking for the meanings in the emergent patterns, and recognizing the specific properties found within the constructed concepts used to describe the data (Charmaz 2014). Theoretical sensitivity can give direction to the data analysis and give indication as to 'what to do next' (Cho & Lee 2014:4). Through theoretical sampling and sensitivity, a final level of theoretical saturation can be achieved (Marshall *et al.* 2013).

Theoretical saturation — Theoretical saturation is attained when the dimensions, properties, and concepts of a conceptual category are saturated with data (Charmaz 2008). This process involves continually gathering new research participants until the data are complete, and no new characteristics are emerging from the data (Glaser & Strauss 1967;

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[40] Gerunds are derived from verbs, but function as nouns in an effort to highlight and focus the coding on action. Gerunds will be presented more thoroughly in section 4.11 Data Analysis Methods.

Moghaddam 2006; Marshall *et al.* 2013; Charmaz 2014). The focus is not just the repetition of similarity in the data, but rather it is the comparing of the data until no new properties within the concepts emerge. Theoretical saturation is facilitated through the process of constant comparison, in which there were no new recurring patterns or themes that arise from the data analysis (Tuckett 2004; Charmaz 2014). However, as Morse (2000) contended, the estimation of appropriate sample size to reach theoretical saturation depends on various factors which can include: the scope and nature of the topic, the quality and amount of data rich information gathered from each interview, the qualitative research method chosen and the overall design of the research. Marshall *et al.* (2013) also added the importance of sampling procedures and the experience of the researcher as factors needed to achieve saturation. 'Premature departure from the field may well result in data that are only partly analysed and therefore fail to elevate obvious categorizations to a more abstract theoretical level' (Suddaby 2006:636). The researcher maintains reflexive awareness of theoretical developments within the study and thereby continues to adjust their process throughout the research.

4.10 Conclusion of Methodology

The first part of this chapter considered the methodological aspects of this grounded theory research. The remainder of this chapter will address the specific methods used as the grounded methodology was utilized in this investigation. Details in the following sections indicate the ethical considerations, procedures, techniques, researcher's reflexive awareness, and finally the specific attention to this thesis' trustworthiness, transparency, and authenticity.

4.11 Ethical Considerations

In giving attention to ethical responsibility for this investigation, it was important to seek ethical approval from the governing board and to take steps to ensure the confidentiality of the participants. Although ethics approval was a singular action, an awareness of ethical practices was maintained throughout the investigation.

4.11.1 Ethical Approval

Careful consideration was given to ethical concerns, as this process is often a balance between requirements of the governing institution associated with the research, the aims of the study, and the rights and confidentiality of the participants (Orb *et al.* 2000; Smith 2003; Blaxter *et al.* 2010; Thomas 2013; Punch 2014). This procedural aspect of the research also helps to ensure the researcher gives attention to their role within the research study. The ethics of a study encompass the full scope of thinking and conduct of a researcher's work. One must realize that what may seem right to the researcher may not be in the best interest of the participants and could create unintended and unforeseen consequences (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree 2006; Thomas 2013). As part of the ethical considerations given in this investigation, decisions were made regarding information that the participants should be given before they consented to take part in this study (Smith 2003; DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree 2006). Therefore, attention was given to sharing with participants the purpose of the research, expected duration of their time commitment, their right to decline answering a particular question or to withdraw at any point, the measures that would be taken to protect their confidentiality, and how they could follow up with any questions after the study. This was an important step prior to asking the individual to give their informed consent to participate (Orb *et al.* 2000; Thomas 2013). Once participants had been properly informed, each participant received an *Information Sheet for All Participants* (Appendix 6). After they had read this form and had the opportunity to ask any further questions, they then had the opportunity to sign the *Consent Form for Participants* which was kept in a secure file throughout the study (Appendix 7). If they had no further questions, the recorded interview began. Ethical approval for this research study and its associated research questions were obtained through the Oxford Centre for Mission Studies' Research Ethics Committee in January 2018. All participants were over 18-years of age and did not report any impaired mental capacity in the interviews. The ethical risk to participants was recognized as minimal.

4.11.2 Safeguarding Confidentiality

Maintaining participant confidentiality, throughout the research process, is vital (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree 2006). Recorded interview names were withheld unless the interviewee chose to use them or had agreed to their use if necessary. Otherwise, they were always referred to by their participant number (P#) throughout the write-up (Smith 2003). Care was also given to maintain a sense of professionalism and to preserve an

awareness of ethical considerations throughout the study. These practical confidential measures were deemed essential and were maintained throughout the participant recruitment and duration of the study (Orb *et al.* 2000; Smith 2003; Thomas 2013).

4.12 Participant Sampling and Fieldwork

This section presents the participant demographics, including the three phases of participant recruitment and subsequent interviews. The study began with a technique known as purposive sampling. This type of sampling can be used to identify and select participants who are most relevant and most knowledgeable or experienced with the topic of the study (Patton 2000; Graneheim & Lundman 2004; Morrow 2005; Thomas 2013). In this case, participants were sought who were representatives of CCP practices within the Catholic, Anglican, Episcopal and other Protestant Christian traditions. Phases one through three were further developed through a process of snowball sampling. Each phase concluded with theoretical sampling, until theoretical saturation was achieved with the culmination of data collection in phase three.

4.12.1 Participant Sampling Demographics

Following the development of the research design and the fulfilment of ethical considerations, the next significant step was recruitment of information rich participants. Marshall *et al.* (2013:11) insisted that after the research topic and design have been developed, no research endeavour is more essential 'to creating credible research than obtaining an adequate sample'. The selection of participants and the final sample size requires as much consideration as the data analysis, because of the need to gather quality data to support excellence in data analysis (Morse 2000; Tuckett 2004; DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree 2006). In this research, best practices were utilized to account for the reasoning behind the eventual sample size and its relation to theoretical saturation (Glaser & Strauss 1967; Marshall *et al.* 2013; Charmaz 2014). Table 4.3 and Table 4.4 below delineate this iterative process of participant recruitment, including all three phases, conducted from May 2018 through August 2020. Other unsuccessful attempts related to participant sampling were made during phase one as indicated in Appendix 8.

Table 4.3 Phase One and Two of Participant Sampling

Centering Prayer Participants within Contemplative Outreach- May 2018

Centering Prayer — seven interviews
Contact with leadership from CONW led to interviews with affiliates in the Pacific Northwest region of the USA. These seven interviewees were local prayer group leaders and prayer practitioners in the organization.

Centering Prayer Participants at St. Placid Priory in Lacey, Washington - May 2018

St. Placid Priory — three interviews
Three interviews with Benedictines who were affiliates of the priory, and who were familiar with Contemplative Outreach.

Other Christian Contemplative Prayer Participants - July through September 2018

Lutheran — four interviews
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA):
The Pacific Northwest Washington Synod of the ELCA recommended two pastors in Seattle, Washington and one church office staff member. Through snowball sampling, I also interviewed an additional Lutheran participant.

Presbyterians — one interview
Contacted 1 church
The Northwest Regional office in the USA recommended one pastor who I interviewed.

Methodist — one interview
This participant was the result of snowball sampling.

Catholic — two interviews
These participants were the result of snowball sampling.

Conference Participants - September 2018

World Community for Christian Meditation (WCCM) Participants — three interviews
Attendance at the WCCM John Main Seminar and associated Silent Retreat in September 2018 led to three more interviews with members of this organization.

Table 4.4 Phase Three of Participant Sampling

Theoretical sampling and subsequent snowball sampling– July through August 2020
Fifteen interviews

Following the phase one and two of iterative data collection and analysis, the subsequent emerging codes and theoretical sampling resulted in 15 additional participants.

The study population was comprised of Christian individuals who had maintained some form of CCP practice for two to forty plus years, varying from twice daily to averaging approximately four times a week. They had seasons of very consistent CCP practice and times that had waned slightly. Some participants belonged to larger international organizations such as CO or the WCCM, while others were supported within their own individual or group practices. Participants included those from Catholic, Anglican, Episcopal, Lutheran, Methodist, and Presbyterian traditions (Appendix 9).

4.12.2 Participant Sampling and Interview Phases

Participant sampling and associated interviews occurred in three phases between May 2018 and August 2020. The sampling included purposive, snowball, and theoretical sampling, until theoretical saturation was attained (Figure 4.4 below).

Figure 4.4 Data Collection and Analysis: Phase One through Three

PHASE ONE	PHASE TWO	PHASE THREE
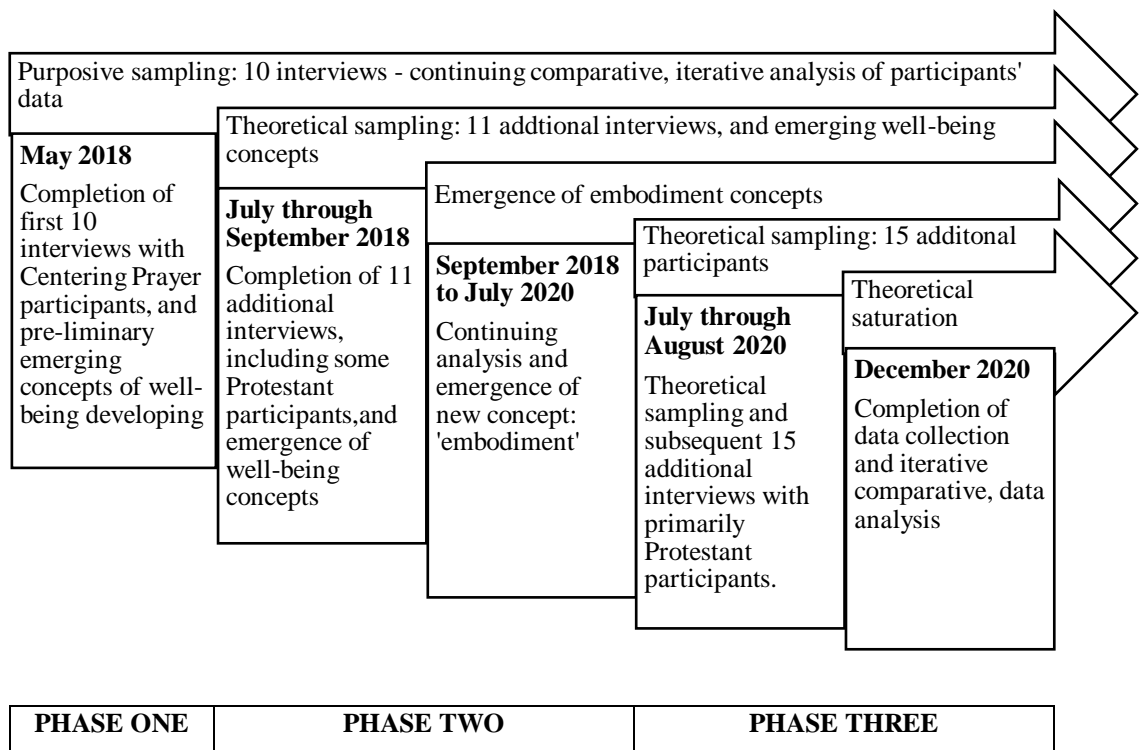
Phase one — Research participants were located through a search of Christian religious groups and organizations that might include members who practised CCP. Contact was first made at the national and regional offices of various American Christian denominations and CCP organizations. These phone calls primarily led to the denomination's or the organization's particular stand on the topic of CCP, their expressed

disinterest in the topic, the individual on the phone expressing interest in the research yet unaware of any practitioners, or a referral to another contact. These further contacts then led to no contacts, a potential interview, or more local resources that eventually supported a process of snowball sampling to generate participants. Snowball sampling was useful, as it allowed for increasing potential participants through other informants or participants (Morrow 2005; Blaxter *et al.* 2010; Charmaz 2014). Additionally, contact was made with CO, an international contemplative prayer organization headquartered in St. Benedict's monastery in Snowmass, Colorado, USA, which led to contact information for those in CO leadership or prayer groups here locally in Washington state.

Phase two — After the initial ten interviews were completed, a search was initiated within the leadership of some Protestant denominations for other CCP practitioners, in order to further integrate potential Protestant CCP practitioners. This approach sometimes led to local contacts, or to the denomination's stance on contemplative/meditative prayer. Between July and September 2018, eight more interviews were conducted including Catholic, Lutheran, Methodist, Presbyterian, and Catholic traditions. This led to a total of 18 participant interviews.

In August 2018 contact was also made with WCCM, which is an international CCP organization headquartered, at that time, in London, England.[41] This organization also has a Benedictine affiliation in that much of the leadership are Benedictines, some of whom live at the associated Bonnevaux monastery in Poitiers, France. This contact was followed up with my own attendance at the 2018 World Community for Christian Meditation's annual John Main Seminar in Bruges, Brussels and the associated Silent Retreat in Torhout, Belgium. This led to three more interviews and a brief non-taped meeting with Lawrence Freeman,[42] concluding with 21 participants.

Phase three — This phase followed a substantial amount of iterative, constant comparative interviewing and coding of the data. As codes were developed, a surprising concept of *embodiment* began to emerge through the abductive reasoning process and theoretical sensitivity. At that point, additional theoretical sampling generated 15 additional interviews, in which subsequent analysis achieved theoretical saturation. Due

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[41] At the time of this study, the WCCM was in the process of restoring Bonnevaux, a monastery in Poitiers, France, and eventually making that their international home. https://bonnevauxwccm.org

[42] www.wccm.org: Father Laurence Freeman OSB is the Director and Spiritual Leader for the WCCM. The OSB is the abbreviation for the Order of Saint Benedict, which is a particular monastic religious order of monks and nuns who follow the Rule of Saint Benedict.

to the COVID-19 global pandemic,[43] and various subsequent local and global quarantine mandates, those additional interviews were all conducted via Zoom.[44] Online learner scholar Helen Scott (2011) insisted that successful interviewing can be conducted through online video communication, especially if it is a technology that is familiar to both participant and researcher. Each study participant was very well acquainted with Zoom technology.

4.13 Interviews

This section reports the interview design process which included consideration of sampling of participants, how many interviews were necessary, what type of interview to conduct, all in preparation of the subsequent interview data analysis (Qu & Dumay 2011).

4.13.1 Interview Strategy

Phase one and phase two included the first 21 interviews and were conducted face-to-face. These semi-structured interviews opened up an interactive space for mutual discussion and for the participant to share. The interview questions allowed for flexible, convenient, and effective means of generating discussion and collecting data. This process assisted in the development of in-depth understandings of CCP practitioners' lived experience (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree 2006; Blaxter *et al.* 2010; Qu & Dumay 2011; Charmaz 2014). Through the collection and analysis of these interviews, discoveries were made regarding the meanings, feelings, perceptions, beliefs, and motivations of participants who practised CCP (Burnard 1991). As Qu and Dumay (2011) insisted, the interview can be a practical way to understand the lived experiences of others, although the full comprehension of this reality may be difficult to interpret. The interview's purpose is to gather data that are theoretical, conceptual, and based on the meanings of lived experiences that participants ascribe to them (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree 2006; Qu & Dumay 2011). This grounded theory interview allowed participants to share personally constructed understandings of their CCP practice, followed by careful, iterative, reflective data analysis. Interviews were conducted in interviewees' chosen setting, in as convenient and relaxed setting as possible (Orb *et al.* 2000).

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[43] COVID-19 was a novel coronavirus that resulted in a global pandemic beginning in 2020.
[44] Zoom is a cloud platform for audio and video conferencing. Especially during the COVID global pandemic and various mandatory quarantines in 2020, Zoom became a prominent source for meetings, and other communication.

4.13.2 Interview Procedure

The interview method extends beyond the actual semi-structured dialogue in which the researcher engages directly with the participant. Kvale and Brinkman (2009) suggested that an investigative interview has seven stages, which should be planned before the actual interview takes place. These stages are: thematizing the interview, designing, interviewing, transcribing, analysing, verifying, and reporting. These stages are outlined in Table 4.5 below.

Table 4.5 Stages of an Investigative Interview

Stage	Description
1. Thematizing	Define research purpose; Become familiar with interview techniques
2. Designing	Develop overview of investigation; Recruiting participants for interviews; Not linear, but allow for theoretical sampling
3. Interviewing	Conduct first round of interviews concurrently with grounded theory data analysis
4. Transcribing	Transcribe recorded interviews
5. Analysing	Concurrently with interviewing stage; Continuing in an iterative manner
6. Verifying	Attention to trustworthiness
7. Reporting	Completing the written report

Adapted from Kvale & Brinkman 2009

The first two stages, thematizing and designing, were addressed in the early developmental phases of this investigation when the research purpose was determined, and the primary and secondary research questions were initially developed. The specific interview questions were also finalized during these two stages (Appendix 10). Each interview followed a similar pattern. Prior to the recorded interview, introductions were made, and the study specifics and consent form were explained to the participant (as outlined in the ethics section). Often, while building rapport, an informal discussion ensued before the actual recorded interview began.

While the main research question guided the research design, additional semi-structured interview questions were developed, bringing further direction to search more deeply into different aspects of contemplative prayer practices (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree 2006). The first six interview questions were designed to initiate discussion regarding the specifics of the participants' CCP practice. These questions related to aspects of practitioner motivations to begin this particular prayer practice, consistency of the practice, length of time involved, and meanings surrounding this practice in the

practitioners' lived experience. Questions 7 through 12 led the discussion toward the various influences and impacts of their CCP practice. These questions centred on positive or negative impacts, and ways in which this practice may have influenced the practitioners' overall well-being. The final question, number 13, was included to generate any additional information that participants would still like to share.[45] These questions added to the completion of the first two stages of Kvale and Brinkman's (2009) interview preparation. The next four stages followed an iterative approach in which the interview was transcribed and coded as the interview process continued. This supported a constant comparative approach to data gathering and analysis.

During phases one and two, the interviews lasted between 21 to 59 minutes, depending primarily on the length of participants' responses to individual interview questions. During phase three, interviews lasted between 22 to 118 minutes. As part of the interview, it was important that an active interviewer role be maintained not only in asking questions, but also in focused, interactive listening (deMarrais 2004; Qu & Dumay 2011). During the interview, as participants shared, their responses often generated further probing questions, which helped to gain greater understanding of the studied topic (Kvale & Brinkman 2009; Qu & Dumay 2011).

In general, all the participants were engaged in the interview and willing to share about their CCP practice, with its perceived influence in their lived experiences. The interviews were not rushed or cut short before questions and answers were completed. Some of the interviews were longer than others primarily because some participants chose to expand on their responses more than others, although each interview had a sense of completion when it was finished. Throughout each of the three data collection phases, each interview was transcribed, proofed, and iteratively analysed until theoretical saturation was achieved. At this saturation point, the data collection stages were concluded as gathering new data were not contributing to any new information and the final codes had all been well-developed (Glaser & Strauss 1967; Charmaz 2014).

4.14 Data Analysis Methods

Data analysis procedures were iteratively conducted during all three phases of data collection. They included a constant comparative focus, iterative coding process, and the

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[45] The interview questions were then approved by the Ethics Board at the Oxford Centre for Missions Studies.

theoretical development of the grounded participant data. Researcher participation and observation at various CCP events, although not part of the coding analysis, further supplemented understanding of the primary participant data. The coding procedure is described in this chapter. Through these coding methods, greater interpretation, meaning, and understanding of the participants' data continued to emerge, developing increasing abstraction towards the substantive grounded theory.

4.14.1 Coding the Data

Coding is an analytic technique utilized in grounded theory data interpretation (Moghaddam 2006; Charmaz 2014). These analytic methods are recognized as 'an interpretive act of the researchers who are sensitized to certain theoretical concepts' and must be done through a reflexive lens (Sarker *et al.* 2001:41). Charmaz (2014:113) claimed that '[g]rounded theory coding generates the bones of your analysis'. This process builds a firm foundation on which to continue the theory development.

Prior to initiating the actual coding, the first step was to re-listen to the interviews with a focused attention on *hearing* what the participants were really expressing. Following this, the interviews were transcribed by hand as this process allowed an immersion into the data, which proved valuable as the iterative analysis stages continued to advance. Following this, the next step was to begin coding in a dissecting, iterative, comparative way, which again prompted a closer look at the data.

Coding Labels — Leading grounded theorists' approach and label the process of coding differently, using various terms and meanings. For example, the phase that follows Glaser's (2011) open coding is selective coding, while for Strauss and Corbin (1990) it is axial coding, and for Charmaz (2014) it is focused coding. These differing terms for coding can be confusing; however, the constant comparative and iterative concepts of grounded theory allow for overlap within the coding process, and consequently between the terms themselves.

This study approached the initial labelling process with three different phases: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. Although these were not meant to be distinct phases, they did give some direction to the developmental coding process (Strauss & Corbin 1990; Sarker *et al.* 2001). In this way, it was possible to work with the data in an effort to allow the codes to emerge and to not be restricted by the overlay of rigid phases of coding. These coding procedures led to the final analytic constructs of codes,

properties and dimension of concepts, and conceptual categories. This is further outlined in Table 4.6 below.

Table 4.6 Data Emerging in Theory through Open, Axial, and Selective Coding

Coding Phase	Description of Phase	Theory Development
Selective Coding	Axial codes were further brought together and connected with increasing abstraction, as conceptual categories were formulated, and a core category or categories were developed	Conceptual Categories
Axial Coding	This process was applied to the data, in order to bring the fragmented data back together around a common axis. This related categories to subcategories by asking how they are related and by specifying the properties and dimensions of a category.	Concepts
Open Coding	A comparative interpretive process of line, phrase, incident coding in which the data were broken down analytically. This is also an important initial connection between the data and the emerging abstract ideas.	Properties and Dimensions of Concepts
Participant Interview	This is the interview material, the 'raw data' from which the coding process began and from which the future codes and categories helped to develop the theoretical understandings of the phenomenon.	Data

Open Coding — Following the transcription of the interviews, a process of open coding was initiated to look closely at the data and promote an open-minded approach to the participants thoughts, feelings, and actions found within their words (Burnard 1991; Charmaz 2014). Development of the codes and categories were vital in constructing 'an analysis of the data rather than merely a description' (Eaves 2001:657). As open coding requires a close examination, data were examined carefully, word by word, phrase by phrase, and incident by incident, always looking at the data in a comparative analytic way in order to begin to conceptualize and label the data (Moghaddam 2006; Charmaz 2008). This initial interpretive process required including the perspectives of the participants to help develop the depth of insights within the participants' meanings and a comparative recognition between developing codes. (Moghaddam 2006; Charmaz 2014). This aspect of coding was further enhanced by the use of *in vivo* codes.

In the initial process of coding, sometimes participants' actual words were utilized as a code, because they expressively described the data and thus were known as *in vivo*

codes (Charmaz 2014). These types of codes aided 'in discerning participants' meanings and in explaining their emergent actions' (Charmaz 2008:164). One of the benefits of using in-vivo codes initially was the ability to begin the analysis phase while staying close to the participants' verbal expressions within the data. This helped to highlight participants' perspectives, since these codes were intimately connected with participants' own expressions. They were terms that seemed unique to that participant, or commonly used by other participants, or they were terms commonly used in participants' CCP group or organization. Applied research practices scholar, Karen Scott (2004:116) further encouraged the use of participants' words 'to avoid drifting into the meaning of the researcher, possibly blending researcher meaning with that of the participants'. Therefore, use of participants' words was another important aspect of the coding process.

Another approach to coding was the utilization of gerunds, which encouraged coding for action during this initial phase of data analysis. Charmaz (2014) insisted that coding with gerunds is a heuristic manoeuvre that can help to express implicit meanings and actions as the researcher interacts with the data. Gerunds enable researchers 'to see implicit processes, to make connections between codes, and to keep their analyses active and emergent' (Charmaz 2008:164). Gerunds serve as nouns, yet have a verbal ending of *-ing*. In this way it becomes easier to focus on the action inherent in the thought that is being coded, as these words can be used as nouns but can also show action.

As the initial coding progressed it was important to utilize a constant comparative method, continuing to make comparisons at each level of the analysis, (Glaser & Strauss 1967; Charmaz 2014), in order to further 'understand the construction of their relationships' (Scott 2004:114). Coding is not a linear process and further coding helped to bring greater understanding to previous codes. This emphasized the critical need for constantly reviewing the codes and looking for correlation within the data. In this study, comparisons were made between fragments of data, incidents, codes, and categories. This comparative approach helped to establish greater confidence in the data analysis. This process also further strengthened development of the substantive theory by helping to identify all possible aspects of CCP practices. For example, as a word or phrase was encountered, comparison with previous participant uses of the word or phrase helped to investigate the meaning embedded within that particular usage. All these instances of the phrase and comparing what other participants had shared, assisted in the construction of the properties and dimensions found within the developing concepts. This initial coding aided in going from the concrete data to the beginning developments of abstract insights,

allowing for continuation beyond the initial sorting and sifting of the qualitative codes to deeper meanings. This helped to postpone coding with abstract concepts before the data had been sufficiently opened up and looked at through the participants' words.

Axial Coding — Comparing codes was an important part of the analytic process. As the coding process continued, this axial coding stage helped to reduce the number of codes into fewer groupings that were gathered through systematic analysis and comparison around common axes (Moghaddam 2006). This helped to develop further connections between dimensions, properties, and concepts (Strauss & Corbin 1990). This level of coding is furthermore reflected in 'the idea of clustering the open codes around a specific "axes" or points of intersection' (Harry *et al.* 2005:5). In this way, axial coding was applied to the data, as the fractured open codes were gathered together around common relational axes. Interconnecting the pieces of data that were dissected and labelled through the open coding process also further reduced the number of codes (Strauss & Corbin 1990; Sarker *et al.* 2001). Data were further defined, constantly being compared and elevated into greater levels of abstraction, through properties and dimensions within specific concepts. While the initial phases of open coding served to separate the data into smaller chunks, the next phase of axial coding helped to bring those chunks back together around central axes.

General guidelines were followed in choosing an axial code:

- it must be central, connecting to all other open codes gathered within it
- it must be found frequently among the open codes, with indicators pointing to that idea
- it must have a logical and consistent explanation, without forcing the data
- the actual phrase used to describe the axial code (central category) should be abstract, leading to the developing substantive theory/model
- it should help to develop depth as it consistently refines the concepts it describes

Adapted from Strauss & Corbin (1990)

These recommendations helped to establish consistent methods used in axial coding. Following axial coding, the next phase served to develop greater focused connections within the data, moving closer to substantive theory development (Moghaddam 2006).

Selective Coding — The next stage of data analysis was selective coding, which helped to gather axial codes and the delineating properties and dimensions under single conceptual categories. This process helped to identify concepts that needed 'further refinement and development' (Strauss & Corbin 1990:116), further integrating analytic codes (Scott 2004). These processes worked towards the continual building and refining of a theoretical model of CCP (Harry *et al.* 2005). Axial codes that had been generated were further brought together conceptually in a way that could direct the discovery of meanings and core concepts embedded in the data of participants' CCP practice descriptions (Moghaddam 2006). This process also provided instances of data saturation, which continued until there were no new codes being generated in the data. Figure 4.5 (below) illustrates the process of elevating participant interview data to conceptual categories through the process of constant comparison of the emerging open, axial, and selective codes. The data emerging from the participants' data directly delineated the eventual properties and their dimensions. These were then gathered around the axes of axial codes to form the concepts and eventually the conceptual categories.

Figure 4.5 Coding: Elevating Participant Data to Conceptual Categories
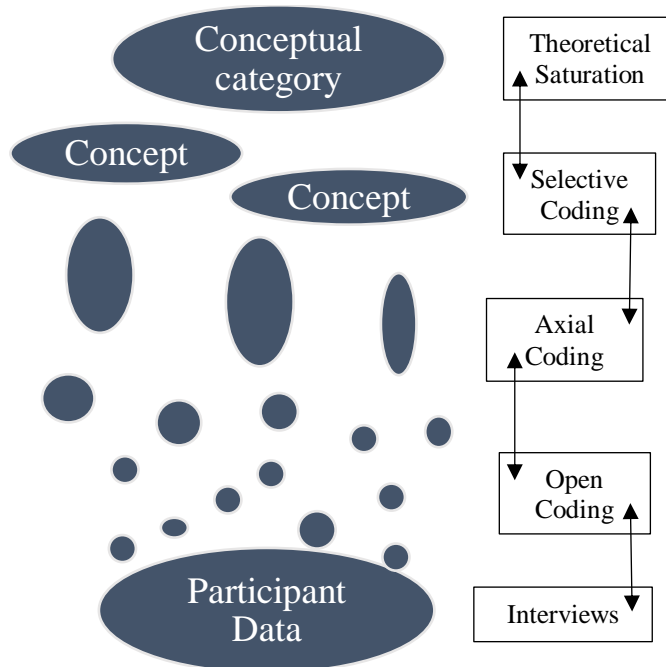
Open coding encompassed both line-by-line coding and gerunds. Approximately 2800+ open codes for all 36 interviews were gathered around approximately 120 axial codes. Axial codes were subsequently condensed into fewer than 20 selective codes,

which then helped to focus the data's concepts into the final conceptual categories found within CCP, well-being, and embodiment.

Abduction — Coding was important to define what was emerging from the participants' data. Abduction provided a means to continue examining possible interpretations of that data to account for all aspects including 'surprises, anomalies, or puzzles in the collected data', thereby assisting in analysing the data and assessing all possible interpretations within the data (Charmaz 2008:157). Charmaz (2008:167) insisted that this involves 'both imaginative interpretation and *reasoning'* as one works to further define conceptual categories and bring depth to the analysis. Abduction brings the researcher to a recontextualization of the phenomena in terms of the processes that help to explain it, coupled with a comparison with the extant literature. Continued theoretical sensitivity served to give meaning to what was important as it emerged in the data analysis. This process required a reflexively rigorous approach to maintain a theoretically sensitive awareness of any potential researcher biases and perspectives throughout the analytic process (Sarker *et al.* 2001). As the research progressed through all three phases of interviews and subsequent development of codes, more data were gathered in an attempt to better saturate advancing concepts and bring increasing fullness to the emerging theory. Concepts became saturated with greater data and detail, and leading to enhanced theoretical constructs (Marshall *et al.* 2013). This continued to generate theoretical understanding of the lived experience of long-term CCP practices and its influence on well-being, until essentially there was nothing new arising in the coding and data analysis (Bowen 2008). Theoretical saturation was achieved with the culmination of phase three.

Memo writing — Another technique that was incorporated as part of the coding and data analysis process was memo writing. This process helped to capture thoughts, speculations, ponderings, and ideas that became recognized throughout the research process, further assisting in the reflection and code development. Memos helped to retain ideas that might otherwise be lost in the research process (Glaser & Strauss 1967; Charmaz 2014; Kenny & Fourie 2015). Memos were also used to elaborate on the data, describe the situation, and simply as a way of recording impressions (Moghaddam 2006). Charmaz (2014:72) insisted that '[m]emo-writing is the pivotal intermediate step between data collection and writing drafts of papers'. Memos were utilized in a variety of ways. Sometimes memos were written as part of the interview process, although in general it

was far more valuable to remain focused on the interviewees themselves during this time. Memos were sometimes written during the analytic phases and in this way, they became centrally beneficial in the theoretical constructs (Glaser & Strauss 1967; Charmaz 2014; Kenny & Fourie 2015). Memoing produced a valuable resource that could be drawn upon later as the coding process and the emergence of abstract categories continued (Moghaddam 2006).

4.14.2 Observation Data Collection Methods

Data are data, and as Glaser and Holton (2004:12) insisted, grounded theory 'works with any data — "all is data" — not just one specific data. It is up to the GT researcher to figure out what data they are getting'. In the grounded theory method, observations are a valuable source of data collection. As Suddaby (2006:635) contended, 'grounded theory studies rarely have interviews as their sole form of data collection'. Glaser and Strauss (1967:65) advocated the use of multiple data sources intersecting on the same phenomenon and identifies these as 'slices of data'. In this study participant interviews were the primary source of data. Additionally, I participated in and observed various CCP events (Appendix 11). From this exposure, I was able to collect observational data experientially. These data were not used in the coding process, but rather in a way that exposed me to the broader community of CCP practitioners and organizations. I journaled about these participation and observational experiences. These events have been primarily affiliated with CO and the WCCM. Although the primary data alone have been analysed using grounded theory coding methodology, all three of these triangulated areas of data have aided and added to the richness of the data analysis, and subsequent understandings. The participant interview remained primary, with the observational data maintaining a subservient role in the data analysis and the theory emergence.

4.15 Quality Assessments in Qualitative Research

Within qualitative research, recognizing quality is a debated topic (Graneheim & Lundman 2004; Shenton 2004; Rolfe 2006; Davey *et al.* 2010; Connelly 2016). Although experts agree that standards are necessary, there is still argument as to what constitutes confidence in the quality of an investigation (Connelly 2016). This can further promote a sense of confusion in assessing quality within academic research (Graneheim & Lundman 2004). This debate is further bound in the perceived similarities and differences

between quantitative and qualitative research (Rolfe 2006). The standards of validity and reliability as positivist measures can be difficult guides for assessing quality in naturalistic investigations. In the past forty years, paradigms and associated terminology have arisen in attempts to address this important aspect of quality guidelines within qualitative studies. The responses to these debates have included recommendations for actions within naturalistic, investigative methods to promote integrity of the findings and overall research design.

4.15.1 The Debate

According to Rolfe (2006), the arguments surrounding quality assessments in qualitative studies include primarily three different perspectives. First, some recommended that quantitative and qualitative studies be judged the same way (Morse *et al.* 2002; Davey *et al.* 2010). However, opponents of this argument are among those who supported the uniqueness and complexities found within the various approaches of non-quantitative studies. This creates difficulties in creating a model in which all qualitative investigations can be evaluated by the same criteria (Krefting 1991; Rolfe 2006; Davey *et al.* 2010).

A second perspective insisted that the criteria used to judge quantitative studies are often irrelevant in assessing qualitative studies, therefore other criteria needs to be utilized (Krefting 1991). For example, quantitative investigations, which present a more positivistic inquiry presume a precise reality that is discoverable, while naturalists in qualitative studies understand that there may be multiple understandings and alternative descriptions for social realities (Lincoln & Guba 1985; Anney 2015). The qualitative researcher can contribute to the discovered reality found within the data interpretation (Davey et al. 2010). Qualitative research utilizes data often gathered from participants and observations that require a development of understanding throughout the research process. This process can be further bound in contextualization, meanings, perspectives, and values, allowing for multiple meanings found within the interpretation and analysis of the data. As Graneheim and Lundman (2004) insisted, these are essential considerations when discussing criteria used to judge findings in qualitative studies.

A third contention in this debate supported a continuum of quantitative and qualitative differences rather than a dichotomy (Rolfe 2006). This compounds the efforts to create two separate sets of criteria for these research paradigms. Although differences between quantitative and qualitative designs can be recognized, the qualitative paradigm is not unified in their perspective, making the possibility of a unique set of qualitative

research criteria difficult. Rolfe (2006) further insisted that criteria standards might work for undergraduate elementary research studies, but that judgements regarding advanced research studies can only be done with the maturity and practise that is developed within the experienced researcher. This further allows for determinations of judgements to be made for each unique study. Furthermore, researchers must recognize that each research study is distinctive and that creating an established criterion may be ineffective.

Not only do these debates point to the dissension in categorically defining what is quantitative and what is qualitative, but they magnify the difficulty in finding unity within quality criteria standards for qualitative research. There needs to be some accepted method for making quality assessments, otherwise the limits for what constitutes confidence in qualitative research findings is left to each individual researcher based on their unique study and possible personal biases. Positivist investigations depend on such rigorous criteria as reliability and validity, and qualitative criterion methods have been suggested which indicate overlap with these quantitative standards.

4.15.2 Reliability and Validity

In quantitative investigations the concept of validity relates to whether the research actually explores or measures the intended topics. A major form of validity is considered *construct validity*. This indicates to what extent the results actually correlate with the theoretical construct that it is assessing (Thomas 2013). However *internal validity* is managing the circumstances that could subvert the research and create questionable conclusions (Thomas 2013). Some have suggested ways to promote validity, with the implementation of verification strategies. Unlike quantitative methods in which it is easier to present specific evidence for the justification of the findings, qualitative investigations cannot provide the distinct evidence in a way that is calculable to the reader. Therefore, a more selective approach must be utilized. This can help to demonstrate how the process evolved with indications of the methods used, including specific junctures and theoretical insights supporting the emerging theory (Moghaddam 2006). Using the same terminology for quantitative and qualitative research seems to add to the confusion in this debate regarding quality, and this is further recognized in the concept of reliability.

Reliability has to do with how well a research study can be carried out by another researcher at a different time and the same results obtained, even if the interpretations might be different (Blaxter *et al.* 2010). It makes assessment of the consistency in

measurements, or the degree to which the study instruments used measure the same way, with the same conditions, and with the same subjects. The reliability of a study is estimated using these criteria and can also be related to the aspect of the reader being able to recognize how the data were analysed and conclusions were made. Trying to make this level of assessment in qualitative investigations does not account for human nature, and it can be far more difficult to justify (Moghaddam 2006). Furthermore, Thomas (2013) insisted that too much focus on aspects of reliability can disrupt the real focus of the research, because as he noted you can even get different results at two different times due to the nature of people; however, some researchers find a correlation with reliability and validity within the terminology related to a study's *trustworthiness* (Lincoln & Guba 1985; Morrow 2005).

4.15.3 Applying Trustworthiness in Qualitative Research

In developing criteria and the use of other terminology, qualitative researchers have been able to demonstrate a distinction from the more positivist indicators of validity and reliability. Trustworthiness relates to the degree of confidence in the quality of the entire research process (Graneheim & Lundman 2004; Morrow 2005; Anney 2015; Connelly 2016). Within this framework, the quality of a grounded theory study is supported by the confirmation of the study's trustworthiness and surety of the knowledge produced. Demonstrating trustworthiness of the research confirms the transparency of the researcher's assumptions and biases, giving clarity of this awareness throughout the study. The incorrect application of the qualitative criteria of trustworthiness to studies is as problematic as the application of inappropriate quantitative criteria. Krefting (1991) further insisted that the inappropriateness of quantitative criteria in the assessment of qualitative research, and the plurality of qualitative research are important to the understanding of any model of trustworthiness in qualitative research.

4.15.4 Trustworthiness Criteria

Noted qualitative methodology scholars Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested trustworthiness quality criteria which are accepted by many qualitative researchers (Krefting 1991; Graneheim & Lundman 2004; Shenton 2004; Morrow 2005; Anney 2015; Connelly 2016). These criteria include primarily credibility, transferability dependability, and confirmability to which Guba and Lincoln (1994) later added authenticity (Table 4.7 below).

Table 4.7 Quality Assessments in Qualitative Research

Qualitative Trustworthiness	Quantitative
Credibility	Internal validity
Transferability	External validity
Dependability	Reliability
Confirmability	Objectivity

Credibility — Credibility corresponds with the positivist concept of *internal validity* and refers to an internal consistency (Morrow 2005). Credibility is a part of the decision making when choosing the study focus, selection of the context, participants, and the data collection process and analysis (Graneheim & Lundman 2004). This allows for confidence in the research findings (Anney 2015). Methods can be used to support strategies which incorporate triangulation techniques. These approaches can include the site triangulation achieved by observations of participants within several related organizations to reduce the influence of local factors peculiar to one group, member checking, thorough literature review, and random sampling (Shenton 2004; Anney 2015). Other valuable aspects are well established research methods and negative case analysis (Shenton 2004; Morrow 2005; Anney 2015; Connelly 2016). With early familiarity of participants' culture and prolonged field observations, a reflexive stance of the researcher can also help to show credibility of the work (Shenton 2004; Morrow 2005; Anney 2015). Credibility becomes a valuable aspect of trustworthiness within the study.

Credibility in this study was supported through:

- purposive and snowball sampling
- a thorough literature review
- internal consistency throughout the entire research process
- incorporation of triangulation techniques (Shenton 2004; Anney 2015), achieved by the observations of participants within several different contemplative prayer organizations helped to reduce the influence on the study of local factors peculiar to one group (Shenton 2004; Anney 2015)
- early familiarity with participants' CCP culture and prolonged field observations experienced via the many different events attended (Shenton 2004; Morrow 2005; Anney 2015)

Transferability — This aspect of trustworthiness is concerned with the transfer of a particular study's findings to other participants in a different time and place (Anney 2015), and it can be correlated with the positivist concept of *external validity* (Morrow 2005; Merriam 2009). The researcher can give suggestions related to the transferability of a study, but it is the reader's decision to assess the transferability to another context (Merriam 2009). To facilitate the reader's ability to assess this, the researcher must provide a detailed description of the inquiry and the context, specifics of participants and their selection, and the data collection and analysis (Graneheim & Lundman 2004; Shenton 2004; Morrow 2005; Anney 2015; Connelly 2016). Trustworthiness can increase if a detailed description is given throughout each phase of the study.

Transferability was considered in this study by:

- providing attention to detailed descriptions throughout the study (Graneheim & Lundman 2004; Shenton 2004; Morrow 2005; Anney 2015; Connelly 2016)

Additionally, the researcher can give suggestions related to the transferability of a study, but it is the reader's decision to assess the interchangeable value in another context (Merriam 2009). While issues of transferability refer to the study's feasibility in another context with other participants, an additional aspect of trustworthiness involves dependability and the research design being understood as a prototype to guide future work (Merriam 2009).

Dependability — Dependability correlates to aspects of *reliability* used in quantitative inquiries (Morrow 2005). There should be stability over time (Morrow 2005; Anney 2015). This requires in-depth descriptions of the participants, methods employed, and the analysis to allow the study to be repeated (Shenton 2004). These details need to include aspects from the implementation to operational and reflective levels, in order to promote an opportunity for thorough understanding and also transparency of effectiveness of what was done. Techniques that can support a consistency and a descriptive method throughout the research are: memoing, audit trail, process logs, and peer-debriefing.

Dependability established internal consistency (Morrow 2005; Anney 2015), which the following methods helped to establish:

- in-depth descriptions of the participants and methods employed

- thorough, transparent analysis to allow a similar, future study to be conducted (Shenton 2004)

These techniques can also be valuable in supporting another important aspect of research's trustworthiness, namely that of confirmability.

Confirmability — Steps that support confirmability help to ensure that researcher biases are taken into consideration as they work to show that the findings are the result of the experiences and ideas of the participants, and not the researcher's characteristics and preferences (Shenton 2004). Confirmability depicts efforts towards neutrality, or the degree of consistency in the findings, showing that the findings could be repeated and indicating the degree to which they are confirmed by others (Connelly 2016). This aspect of quality criterion relates to objectivity found within the positivist perspective (Morrow 2005). Although the researcher is never totally neutral or objective in naturalist studies, measures can be taken to minimize the influence of researcher biases, beliefs, and notions. Techniques that support confirmability are found again in a detailed research process and an accompanying audit trail. These supporting methods include methodological log of memos, with peer review to prevent bias, and member checking (Connelly 2016). Other strategies that help to promote confirmability include admission of researcher's beliefs and assumptions, reflexive journaling, triangulation, recognition of shortcomings in study's methods and their potential effects and providing visible proof of the steps taken (Shenton 2004; Connelly 2016). Taking one's own biases into account helps to show that the findings are the result of the experiences and ideas of the participants and not the researcher's characteristics and preferences, thereby further illuminating neutrality efforts (Connelly 2016).

Confirmability in this study included:
- acknowledging biases and pre-conceived notions through researcher reflexivity and helping to depict neutrality throughout the process (Morrow 2005)
- logging and reviewing memos (Connelly 2016)
- seminar presentations with subsequent appropriate course corrections
- peer and supervisory reviews to amplify biases (Connelly 2016)

4.15.5 Assuring Trustworthiness

In conclusion, a critical element in assessing trustworthiness and actual integrity of an investigation is the transparency of the researcher's actions throughout the study (Connelly 2016). Indications of trustworthiness include researcher reflexivity (Morrow 2005), memoing of thought processes, being open to critique from colleagues and supervisors, all of which can bring greater awareness of researcher biases and presuppositions. Additionally, the memoing, coding, and diagramming also provide an audit trail. The process of constantly comparing the data also supports the trustworthiness of the study.

Sometimes methods that can appear to create trustworthiness can also create confusion in the actual data analysis. Although a potentially valuable process, member checking can possibly contribute to this complexity when participants, who have not been involved in the detailed data analysis, are given opportunity to check and concur with some of the findings. This can enhance insights, but it can also be problematic balancing their input with the analytical process (Kvale 2006; Anyan 2013). While potentially in agreement with the findings of the study, the participants may not fully understand the abstract analysis that contributed to those results. Researchers need to be aware of issues related to trustworthiness and utilize the methods that will demonstrate their careful attention to this important characteristic of their research investigation.

Attention to quality needs to be of utmost importance in a study. As Morse et al. (2002:14) insisted: 'This is an important issue and must be seen as more than just a paradigm debate'. Quality assessment in qualitative research cannot be relegated to the end or simply as an isolated endeavour. An ongoing focus on quality must be incorporated from the very onset of the study and given attention throughout. Hayashi *et al.* (2019:102-103) insisted that no 'protective measures' will unequivocally guarantee validity, reliability, or trustworthiness in a study. However, conscientious awareness to detail and transparency must be aligned with quality assessments throughout the study.

Transparency and Reflexivity were sustained through:

- a constant reflexive stance
- the process of constantly comparing the data.
- clear, and detailed descriptions of the work throughout the thesis
- achieving data saturation in support of the study's trustworthiness (Hayashi *et al.* 2019).

4.16 Conclusion

In summary, this chapter has discussed the assumptions and paradigmatic framework of this interpretivist-constructivist research approach. Several sections outlined the selection of grounded theory as the means to investigate the lived experiences of long-term CCP practitioners. The chapter then detailed the fieldwork, including the participant sampling, data collection, and data analysis. In the final sections, attention to and development of research trustworthiness was outlined. Importantly, adherence to the principles of constant comparison in grounded theory has been emphasized, as this has allowed the conceptual categories to emerge gradually from the participant data and to form the basis of the findings presented in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS

This chapter includes a small number of the illustrative interview transcriptions from the 36 participants' data, indicating the lived experience of their long-term CCP practice. However, in order to refrain from repetition and excessive participants' data in this chapter, additional examples of relevant interview data are located in Appendix 14. The interviews generated an abundance of rich data, and decisions about which participants' quotes to include have been guided by the focus of the research questions. This chapter describes, abstracts, and conceptualizes grounded theory data emerging from the participant interviews. From these data, the generation of codes, concepts, and conceptual categories have developed the substantive grounded theory. Sample coding processes are further illustrated in the appendices. Appendix 12 depicts the open coding procedure, as detailed utilizing a few portions of the interview from P11. This shows how segments of data were analysed through the initial coding process of line-by-line coding, while also indicating the use of gerunds in the open coding process. Appendix 13 further outlines the more advanced stages of coding from participants' data to conceptual categories. It is a simplified version of the extensive data analysis that was conducted in this study from interview transcription to the open, axial, and selective codes. This complete coding process was necessary to develop the final conceptual categories, which ultimately led to the substantive grounded theory generated by the data analysis. The following sections outline the emerging conceptual categories as depicted in Table 5.1, further delineating the concepts within each conceptual category.

Table 5.1 Long-Term Christian Contemplative Prayer Practitioner Data

Substantive Theory	Conceptual Category	Concept
Christian Contemplative Prayer (CCP): in an Embodied Practice Integrating Well-Being	Christian Contemplative Prayer Section 5.1	Initial Introduction to CCP
		Beyond Words
		Silent Prayer
		CCP Methods
	Well-Being Section 5.2	Personal
		Communal
		Environmental
		Spiritual
	Embodiment Section 5.3	Embodied Self
		Embodied in Christian Community
		Embodied Space
		Embodied in God

As the findings are presented in the following sections (5.1, 5.2, and 5.3), concepts are further described in terms of their properties and dimensions. Properties help to distinguish the characteristics of a concept, and dimensions indicate a continuum of variations within the properties, defining the concept further (Strauss & Corbin 1990). The following three sections in this chapter will develop these concepts and conceptual categories more fully. Participants' quotes are formatted as indented and italicised, with the participant's number in parenthesis after the quote. Section 5.1 recognizes aspects of data related directly to the *Christian Contemplative Prayer* practice itself. Section 5.2 focuses on *Christian Contemplative Prayer and Well-Being*, followed by Section 5.3 which incorporates participants' data related to *Christian Contemplative Prayer and Embodiment.* Section 5.4 concludes the participants' data presentation.

5.1 Conceptual Category — Christian Contemplative Prayer

The first main conceptual category is: *Christian Contemplative Prayer*. This relates to aspects of the practice itself. This conceptual category encompassed four concepts, which helped to further clarify this conceptual category. This section presents data emerging in the following four concepts: 1) Initial Introduction to CCP, 2) Beyond Words, 3) Silent Prayer, and 4) CCP Methods. These are depicted in Table 5.2 below, which indicates the concepts, properties, and dimensions that define the conceptual category of Christian Contemplative Prayer.

Table 5.2 Conceptual Category — *Christian Contemplative Prayer* —
Coding Structure

Conceptual Category	Concept	Property	Dimension
Christian Contemplative Prayer (CCP) (The practice) Section 5.1	Initial Introduction to CCP Section 5.1.1	Personal influence	• Drawn to silence • Dissatisfaction/seeking more • Reading CCP books
		Communal influence	• Invited by someone • Attend info meeting • Monasterial participation
	Beyond Words Section 5.1.2	Spectrum of understanding	• Understand some aspects • Incomprehensible mystery
		Defies simple description	• Inexplainable • Words can only point to it

Conceptual Category	Concept	Property	Dimension
Christian Contemplative Prayer (CCP) (The practice) Section 5.1	Silent Prayer Section 5.1.3	Personal silence and solitude	• Recognize the value of silence • Drawn to silence
		Communal silence	• Collective intention • Powerful
		Cultural contemplation	• CCP not always silent • Cultural/tradition variations
	CCP Methods Section 5.1.4	Various Methods	• Embodied Sitting • Embodied Movement
		Same Intention	• Contemplation in God • Union with God

5.1.1 Initial Introduction to Contemplative Prayer

The first concept of CCP is: Initial Introduction to Contemplative Prayer. This concept reflected both the personal and communal ways in which practitioners were introduced to CCP. On a personal level, some participants depicted being drawn to silence and solitude from an early age. This was recognized as a childhood interest that continued to grow and develop as their spirituality matured into adulthood.

> *I would, as a little kid, go over, light candles and sit in the sanctuary. I just had this kind of quieter, contemplative, side to myself or a piece of myself that's always been who I am. (P15)*

> *I had a history as a child of using wordless prayers as prayer. I now understand as an adult that it was actually wordless prayer. It is not hard to leap and find the connection to contemplation. I think my practice has changed in that it has become more mature. I would say my practice has become more and more wordless over time. (P22)*

> *My interest began in my childhood. (P32)*

For these participants, once they discovered CCP it was almost a natural transition to incorporate this silent prayer practice into their spiritual discipline. There was a sense that their childhood silent prayers had matured into their current CCP practice. Others found within themselves, as adults, an increasing spiritual awareness of desperation. It was this sense that caused them to seek out something more in their spiritual discipline, life, and relationship with God.

> *Like most things in my life, I came to it out of desperation. You know Wayne Maler; he wrote a book about Sabbath and being enough. I went to a retreat with him. He said, how many people came to contemplation out of desperation, and half the room raised their hand. (P23)*

Still others sensed a dissatisfaction, emptiness, or a longing for more holistic spiritual practice, rather than the sense of a more disembodied existence they were currently experiencing. Their dissatisfaction led them to a place of openness and to aspects of spirituality that might help them become more wholly integrated in their Christian spirituality and life in Christ.

> *I came to it [CCP] through a mental health counsellor when I was dealing with depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, of which part of that was self-harm and a detachment from the body. (P11)*

> *Probably the driving force was this growing dissatisfaction with the ordinary Christian life, that was fairly cut-n-dry and not very life giving. It felt dutiful and mechanic, but it did not feel very organic. I began to sense an emptiness. When I read [in Scripture] things like, you know, I have come to give you life, that you may have it to the full. I thought, Really? This is it. It didn't feel very full to me. (P12)*

As participants become aware of CCP, they often sought out books on CCP to further assist them in their understanding and the establishment of their spiritual discipline of a CCP practice.

> *I read books by Basil Pennington and Thomas Keating. (P6)*

> *I started studying contemplative prayer. (P7)*

> *I started reading about it, because that's the first thing I did, I read about it. (P8)*

> *So, the foundation of my beginning was reading. (P31)*

For some, their own personal influence was the catalyst in their introduction to CCP, and for others there was also a communal influence that helped to initiate their CCP practice. This communal influence and introduction to CCP sometimes came through a friend, religious leader, or even a counsellor.

> *I was introduced to Centering Prayer by a friend, who is a pastor. (P9)*

As participants shared, sometimes the important value of a friend's encouragement was apparent. For example, some participants recognized that a friend's invitation to participate in CCP was received more favourably than an invitation from someone they were less familiar with.

> *I knew my friend over 2 years before this came up, and I asked her, do you think I would fit in there [with the contemplative prayer group]. That gentle introduction helped me. If like a stranger would have asked me, I do not think I would have trusted them. (P18)*

The importance of relationships within the initial introduction to CCP can also be recognized with the reception of 'permission' to engage in this quiet contemplative prayer practice. This is further recognized in the way in which the following participant had been encouraged by a friend and given what felt like permission to doodle contemplatively in prayer. In this way, the participant found the embodied contemplative practice of doodling helped them to stay present in CCP longer.

> *A friend gave me permission to doodle pray.[46] (P34)*

The concept of being given permission for CCP is also recognized in the words of another participant. This participant shared their belief that it is possible for a denomination *not* to give one permission to engage in CCP. This topic is not specifically addressed in this study due to this study's focus on the practitioners' lived experience, although it helps to point to an important element of being given permission to participate in CCP.

> *The Protestants ... will not sit in silence. They will not give permission [for CCP] either. (P26)*

For others their communal influence came through attendance at CCP workshops, conferences, organized groups, or classes.

> *I went to hear Father Keating [...] here's somebody who speaks my language [...] a combination of spirituality and psychology. (P3)*

> *Then I read in the paper about this meditation group that was started by this Benedictine monk, and in 1994 Father Laurence Freeman came to the Philippines and spoke on meditating. (P19)*

This exposure eventually led to their own CCP practice. Still others became exposed to CCP through their participation in an informative group event, such as gatherings centred on lectio divina. It was at those events that they discovered CCP.

> *I begin with lectio divina with a group, and then it becomes easy to introduce Centering Prayer. (P26)*

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[46] A form of CCP which has been developed as a method by Sybil MacBeth. The author of books on Praying in Color, she recognizes this as a method for some to sit still with God in an embodied way and stay focused (https://prayingincolor.com).

Or a group event at a monastery, convent, or priory. This experience then became the catalyst for their own personal CCP practice.

> *My friend and I found out about Centering Prayer at the Benedictine Monastery. (P1)*
>
> *Meditation started in 2007, when I entered the convent. (P20)*
>
> *I spent a week with the Trappists, and it became the rhythm of my life. Then later I happened to see a brochure about a week-long Centering Prayer retreat with Cynthia Bourgeault. I signed up and loved it. (P25)*

Participant 29 (below) expressed a number of aspects about their initial introduction to CCP. They noted they were not even looking for a spiritual practice, they were simply burnt out and searching 'for something'. Their comments reflect comments of those who also spoke of being desperate and dissatisfied before discovering CCP. In their search, P29 came upon a community who welcomed them into the communities' lived experience of spirituality. P29 recognized their own surprise at being receptive to the invitation. They also spoke of their embodied experience within the community, in which even in our short interview they mentioned the beauty of the eucharist and an awareness of nature and the coyotes in the 'background'. This initial exposure led them into an even fuller embodied lived experience, in which they eventually became a member of the Trappist order and now maintain a consistent daily CCP practice. They further note that this community gave them 'permission' to do nothing, which although they are an active participant in the community, they felt they had permission to sit in contemplation with God and not feel any guilt.

> *I realized I was burned out. I was a professor and I did retreats. I was looking for something, but I did not know what. I was on sabbatical in Colorado. I saw a sign for a Trappist monastery, and I wondered in. They invited me to do a retreat. I should have been repelled, but I was bitten. The eucharist was beautiful. There were coyotes in the background. I am now a member of the Trappist order and a family brother of it. They give me permission to do nothing and feel no guilt. Being over doing. The fullness of what it means to exist. (P29)*

Although this study is primarily focused on the experience of embodiment within the actual practice of CCP, it is noteworthy that as P29 spoke of their experience at the monastery they presented it as being so all consuming and full. Yet, their experience at

the monastery, and of CCP while they were there, was so full in an embodied way and in the sense of: Being over doing.

5.1.2 Beyond Words

The second concept of CCP is: Beyond Words. This reflects comments in which practitioners explained aspects of their CCP practice, including lived experience, well-being, and embodied aspects; however, at times participants expressed that their CCP practice challenged verbal description.

> *I don't know how specifically I can describe it [CCP].
> (P10)*

> *I mean, there isn't a way to talk about it [CCP] because it doesn't…it's beyond language. (P11)*

> *I didn't have any aha or break-through moment, but I did have a subtle shift. If you ask me to explain it, I am not sure I can. You know it is a mystery, but I sensed God was doing something in the Centering Prayer practice or the contemplative prayer practice. (P36)*

The following brief dialogue indicates that while there are elements of this practice that go beyond words, still the practice remains focused on being with God, an experience itself that can go beyond description.

> Interviewer*: Anything else you would like to add about contemplative prayer, especially related to your relationship with God?*

> Practitioner*: It is so hard to put language to, isn't it? I can feel myself stuttering. What I know is that I feel more and more relaxed in God in the sense that I am more able to surrender and not know and not need to know. To have the mystery of God be a place and presence. God is not a problem to figure out. So, for me, contemplative practice has helped that sense that I just want to be with God. I do not have some telos that I want to get something from God. I think that allows me to be so much freer in my own life. (P35)*

As another participant shared, although descriptions of their CCP practice may be beyond words those aspects were not without a sense of understanding in the practitioners' CCP lived experience. There still appears to be an innate understanding of CCP that can defy one's ability to express it with words.

> *I can't describe why exactly you know, in words, but I understand perfectly. (P8)*

Recognizing that elements of this practice are beyond words, this practitioner shared another aspect in which words can only point to certain aspects of this prayer practice. Much as a signpost can point the way to a location, still the sign with its words are not the location.

> *I find that you can't really explain it because it's beyond*
> *words, and words can only point to it. (P7)*

It became evident that while participants could vividly describe aspects of their CCP practice and its meaning in their life, there is also a perspective of this prayer practice in which words can only point to its influence in the practitioner's lived experience. Brandt (2019:202) suggested that CCP can allow a recognition of one's human finitude and the realisation that 'God transcends their propositional thoughts and prayers'. Similarly, spiritual aspects of CCP may transcend one's thoughts and expression, and maybe even at times one's cognitive understanding.

5.1.3 Silent Prayer

The third concept of CCP is: Silent Prayer. Some participants spoke of their awareness that God is *in* the silence. That silence was not a sense of giving up or releasing all noise and creating an emptiness, but rather that the silence could also be recognized as a presence that God is in.

> *Of course, God is in the silence. (P19)*

> *The silence was not something I had to give up, but a*
> *presence in its own right. Everything you need is right*
> *here, just being in the presence. (P31)*

> *I ended up living by myself, and I became aware of silence*
> *with God. (P33)*

Many participants spoke of the important aspect of silence within their CCP practice. They recognized that God is 'in' the silence and that it was grounding for them. Silence is not just an empty void of sound, but within CCP it was wordless and thoughtless. It is a place to watch, wait, become aware, and in a sense, as a few expressed, it's an embodied rhythm. Silence within CCP was expressed in ways that were multi-faceted.

> *I was just sitting down in front of the altar, and just*
> *watching and waiting in silence. (P20)*

> *It's a rhythm. But the part of day that has to do with silence,*
> *it is the grounding. (P25)*

> *Then I spent time in silence, in a Centering Prayer exercise. It is wordless and thoughtless. (P30)*

> *Sometimes we go for a walk to the sea, but it is all in silence. (P32)*

Yet, while silence could be a presence to appreciate alone with God, it could also be experienced within a group of CCP practitioners.

> *Most of the time that room is silent and those are just, those are times when I feel like I've been carried by that collective intention to consent to a much deeper level of consent within myself. That's just, it's a treasure and that's something that I can't maintain on my own. (P3)*

> *I think the sense of profound stillness comes more easily and quickly and it arises more readily in a group. Especially with very practiced meditators. I also think there is the welcome and mutual support. (P21)*

Silence was similarly valued within group CCP; however, there was a way in which some expressed the group CCP silence potentially came more quickly and it arose more readily within the group. It was also recognized as a way in which the group assisted one in consenting to an even deeper level within themselves in silent CCP. Sometimes experiencing this silence in CCP can be easier in a group.

> *Often stillness is so daunting […]. When we all experience silence together that is a much different way to experience stillness and silence. It is easier than on one's own. Often, they are really moved by how powerful that experience is. (P34)*

Being in silence together in CCP can help to ease the discomfort with silence that can sometimes be experienced within this practice. Participants valued the silent aspect of this prayer practice, yet they also expressed that sometimes silence could be difficult, confrontive, and uncomfortable.

> *If I am alone in my cell [room], I am easily distracted. I mean it is more difficult to sustain and to hold this silence, but I do not know why. Maybe you are much more confronted with yourself, but it is hard to describe. It is a silence. First of all, you have to quiet all the things in your head and all the things going on inside you. It is the most difficult thing to do, to be silent. Difficult, but sometimes I can sit and hold the silence in me and enjoy the silence. (P20)*

> *When I was in seminary, we took a trip to a monastery and it was uncomfortable for me to sit in silence. (P16)*

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Frustration in silence could also be influenced by potentially distracting environmental sounds. These could be intermittent disruptive noises, or some consistent 'noise' found within the CCP space. Yet, for the following participant (P15) and others, one way to deal with these ambient noises was to just accept them and allow them to be part of one's silence within.

> *I used music early on because it would be also kind of some white noise [participant referring to noise that helps to mask other background noises], and there was something to that, that worked for me very well. I've moved, not moved away from but expanded into silence, and there I use that in air quotes [participant used both their hands to indicate virtual quotation marks around the word silence, indicating that silence was not always without any other background noise] because there's always noise. There's always something. And, my frustration early on was how do I push that out? And so, I've felt frustrated that I was trying to push everything out to find that quiet space. And I found when I took it all in, then I found that quiet space. So, if a car went by, I would acknowledge and hear it. And then I take it all in and once I've taken it in and just embraced it, then it just becomes part of that centring for me. And so, I walked through all my senses and just take in that sound of the fan, I hear in the back and taking the sound of birds, and if it's a car that's going by that they should take that into them, and then it is gone, and I can recognize the silence. (P15)*

While silence was of elemental importance within one's CCP practice, still it could be a difficult aspect. For some, it was a process of practicing and learning how to sit in the silence, less encumbered by the silence itself or the seemingly intruding noises. Sometimes, accepting competing noises or practising in a group was found to be beneficial. One participant (P35) remarked on another perspective of CCP and silence. While valuing silence themselves, they acknowledged another cultural perspective of CCP that does not include a strong focus on silence. While potentially an important aspect of CCP, this was only noted by this participant and is simply presented here, as this study is only focused on the silent practice of CCP.

> *There is also a critique of everything I have just said. It comes from some parts of African American practices, that say defining contemplative practices by stillness and silence is very European and is one way of doing contemplation. The African way has its own contemplative practices that has its own way of drums and shout. (P35)*

5.1.4 Participant Data on Christian Contemplative Prayer Methods

A fourth emerging concept is: Christian Contemplative Prayer Methods. A surprising aspect within the data was the emergence of various CCP methods. One aspect that made it seem surprising was the fact that the initial ten participants had primarily spoken about their method of CCP as being focused on sitting in silence. This initial group consisted primarily of Catholic and Episcopal Centering Prayer participants. The varying methods began to emerge among the next phase of participants who consisted primarily of Protestant participants. The methods began to exhibit some form of movement within their CCP method; however, their movement was all prior to their time of sitting silently in CCP. For all participants, the specific method seemed to simply be a means towards contemplation and awareness of union with God.

> *So, for me, meditation is a hodge podge. Meditation for me, isn't monolithic, in the sense that there is only one aspect to that. There are a lot of things I would lump under that heading. For me it comes back to Colossians chapter 3: Set your mind on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God.[47] So, anything that will help me set my mind on Christ becomes a meditative practice. (P12)*

> *So, what makes it meditation was my question to people and what makes it contemplative prayer, what is it that gives it that name? Is it one thing or is it many things? (P15)*

> *I started giving myself permission, that there was more than one way to seek God. (P25)*

Some participants expressed that there was an element of embodied movement that helped them into that place of resting in God's presence in silence. In a sense, the movement helped to quiet their body and hence quiet themselves to be able to sit in silence and just be present.

> *They're getting quiet enough to make that connection and it's hard for people. That's why I think I have looked for places and ways like using the Play-Doh for kids and providing a place to put that energy, so that their soul can listen. Praying in colour[48] is another contemplative thing I've used with kids and adults. And so different ways of doing contemplative prayer for different people, you know, I had to get a little creative. The Desert Mothers and Fathers, I mean there's just so much history and they're*

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[47] This is in reference to the scriptural passage in Colossians 3:1-2

[48] Praying in colour references the use of contemplative, silent doodling, without any specific thoughts, but just an awareness of God's presence. It also referenced Sybil Macbeth's *Praying in Color* books.

> *very structured. Contemplative prayer doesn't always work for everybody, but I had thought that's what it had to be. I mean it just comes in all shapes and sizes. (P15)*

> *I think my prayer practices for me are generally based around movement, and it's funny because I still encourage that in other people. I still like to learn about prayer languages, and best prayer practices for other personalities. (P16)*

> *It was really that contemplative prayer experience, that was at many different times, walks, and journaling, and sitting in silence, that God used to lead me […]. (P36)*

In that awareness, one is resting in God's presence releasing all other thoughts and actions. Within this recognition of various methods was the realization that people, their personalities,[49] their Christian faith tradition, and personal perspectives can all vary and need to be recognized as an integral aspect of this practice.

> *Some of the women from the group said it was just hard to sit still. So, it could be different types of people may not be able to do this. (P14)*

> *We are all so different. How we learn, how we relate, and how we come into being is all so different. (P29)*

> *I believe there are so many ways, just as there are other people. (P33)*

> *You know if your kid can't learn math, we would try every way to teach them, and how is that different from prayer. I have come to realize that I cannot be so arrogant to know what someone's relationship with God should look like. (P34)*

> *That became an aha and I found God was really present. I had thought I had to go through these practices and God might show up, instead I realized that practices made me more aware that God was there. It is kind of like language. There are lots of languages, and they are all contextual and fit in the culture in which they are formed. They are all different, but all serve well. So, I think it is the same with spiritual practices, there is just a feast, a richness of contemplative practices. (P35)*

In their affirmation of various methods of contemplative prayer leading to contemplation, participants described the following methods indicated in both Figure 5.1 and Table 5.3.

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[49] This study did not have the space to examine personality differences related to various methods of CCP. Personality perspectives are only noted here, as they were mentioned by a few participants.

Each method is a silent practice with one's intention focused on God, ultimately leading the practitioner to the same end — silent contemplation in union with God.

Figure 5.1 Various Methods of Contemplative Prayer Leading to Contemplation
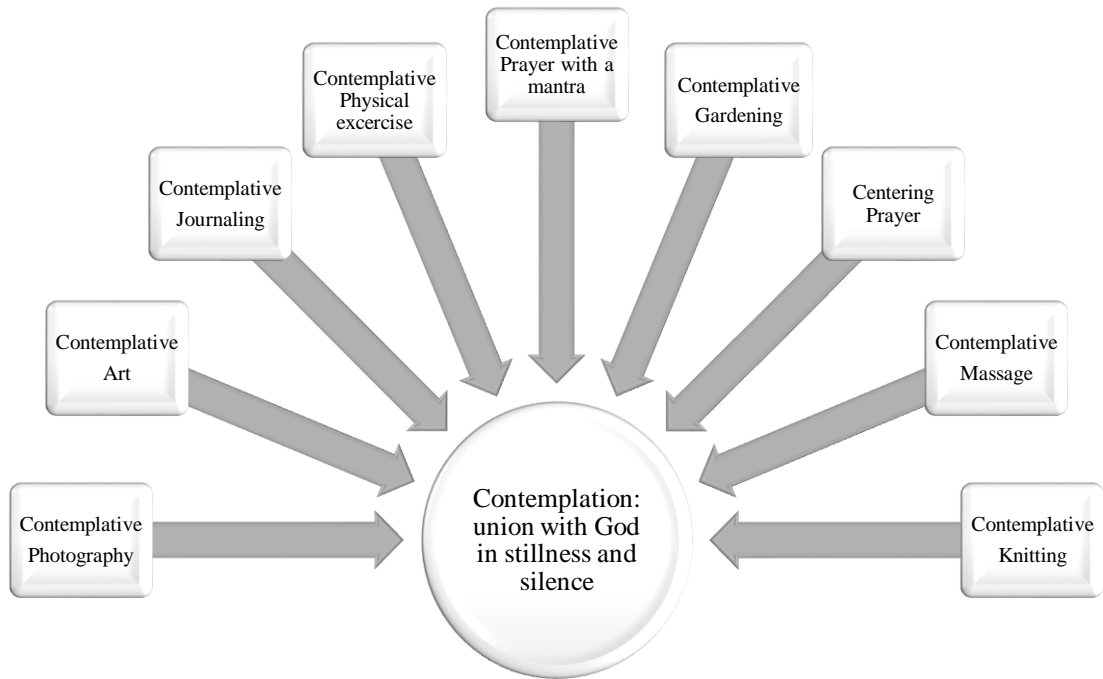
Table 5.3 further describes those paths. Participants delineated the specifics of these activities, relating them to individual prayer practices, or those practiced in a group setting. The activities assisted in the process of settling the practitioner, releasing physical energy, and helping to quiet their being. Within one sitting, these CCP methods often led to a cessation of the particular method, with the practitioner resting in silence, with their intention focused on unity with God.

Table 5.3 Examples of Methods of Embodied Christian Contemplative Prayer

Method	Method description - (individual or group)
Contemplative Journalling	Silent journaling — Often includes journaling around any given topic, or really no topic at all
Contemplative Doodling	Silently doodling — Often involves writing a word/name followed by doodling around that word
Contemplative Art	Silent artistic time, including various artistic mediums
Contemplative Biking/Jogging/Walking	Any variety of silent physical activities

Method	Method description - (individual or group)
Contemplative Christian Yoga	Silent yoga participation, with a focus on God, often ending in the Savasana pose[50] (also known as corpse pose)
Contemplative Gardening	Being present with God in the quiet garden
Contemplative Prayer Movement	Silent embodied movement focused on particular prayers or Scriptures, and God
Contemplative Prayer: Embodied in Stillness (with or without a mantra)	Sitting in silence, with one's intention in God (for example, depicted in classical writings and contemporary Christian teachings of authors such as Thomas Keating and John Main)
Contemplative Photography	A silent walk while photographing, followed by a quiet contemplative gaze at the photos to receive in the photo something from God
Contemplative Massage	A time of releasing thoughts with a focus on God, in silence and stillness, during massage
Contemplative Knitting	Knitting (keeping one's hands occupied), while releasing thoughts, and sitting in silence with one's intention focused on God

Some participants spoke of incorporating yoga into their CCP practice, and some compared the sitting in yoga with the contemplative prayer 'sit'.

> *So, like with Christian meditation, you know how people*
> *do the yoga sit, well with this you can 'sit' anywhere. It is*
> *so flexible. (P19)*

For some there was a recognition that not all Christians believed that this ancient Hindu practice could be a part of a Christian practice. Thoughts on yoga from a Christian perspective are presented as transcribed from the interview of a CCP practitioner who teaches Christian yoga (Appendix 15). This participant's comments reflect the perspective of other practitioners in this study as well. Theologian and priest, Thomas Ryan (1995:145) argued that yoga for the Christian can be a way to inhabit the physical body, using bodily postures to increase awareness and 'concrete application of our incarnational faith'. He further insisted that the discipline of yoga can help remind the Christian of the indwelling of the Trinity and this revelation of what a 'precious, awesome, divine expression [Christians] are in their embodiment'. Some participants integrated a Christian perspective in their yoga practice which helped to lead them into a resting place of contemplation in union with God. The participants' data emerged with varying methods of CCP. However, there was a consistent aspect that supported all methods ultimately leading towards contemplation as expressed by this participant:

> *Contemplative prayer is about sitting in God's presence,*
> *that pure presence. (P24)*

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[50] This final resting pose allowed the participant to silently rest with their CCP intention in union with God.

For many participants there was a recognition that one could not privilege one CCP method over another. All methods that were spoken about led the practitioner to a place of silent contemplation in union with God.

> *There is some confusion, they think that it is the practice which is creating something. God is already here; the practice is the strategy that gets us here. The practice itself is not magic, and when we become attached and think you have to do this one practice, that is just idolatry. That is like taking the sign that is pointing to God and making it God. We have to be really careful about privileging a particular practice. (P35)*

Participants also expressed that their CCP practice was connected to a developing awareness of listening to God more, becoming more open and spiritually aware, leading to greater unceasing prayerfulness.

> *I'm listening to God and that's what I think Centering Prayer really is. I'm listening, instead of doing the usual talk, talk, talk, talk, talk. (P4)*

> *So just being in a constant…I feel like I'm in a constant conversation with God now in a way that I wasn't before. (P8)*

> *I used to think of prayer as a little request making. But I think the emphasis with contemplative prayer is about listening. What is going on there. I also think I see things [spiritually] that might be connected, and I never saw that. (P18)*

> *A contemplative Christian wants to be awake and aware of anything that they can receive from God. So, the way I see it is that: Contemplation is putting yourself in God's gaze and being totally open to whatever he sends, and for me that is prayer. (P22)*

This conceptual category of Christian Contemplative Prayer, helps to delineate the different ways in which participants were initially introduced to this practice, the ways that CCP description is sometimes beyond words, the way in which silence envelops this spiritual discipline, and the various methods that long-term CCP practitioners use to enter that silent space in contemplative union with God.

5.2 Conceptual Category —Well-Being

The second main conceptual category is: *Well-being*. It is delineated in the following four concepts: 1) Personal Well-Being, 2) Communal Well-Being, 3) Environmental Well-Being, and 4) Spiritual Well-Being. These are depicted in Table 5.4 below.

Table 5.4 Conceptual Category — *Well-Being* — Coding Structure

Conceptual Category	Concept	Property	Dimension
Well-Being Section 5.2	Personal Well-Being Section 5.2.1	Meaning and core values	• Strengthening core values • Valuing developing core values
		Self-awareness	• Recognizing 'true-self' • Becoming more of 'true-self'
		Healing	• Ongoing process • Holistic
	Communal Well-Being Section 5.2.2	Others noticing the changes	• Valuing others perception • Others complimenting changes
		Restoring relationships	• Resolving conflicts • Letting go of past hurts
		Improving relationships	• Accepting • Patient • Forgiving • Loving • More open • Less anger • Less judging • More authentic • Peaceful
	Environmental Well-Being Section 5.2.3	Effecting	• Effect the world
		Connecting	• Creating and connection to the Creator • More connected with creation
		Appreciating	• In nature • Creations awe
	Spiritual Well-Being Section 5.2.4	Growing	• More spiritual
		Recognizing	• Realizing one's identity as a child of God • Recognizing God as loving
		Accepting	• Openness to God's presence • Allowing the Spirit to work

Within the data, CCP was recognized as a process evolving in multi-faceted ways as realised within the process of the CCP practice itself, and also as a process which contributed not only to individual's well-being but also on a broader scale.

> *You know, this [CCP] is a three-step process [use of sacred word, close one's eyes, release all thoughts] I learned on the first day, and it is all I really need to know about it. (P2)*

> *So, as time has gone on, I think in the process, I have built my mind up or something, or really strengthened my mind, and I think that's part of it too. That I have gone with longer periods of less distraction. Then I think, there goes that process. (P6)*

> *It [Centering Prayer]is about the process, and that you can trust the process. I think that is really what it's about. You can trust the process, because this is how it works, and it is an ancient practice. (P8)*

> *It is an ongoing process. […] It is part of the healing process in the world. (P9)*

5.2.1 Personal Well-Being

Personal well-being was reflected in the data through a few different perspectives. One of those is an increasing development of one's emerging 'true self'. In this way, participants described a greater self-awareness, and through that a process of becoming more authentic with both themselves and others.

> *My understanding of Centering Prayer is that it's not about what's happening in here but it's about what's happening from here out. It's about what kind of person are you going to be in the world. (P2)*

> *I feel less selfish. I feel more grounded, more centred, more real, more authentic. I'm much more aware of what my feelings are, much more able to identify patterns that may not be so helpful, and then choose a different pattern for different behaviour. (P7)*

> *Without Centering Prayer, it is so easy to get caught up in the superficial identities, and that is so limiting. (P18)*

> *It is not what I do, but becoming who I am. (P31)*

Participants realized a growing sense of peace, patience, and lessening anxiety in their lives. These aspects referred to a sense of participants' inner and outer well-being, relating to aspects of the self that are not visible, but yet are personally realized within one's being and one's interaction with others.

> *I'm more focused on what I do, and more in the present. I feel more at peace with myself, I'm less stressed out. (P6)*

> *I am becoming generally less anxious. (P14)*

> *[I am] much less worried. (P20)*

> *So, for the most part now, I feel rather peaceful. (P23)*

> *I recognize I feel more deeply as well. (P23)*

> *I think I am becoming more holistic. (P33)*

Two CCP practitioners reflected on their own personal positive developments in which they found freedom from temptations they had previously struggle with for years. They attributed the influence of their CCP practice in giving them the strength to resist the specific temptation, or even their experience of the abatement of that temptation.

> *I'll be honest. I had some problems with [out of concerns for privacy, this struggle remains unnamed here], and since I've done this Centering Prayer every day, I haven't had that kind of temptation. I just, it's just, not there. And so, that's been of help. (P6)*

> *Here's one more point that's important, that I am dealing with an addiction. I wouldn't say what it is, but I find that centring gives me the will to not do what I want to do. My body and mind tell me: do this. But now, I can make a choice about it. I can choose to not do it. It never seems to disappear because it's so ingrained, since really teenage years. [...] So, what centring does is I'm aware of it. I just choose to do something different. (P7)*

Participants' data indicated a belief in healing through CCP, which was recognized by some to be holistic or in some sense transformative. Some expressed a perception of healing within their memories or emotions, which then became part of their increasing well-being within their interpersonal relationships.

> *The memories don't go away, but they are healed. (P1)*

> *Yes sure, it is certainly support in emotional healing. (P18)*

Participants also indicated the ways in which they sensed healing was a part of their whole being and helped to bring greater holistic awareness to their entire being. It was also recognized that healing, related to CCP, was going on whether they realized it or not as

they grew in wholeness and completeness in God. In this way, healing was recognized as part of their embodied CCP experience.

> *So, I believe in Centering Prayer as a healing practice, and I have a lot of faith that the Centering Prayer involves whatever healing I need at the moment. (P8)*

> *So yeah, I think for me, part of my early trauma was related to separating from my body and my physical sensations and dissociating in different ways. So, the other part that was really important for my personal healing is that meditation and contemplative prayer, with all the singing, the sitting and the grounded-ness brought me back into relationship with my body, which was necessary for me to really entertain healing that would last. (P11)*

> *Healing, I feel like there has been an amount. Oh, for sure. (P14)*

> *I think it is super powerful! I think it can be great for times when people are most vulnerable. When people engage in it, it is very healing and meaningful. (P16)*

> *I think my time in contemplation or in the garden is healing. I am so grateful, especially during this pandemic that I had a way to come to God, it is already there, and I am healed in that. I have a spiritual director, I read my Bible, but I already had the quiet garden and it has been a part of healing. (P32)*

While certainly not the focus, there was a recognition that the healing found within CCP could also be part of a 'curative process', contributing to one's improving health and well-being overall.

> *There is a healing process when you make meditation. When you pray, it is not just being silent, healing in the way that the reality of things become less exaggerated, and that is one of the most important things. It also has a curative process on my health. (P20)*

Participants improving sense of well-being is also realised within their interpersonal or communal well-being, contributing to a fuller sense of both personal and communal embodied well-being.

5.2.2 Communal Well-Being

Communal well-being is reflected with a general sense of improving and restoring relationships. Improvement within relationships was also related to improvements in

one's self and a growing sense of knowing and loving one's self. This was depicted through relationships from the past and also through a sense of how one felt about those who have died.

> *Now our mom died, and I think contemplative prayer has*
> *helped to heal that relationship [...] I have been able to let*
> *go of stuff, and it has healed my relationship with my mom.*
> *(P18)*

While participants noted positive changes within themselves, sometimes participants expressed that others had noticed positive changes that the participants had not even been aware of within themselves. It seemed that sometimes increasing well-being was almost a by-product of CCP, of which some aspects of well-being were not always recognized within the individual. Their CCP focus was to be aware of their contemplative union with God, therefore associated influences related to well-being were not necessarily part of the motivation for the practice and were not always recognized by the practitioners themselves. But sometimes the positive changes in the practitioners were observed by those around them, who sometimes would point out the changes they noticed.

> *Well, about a year ago my brother told me, 'I have noticed*
> *you're nicer than you used to be'. (P2)*

> *I think others notice more. I think it has given me a gift to*
> *relate in a non-anxious way. (P25)*

> *I realize things are flowing from me in the contemplative*
> *sense. So, my wife said to me as an outside observer [...]*
> *you were always kind but this [CCP] has made you kinder.*
> *(P31)*

In discussing their practice, the participants themselves could also articulate an increasing ability to be forgiving, accepting, patient, open, peaceful and generally less judgmental and angry towards others. They also recognized a sense of growing in compassion and love for other people.

> *That's [CCP] helped me, I think in my relationships, and*
> *to be a little less judgmental, and less flying off the handle.*
> *(P6)*

> *I think it has made me more accepting of people. I catch*
> *myself when I see myself becoming more judgmental. (P13)*

> *But contemplative prayer is very supportive in the way that*
> *God accepts us the way we are, and we need to accept*
> *other people. (P18)*

> *A part of meditation is forgiveness. (P19)*

> *Radical acceptance! That's the big one! (P22)*

As participants found themselves becoming more of their true self and more authentic, this growing sense of personal well-being also helped them to approach relationships more authentically and sometimes in a way that seemed to flow better.

> *My life flows better because things, thoughts and especially action seems to be more [positively] spontaneous, in which I might say or do something that would be surprising to me, normally. So, I feel less selfish, as a way of putting it. I feel more grounded, more centred, more real, more authentic. I'm much more aware of what my feelings are, much more able to identify patterns that may not be so helpful, and then choose a different pattern for different behaviour. I'm freer to love and be present to someone's pain just to be there with them and I'm not trying to fix it. (P7)*

> *When I am practicing regularly, I can enter into interactions with people from a more stable and centred place, where I'm more in touch with who I am, why I'm there in that moment, and why we might be here in this together at this moment. It impacts my relationships in that I can enter into them more authentically, and then I can have a better perspective as time goes on about those relationships and try to understand other people better. (P9)*

Participants well-being was also recognized in the way they perceived or related to the environment around them. This environment was realized in a communal way with all of humanity in God and also in a way that included all of God's creation in the world. In CCP, there was a sense of connection within CCP that seemed to embody the individual within all of God's creation.

5.2.3 Environmental Well-Being

Environmental well-being was perceived in participants through a sense of CCP's potential ripple effect on the world and all of creation. Many believed that when they practiced CCP it went beyond just themselves, extending to all of humanity and all that God created.

> *We do contemplative prayer anytime we sit down to do our prayer and it is for all of humanity, all of creation. It has an effect far beyond us. So, it's in that with the core of healing of the earth. And that's why I think too that monks*

> *and nuns, who were cloistered people, are important. Because they are a minority, but they are a significant minority who were helping to keep us grounded and centred in that way of being. [It is a way of being] that God created us for and who Jesus tells us, you know, well, when the disciples said to him, where do you dwell? He says, come and see, that is, the place where he dwells is in the heart of humanity that's full. (P3)*

> *So, my yoga practice, […] I don't preach to my own sense of leading it, but it is to help people appreciate their own bodies and by extension, honour the bodies of others and honour the body of the earth. (P11)*

Hence a ripple effect was also recognized as a sense of connection with all of creation. Participants felt a greater wholeness and less separated from creation around them. Ultimately, their sense of connection and embodiment within creation gave them a sense of greater connection with their Creator God.

> *Part of where my spirituality is consists of being a part of all that is around me, rather than this separated experience. Our ministry comes out of us becoming instruments of God's grace throughout the world, in and flowing through us. (P31)*

> *For example, John of the Cross is an enigma. He talks about going into a cave to do contemplation. He talks about the moss in the cave and says don't touch it because the sensual distraction, which distract you from God. But I would touch it, stroke it, and thank God from the depth of my being for His creation. John [of the Cross] talks about escaping all this stuff and avoiding the senses. And I think that all 5 senses are wonderful entrées into the presence of God. I am overwhelmed by the reality of God around me. So, mine is an extrovert and it takes me through created things to the Creator. I am in love with my God, my Creator, and extroverts love the world and use the world to connect with God. (P29)*

Their connection with creation and nature also helped them to perceive nature with greater awe and see the power within nature for healing.

> *I am also getting my certification as a forest therapy guide. I began finding that nature was powerful with my directees, especially those who had struggled with trauma. I use nature now every day. Sometimes it is exercise and sometimes it is a contemplative walk that becomes my tent. (P22)*

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Many participants spoke of the ways that their CCP practice had enhanced their sense of environmental well-being, in the sense that this spiritual discipline connected them in a greater way with all of creation. In that connection, they developed a greater awe and appreciation for humanity and all of God's creation.

5.2.4 Spiritual Well-Being

In this study, practitioners spoke about their spiritual well-being from the perspective of their relationship and awareness of God in their life. Through their long-term practice, CCP had helped to integrate an awareness of letting go and trusting God. This aspect of their relationship with God helped participants to become more open to God's presence and guidance in their life. As practitioners recognized God more in their lives, they had a sense of God's presence in the moment, speaking into their lives, and guiding their choices.

> *It is an openness to God's presence. Sometimes it takes the form of conversation, prayer, or mental discourse. Oftentimes, it becomes more like celebration and appreciation. A turning point for me in contemplative life came some time ago when the thought hit me for several days and returned this impression in which God said: Stop asking for what you already have. My approach had been, God I am seeking this level of relationship with you, I am seeking this depth. But the perspective was that I was seeking for something that I did not have. I felt like I wasn't there yet. God finally broke through and said, 'you are already there, so live deeply into that present reality, but don't act as though you don't already have it'. That was almost like a spiritual whiplash. That really had a radical change to my practice and revealed to me my approach and the mechanistic aspect of it. If I could only find the right formula, you know. But that really did open things up for me that continues to be revelatory and satisfying that I currently live in the real tangible active presence of God, all the time. Sometimes I take time to delight in that, and see that, and sometimes it is just happy reflection. God is the most joyful Being in all creation. And if you are in that presence you cannot help but be in that joy. So, learning to delight in that reality, over the other things, is a major thing of what the silence and solitude is for me on a daily basis. And then I get to realize I don't even have to speak. (P12)*

This participant (P12) resonated a thought that others had similarly expressed. Often their perspective of an improving spiritual well-being was not one of gaining so much in a relationship with God that they had not had before. It was more related to fully 'learning

to delight in that reality' of God, who is always present in one's life, but with whom they had become more wholly aware of through their CCP practice. In becoming more aware, their relationship with God grew and that had helped them to be able to recognize and trust in God's guidance in their life. There is a letting go of thoughts, expectations, pre-conceived notions of who God is and simply trusting what they understand to be God's leading in their life. An integral part of letting go and trusting God was connected to increased opening to God's Spirit working in and guiding their lives.

> *I mean even with a relationship with God, I felt I was pretty strong starting with Centering Prayer. In mindfulness they gave you something to hang on to, but not in Centering Prayer. You let go of everything, even the present moment. It's a little unnerving, but I've become accustomed to the void. It's not a void. It's not even, it's kind of an emptiness, but it's...I don't know. There's just like, it's not an empty emptiness, there is something there that says it's not. My emptiness lets the Spirit work. That's right. (P7)*

Participants recognized that as their relationship with God grew and developed more thoroughly, as they also recognized God's acceptance and love for them. In many cases, they found themselves identifying more as beloved children of God. These aspects gave them a sense of greater spiritual well-being.

> *I thought perhaps of God as a judging God. That certainly was the case with me. And so, over the years, I think especially because of Centering Prayer, I don't have that kind of notion anymore. But rather the God of tremendous love and care, mercy, and compassion. I don't have to earn God's love. (P6)*

> *I think of myself based on what I do. But my contemplative practice has saved me from myself, because it helps me to realize that God accepts me for who I am. (P22)*

> *I think like any practice it leads to conviction, but it also expands my understanding of God's love for me. It can expand my knowledge of my character defects, or things done and left undone. I think that is an important part of our prayer life, to realize my love for God and God's love for me. (P34)*

Participants' spiritual well-being was integrated with their personal, communal, and environmental well-being in such a way that participants spoke of their sense of embodied well-being in life. As their personal well-being grew positively, they related with others and the environment in ways that reflected their growing sense of well-being. They

became more aware of God's presence in all their relationships and throughout their daily embodied lived experiences.

5.3 Conceptual Category — Embodiment

In terms of stillness, I think it can be misunderstood, and is seen as anti-bodies. We ignore our bodies, when in fact stillness is an invitation to more deeply inhabit our bodies, to become more mindful in our bodies. So, I think even something like a body scan, to be aware of what one is carrying, what one is carrying in their body can be an invitation to stillness. Rather than thinking I have to ignore my body, or repress what is going on, and then I can get still. Because I think stillness is the place of full naked vulnerable-ness with God, that a lot of us see this as a place to hide. A lot of our frenetic activity is feeling like we are doing stuff, but we do have to pause and be vulnerable with God. So, I think stillness invites that. (P35)

The third main conceptual category is: *Embodiment*, which helped to develop participants' understandings of themselves as integrated holistic beings within their CCP practice: body, mind, and spirit. Embodied participation in CCP is a very important aspect of the long-term practitioners' lived experience. As the participant quote (P35) above acknowledges, 'stillness is an invitation to more deeply inhabit our bodies'. In their discussions of embodiment within this practice, participants expressed the importance of their embodied self fully engaged within CCP. The embodied aspects of CCP are more fully delineated in this section through the presentation of the data emerging in 1) Embodied Self, 2) Embodied in Christian Community, 3) Embodied Space, and 4) Embodied in God. These are depicted in Table 5.5 below.

Table 5.5 Conceptual Category — *Embodiment* — Coding Structure

Conceptual Category	Concept	Property	Dimension
Embodiment Section 5.3	Embodied Self Section 5.3.1	Experienced in one's body	• Body awareness • Body knowledge • Body participation
		Anchored in the present	• Centring in one's body • In the present with I AM
		Connecting body, mind, and spirit	• Incarnation • Valuing embodiment
	Embodied in Christian Community Section 5.3.2	Support	• Easier to sit in silence together • Group CCP can strengthen one's personal CCP
		Collective intention	• More powerful • Being present
		Connected in love	• Importance of community • Love of others connected to love of self and God
	Embodied Space Section 5.3.3	Empirical space	• Silent space • Relaxed space • Safe space • Peaceful space • Better space • Difficult space • Resting space • Wonderful space • Physical space • Simple/basic space • A space in nature • Familiar space
		Creating space	• Intentional space • Creating a 'tent' space • Holding a space for others
		Sacred space	• A space to commune with God • God as space • Contemplative space/ Entering that meditative space • Receptive space • Communal space
	Embodied in God Section 5.3.4	Heightened awareness	• God's presence • God's patience • Being present with I AM
		Relationship with God	• Connection with God • Coming to God • Overflowing in God's love
		Contemplative union with God	• Temple of God within • God's embodiment: The Incarnation • Unceasing prayer • Contemplation

5.3.1 Embodied Self

The first concept within the conceptual category of Embodiment is: *Embodied Self*. This concept begins to reflect the importance of embodiment within CCP. During the first phase of interviews with Centering Prayer practitioners, they recognized the passive role of their body in their CCP practice. They described themselves during CCP as often times sitting upright in a seat, their feet flat on the ground, with hands and arms relaxed or simply kneeling the entire time on a type of pad on the floor. In this way, they were involved with their embodied self in stillness and silence. Other than a brief mention as to where or how they might sit, there was typically little mention specifically related to their physical body. During phase two and three of the interviews, participants spoke with a more engaging awareness of their body's active embodied role in their CCP practice. Comments referenced the importance of being aware of one's body within this embodied prayer practice.

> *I think embodiment is huge. It is a bodily experience, and that is what contemplation, or the contemplative experience is part of. (P28)*

> *It gives me something to do with my body […], just for my body to slow down. (P34)*

One participant metaphorically described the important aspect of engaging one's embodied self as a means of *being able to settle into that meditative state so much better* within their CCP method.

> *You know when we are getting ready to go on vacation. It always takes me a day and a half to really get into vacation mode, where I can turn everything off and just relax. Letting go of all the other stuff and let myself relax and be in the moment. Where I give time for myself to shut down and really be in the moment and what the moment is. Which is why, when I did body flow, I was able to settle into that meditative state so much better. I had already moved my body, I had released the schedule and the to do list, and the where do I need to run next. How do I shut off the daily concerns and be able to enter into that space? (P16)*

This metaphor helps to illustrate the similar way in which, for some CCP practitioners, the movement within their CCP method helped them to prepare their embodied self to be able to sit in stillness and silence in contemplative union with God. Their particular CCP method helps not only engage their entire embodied being, but also created a way for them to enter contemplation more fully.

The embodied self within the CCP method acknowledged the practitioners' awareness of their body and its need to participate in a holistic way. Rather than in a way which sought to override the body in a disembodied sense, the practitioner engaged the body's knowledge and sought its participation within their entire being.

> *Some contemplative and meditative prayer practices seek to transcend, overcome, or tame the body. Others invite the body to participate and to offer the wisdom it carries in its physicality. (P34)*

Being aware of one's body also contributed to being aware of existing in the present moment. It was a way of consenting in the present moment to contemplation in union with God.

> *I think contemplative prayer has helped me to be more aware of my body. […] We call Centering Prayer, the prayer of consent and we say that we are consenting to God's presence and action within. […] Within that we're consenting to other things like being in this moment, in this chair in this particular time, you know, being in this body right now with, you know, its pluses and minuses, whatever they may be, and the welcoming prayer is a way of continuing the practice of that consent throughout the day and then checking in with your body. (P3)*
>
> *Doing Centering Prayer and learning about letting go and living in the moment. I have learned to feel that this moment could be the best, because that is where God is. (P14)*

Participants recognized the perspective that the body anchored them in the present, where God is. While recognizing that God is timeless, they spoke of the name that God used in referencing Himself: I AM, which is an indication of the present tense. In this way, practitioners felt that their body kept them in the present, without ruminating on the past or feeling anxious about the future.

> *But with me, sometimes I try this, and I try that. But using only the word, keeps me too much in my head. You know I am a body person; I like to sink into my body. My body helps a lot to centre me. (P13)*
>
> *I would say the basic road map for contemplation, is in order to be present your greatest ally is your body. Because your body is the only thing that is in the same time zone as God. So, God has lots of names in the Bible. They are mostly given. You are the God that provides and so on. The name God offers for Himself is I AM. If you are stuck in the past, he is not there, he is here. If you are stuck in*

the future, he is not there, he's here. Now, of course, there is lots of theology around that, because God is timeless. But when we talk about contemplation, we are talking about the now. The only thing that anchors us in the present is our body. When you are stuck in the past, we call that post-traumatic stress. Sometimes it stays in the past, but you cannot stop thinking about what you should have said and how you should have been. And how it was unfair. That is called PTSD.[51] *If you are stuck in the future, that is called anxiety. So, the only way to be in a contemplative conversation with God is to be present. The only way to do that is to ally yourself with your body. The only way to do that is to be present with your body, how you feel, how you are sitting. When you do art, you notice the substrate, how the pencil feels on the paper. When you are in nature, you notice how the wind feels across your skin. When you take a deep breath, you notice yourself in your body. So, none of the ways to enter matter, yet they are the most important thing. (P22)*

About 5 years ago, God's answers to prayer became: I AM. (P33)

As participants spoke about the importance of their holistic embodied self being centred in and through their bodies, they also affirmed the importance of the human body within the Incarnation. They highlighted the Incarnation of God in Christ as essential to their understanding of the value of not only the body, but the created value of the holistic embodied self.

The Incarnation, the death and resurrection and we offer up our bodies for the sake of the kingdom. So, everything is embodiment. (P29)

We have this central teaching around this one word: Incarnation. The Incarnation itself is the highest endorsement of the human body there is. So, we can't just say, bodies don't matter, your spirit goes to heaven and your body goes away. That is Platonism, but bodies matter. We are one whole: mind, body, and spirit. (P35)

The body is important in the context of the embodied self, and it is a vital part of long-term practitioners CCP practice. Whether practitioners' method is one of sitting in stillness, or if their bodies are actively engaged within their CCP, their embodied self was an important aspect of the long-term CCP practitioners' lived experience of this practice.

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[51] The participant was referencing Post-traumatic stress syndrome.

As practitioners recognized their embodied self, they also realised the importance of being embodied within their Christian community.

5.3.2 Embodied in Christian Community

The second concept within the conceptual category of Embodiment is: *Embodied in Christian Community*. Within this concept is the recognition of the important role one's Christian CCP community can play in one's personal CCP practice. This was reflected in a couple of ways in which many practitioners found it easier to maintain a consistent personal practice because of periodic opportunities to participate with their prayer group. They also found that sitting quietly in CCP sometimes came easier within the group.

> *It's hard to describe how the group strengthens your practice, but I just love sitting with a group. (P8)*

> *And one of the reasons I do my Thursday group here is that I think the community part is really important, […] even though it's a really small group that comes. Their home practice thrives because they come once a week to meet together. They know there are other people out there doing [CCP] with them, even when they're not physically together. (P11)*

> *But I have a hard time quieting my mind I guess, [when I am] alone. But if I'm with other people, it's much easier for me personally. (P14)*

> *Well, one of the reasons I went in and out of practice was because I did not have a group. It is very hard to sustain on your own. Being in a community of meditators is vital. You can express how your journey is going. It energizes you and gives you confirmation. (P19)*

> *I think the sense of profound stillness comes more easily and quickly and it arises more readily in a group, especially with very practiced meditators. I also think there is the welcome and mutual support. If someone does not have a group, they can meditate alone, but the group can enhance and support the meditation process. John Main says meditation creates community. (P21)*

> *Often stillness is so daunting to my students, and so difficult. They need to begin with silence in walking or jogging. […] When I invite them in class, this is a big difference when we all experience silence together. It is a much different way to experience stillness and silence. It is easier than on one's own. Often, they are really moved by how powerful that experience is. (P35)*

In the group there is a sense of community and with that a realisation of contemplative union together with God. There was a very profound recognition that the group CCP was more powerful, energizing, and an experience, as one participant articulated, that helps one 'consent' to a deeper level within oneself. Some expressed this as a 'collective intention' or a 'oneness of consciousness' as noted in the following participant quote:

> *Most of the time that room is silent and those are just…those are times when I feel like I've been carried by that collective intention to consent to a much deeper level of consent within myself. That's just, it's a treasure and that's something that I can't maintain on my own. And I think that we're not even supposed to try to maintain that on our own, that…that kind of experience nourishes us and feeds us and sustains us. But we can't hold onto that any more than we can hold onto anything. (P3)*

> *It's really…it's really our group's conscience. (P8)*

> *The group is profound. It is almost like a God or Christ consciousness. It is almost like a oneness of consciousness or a unity. I call the individual prayer like building spiritual muscles. (P23)*

> *The way they are set up, you are in silence and solitude, then you are with others in an intense way to take you down deep to what God is doing. (P30)*

Although the practitioners' personal practice of CCP was a prominent part of their spiritual discipline, the value and difference between individual CCP and group CCP was a theme that participants shared.

> *And that just was captivating for me and to be in that situation [in CCP] with other people. (P5)*

> *In the small group, it's just a very different feeling of energy and to be together and support one another, because in a lot of ways it's a really tough practice. (P7)*

> *I just, I heard from these kids [who experienced CCP] that it's a powerful thing [in a group]. (P15)*

> *For the soul, when you do contemplation it reaches deep inside you in a different way, because it is internal, and it is introspective. […] When you sing that's great and when you worship that's wonderful, but when you sit with a group of people, there is something that just reaches inside of you. And maybe that is an assumption that I shouldn't make. But…. (P16)*

I like the group, because there is a way in which you are being held by the group. The group silence is different. (P34)

I think it is more powerful. I think there is a lot we do not understand scientifically, probably chemical/physical properties that connect us to one another. There is a palpable awareness, the energies as the spirit is present in that, especially for beginners, who feel intimidated. (P35)

Many participants recognized this difference within the group as being recognisable, yet it was still very difficult to express what the difference was. This is reflected in a variety of ways in which participants characterised the difference in their group prayer, although they sometimes struggled to convey exactly what the difference was.

I can't explain what the difference is, but the feeling is different. There is a difference between a group sit and a solitary sit. I want to say the group sit is more powerful, but that's not the right word, it's not getting to it. I don't have a word that explains the difference unfortunately. On the other hand, [a friend] who leads the Wednesday group once told me that the group sit might be more powerful, but it's the day in day out solitary sits that make the difference, you know. It's like turning to God every day, day in day out for years at a time that make the difference, it's not going to a weekly Centering Prayer group. If you are doing that, you're not going to get what you need out of it. It may seem more powerful, but those daily sits are where the magic happens. (P2)

But I will say, in a group it can be more powerful. Something is going on, some energy or something. (P13)

In a group it seems powerful, it was nice. I do not know how else to describe it. (P24)

And in a group that can lead to something rich or powerful. It can be difficult to put words to it. (P25)

Again, although the positive difference within the group CCP could not always be articulated, participants expressed the importance of the group CCP.

I think being with people you know who are doing exactly the same thing as you are is very nice. (P32)

There is something sacred to find that we are all in that one moment sitting in the presence of Christ. (P25)

We are basically being with God together. We are not clouding it with things that can separate. (P34)

> *Coming together with other people I think just helps on multiple levels, like if there's a really stressful thing going on in life, then just even the camaraderie of being there with people. So, it's kind of, I don't know, maybe it's the extra benefit of just having people around and helping to be a shoulder in a struggle or sharing things together. (P10)*

Another aspect of CCP being embodied in Christian community was the sense of connection and belonging within this embodied prayer group, which at times was also expressed as a connection with other people.

> *Well, it just made me feel like I belonged. We had a group where you belong, and everything you say is okay, and you don't get judged or criticized or condemned. (P1)*

> *Well, technically when you're in Centering Prayer, you're now connected to the group. You're connected to every human being on the planet both past, present, and dead. So, it's a communal experience, even broader than just the group. What you experienced in the group is just this sense of the presence of the other, which God is present in the others. As you were present to the other, you're also being present to God and so on. (P7)*

> *They are different in ways and essentially the same. I had the sense when I sit by myself in contemplative prayer, I am also sitting with people everywhere who are practicing contemplative prayer. So, there's a sense of connection, whether I'm by myself or sitting in the same room with others who are praying as far as the experience itself. During the prayer time, I'm sometimes in a group. There's just a sense of a different kind of energy or concentration in the prayer. If it's a group that is comfortable and experienced praying together, it seems like sometimes we'd get to a core. I sense a deeper place that we've gone to as a group together. For example, when I went to hear Thomas Keating speak at a conference in Colorado and there were probably 800 people in a room doing Centering Prayer together and we had that sense of knowing each other and knowing this practice together. (P9)*

> *So, I would say overall, it's one of connection, the experience that I have with other people as a result. There was, first of all, the community approach to it. A lot of people think about meditation or contemplative prayer as a solo activity and there certainly is still a little part of that to the practice. But for me it was all encompassed by community, and a community of caring people who cared about connections to wisdom, connections to life, appreciating life in the moments using contemplative*

practice as a way not to flee from the world, but to withstand the pressures of the world. It is what makes it possible to follow God's call in their life, to do peace and justice work in the world. It helps us to love our neighbours. (P11)

That connection is not separate. It leads to that oneness, in feeling connected to everyone. I find that I am even becoming more compassionate. (P23)

It felt good. There was about 15 people and you could just tell there was a group, and it felt similar. It is nice to be with a community. Also realizing that I am not doing this alone. I have a bigger excitement for life, and what else I am going to do. (P24)

Participants were also aware of a growing sense of love for not only those within their prayer group, but also a love and connection for other people. Sometimes these feelings were also difficult to describe and were sometimes shared as a spiritual sense of connection and caring for one another.

I just thought well, you know, we are in the same room, and it's comforting, and it's a sense of love. Some have been able to reach out and feel a sense of love. (P4)

It's not a romantic love, not in friendship. Love just to have human love for the people that are in the groups with me. And that has translated more widely to, I've had some experiences, experiencing the connection, the heart connection to the Spirit, connection in what some people call them: mystical experiences. I haven't had a lot, but I've had it, you know, just a few in my life. The one that was probably the most powerful was when I was distributing communion one day. This was long before I pursued ordination and people in the congregation, that I was a part of, were coming up. I saw them all and it just…it felt like I wasn't seeing with my own eyes in a physical sense. It felt like I was seeing with the best of my heart, and it didn't matter how I personally felt about them. I just, I felt a strong, strong fondness and love for each person. And I even saw them differently. I mean, there isn't a way to talk about it, because it doesn't…it's beyond language. (P11)

I think the meditation has helped a lot and it helped me to stay with the challenge and allowed love to arise. (P21)

5.3.3 Embodied Space

The third concept within the conceptual category of Embodiment is: *Embodied Space*. This concept reflects a space or place that could be physically, mentally, and spiritually embodied, and sensed in various ways. Participant data indicated the way in which CCP practitioners were embodied in their CCP space. These various understandings of space are an intricate part of participants lived experience of CCP. Many of the varied perspectives are listed here as an indication of the way that CCP practitioners' embodied space is recognized as a part of one's CCP practice.

A space to 'let go'

> *Well it's a place where I can let go of everything that would possibly bother me, or maybe is bothering me, and letting it go to just be there and not have to fix it or change it. (P1)*

Safe space

> *Centering Prayer time is my refuge and escape, and a place where I can just keep practicing the practice, the letting go in this moment. I consent to the work that God is doing. (P9)*

> *There's that more churchy style of contemplative prayer where there's song, there's reading, there's a lot, there's usually a large chunk of silence. It's quiet, it's dark there, candles, everything about the environment and the content is designed to turn you inwards to make you feel safe and enclosed, but you're still with the community. (P11)*

Peaceful space

> *It [CCP] keeps me in a place of having more space, maybe a less stressful space, not jumping as high quite as quickly. (P10)*

> *Through the meditation, I developed this space that I was able to respond to stressful situations from. (P23)*

Transforming space

> *One thing I have noticed, my most powerful sits are the times when I don't want to do Centering Prayer. If I'm sitting there saying: I don't want to do my sit. When I drag myself into [the sit], that changes me, and at least when I come out, I'm in a much better place. (P2)*

Resting space

> *I like to be a participant in a group, because I can start from a place of rest. If I am leading it, [...] I do not start from a place of rest. So, I do enjoy being relieved of leadership from time to time. (P22)*

Wonderful space

>*I have been in a wonderful space with God, what else is there? I have just been with you, what else needs to happen or be said. (P32)*

A space in nature

>*During that Holy Week, [I had a lot of] silent individual time. But after three days of silence, I just, I had this really mystical experience of being able to communicate and feeling God communicating with me through my natural surroundings, through the trees, flowers, birds, plants, just this different level of communication that I don't usually have access to that I could sense in a very real way that lasted for, I'd say, a good week. Once I got to that point, then when I got back into my normal daily routines, it just kind of faded back to my normal perceptive level, but it was just a very visceral and real sense of active communication with God's presence in the moment, in and around my natural surroundings. (P9)*

>*Beauty and nature are a huge way to God,[…] I can really be drawn and talked to by God, out in nature. (P36)*

Physical space

>*I find that physically sitting, I have to be like in a good spot physically to be able to really engage in it [CCP] in that way. (P14)*

>*I love to be by the water, that meditative movement, that puts me in a meditative place a lot quicker, similar to the flame of a candle. I suppose it's the movement of the candle flame as well. Having candles and it's really nice that people can go up and light the candle. Depends on the situation, right? It's sitting, gathering around the cross. I have a little bit of liturgy that just kind of leads people into that space and then instrumental music and you're just sitting around the cross. Then closing it in a communal type of prayer. So, I guess I do a lot of communal contemplative work. (P15)*

Intentional space

>*From a theoretical perspective, the embodied space was recognized as an intentional space, that could act in a sense as a tent, and could also be held for others to embody. You know, every time it's a little different, but I figure I'm given the space, I'm going to give the Spirit this space when the Spirit takes whatever space it wants, but I'm being intentional about taking this time in this space. I'm not going to try to control what it is that happens with it. It is something I'm just going to be in, and whatever happens for me there is a release of that pressure that it*

has to look or be this certain thing. I don't care. I'm just being intentional about the time and space. (P15)

Sacred space

It was just like being in the sacred space where everything was okay. I don't have to do anything or be something, I can just exist there in that space, it's almost like being in heaven. I'm sure that's what heaven is like, it's just like it's all okay. (P1)

A space to commune with God

I'm a natural introvert. I am always longing for silence and places to be just with God in the silence. (P9)

Sometimes participants specifically spoke about creating space for themselves, or even 'holding' a space for others in CCP. Even the idea of a simple, basic space was one of creating that space and not encumbering it with anything else.

Simple/basic space

I was thinking, the way that I like is a very simple process. Me, God, and the chair ideally. I don't want to be in a situation where it's time to do my sit and I'm sitting here going...well I don't have my tea lights. (P2)

Creating a 'tent' space

So, my father taught us to pray the rosary. When you pray the rosary, you are using the rosary as a tent. What you are doing, is to create a tent with the words themselves. You are supposed to use your mouth to allow your mind and soul to connect with God through that. I had a time of struggling with depression. It effects your sleep pattern. I often was awake at night, when I needed to be quiet, and I found that I could use art. I began with art quilting. I would cut little pieces of fabric all night long. Then I would arrange them and find that the images became the cry of my heart. I realized that the calming of the art medium became the tent and I could be calm and quiet, and I could hear God hearing me. It was an answer to me of God hearing me. I feel that there is a healing part, being seen, and a meditative process to that. So, from there, almost anything can be the tent. It can be exercise and sometimes it is a contemplative walk that becomes my tent. (P22)

Holding a space for others

Here's what I think our job is now [as prayer group leaders], it is to hold this space for people and let the Holy Spirit send us those who are looking for this. (P8)

I lead the group, so it is not my time to pray. I have to be there, wholly for them, and hold the space for them. (P17)

Sometimes this space was recognized as being difficult. Maybe difficult because one was physically alone in the space, or troubled by disquieting thoughts, or simply just difficult in ways that could not be expressed.

Difficult space

> *It is a room where you feel, well your own room can be confronting, the silence can be too much, and it becomes difficult to hold your concentration. The cell is also a small place, so I like to go somewhere else. However, for me it is more powerful alone in your cell, and sometimes I cannot sustain it, it is hard to describe. It is more confronting, and more difficult. Probably it is the space you have. (P20)*

However, in whatever way that the embodied space was characterised, it was always eventually a place of silence and stillness, a space of contemplative union with God.

Silent space

> *I think it's like that, because you have that collective intention. I think on the setting, especially if you go into a chapel where there has been prayer and silence, and you're with a bunch of people who have come in with their consent and entered to that prayer time and that silence. I think it does have an even greater effect. I have had sometimes of group Centering Prayer that were really profound in all kinds of ways. I think, for example, one of them, I've experienced this in all kinds of contexts, but being in the prayer hall, the Chapel at Snowmass in the retreat centre, it's just the amount of prayer that's happened in that room and, you know, it's mainly silence. [...] those are times when I feel like I've been carried by that collective intention to consent to a much deeper level of consent within myself. It's a treasure, and that's something that I can't maintain on my own. I think that we're not even supposed to try to maintain that on our own, that kind of experience nourishes us and feeds us and sustains us. But we can't hold onto that any more than we can hold onto anything. (P3)*

> *I recognize that there are times when I can just be in the same silent space with my wife, but at other times I want to have more conversation. I struggle a bit because a lot of me wants to have that cognitive time with God. But I would say, I have had times of pure union with God, or come close to, because of those [silent] experiences. (P12)*

> *So, the things I do in my body set me up to be in that silent space. (P30)*

Contemplative space

> *On the other hand, I have seen the cumulative benefit of centring, in the way it is increasingly easier to get to that [contemplative] place when I practise. (P12)*

> *In 1995, I was diagnosed with fibromyalgia, and because of that I went to massage therapy and I found that I can get to a contemplative space with God. That was a surprise I didn't expect. For a person that lives in their head most of the time, I did not expect that. (P30)*

Receptive space

> *You need to put yourself in a place where you can be accessed by the Spirit of God, and if you don't make the effort, it doesn't mean you are out, you just won't get there to live a carefree joyful life. (P12)*

Communal space

> *I learned the quiet garden was a place to be with God and also a place for companionship with others. To invite others into that space with me. It is very nice. (P31)*

Understood space

Finally, a conceptual idea that seemed to permeate all aspects of the space was the importance of it being an understood space. The importance of being in a space in which one was comfortable, a space to be understood and release all to God, an understood space to be in contemplative union with God.

> Participant: *I am also a chaplain at the hospital. I have done that 4 or 5 years. I was taught to leave my grief at the hospital. I had learned that after I pray with a family, I could go to this specific window and gaze at the sea, and through that I had this contemplative time with God in which I was able to leave my grief there. But during this [COVID] pandemic, that has not worked. Sometimes I was alone with the dying person. I didn't know them, we were not with their family, it was just what the staff told me [about them]. I found that after I was with them, I could not go to my spot [by the window], it didn't work to release my grief. But I found I could go to my garden and that allowed me to release my grief. I understand the garden and I was able to release it there. I felt completely different after a half hour in the garden. If it is raining, I go into my potting shed. I love to just sit in my garden and being in a vegetable plot has meant so much. I think it is about giving me a place I understand, and then I can help the dying again. (P32)*

> Interviewer*: Do you have any other thoughts why your contemplative prayer time in the garden helped you release your grief?*
>
> Participant: *It is all the things I have loved. Nature, the garden [...] It was like taking me back to my childhood. I don't understand why people are dying [in this pandemic] but I do understand the garden and I think it is important to come back to those things you understand. (P32)*

Other participants spoke of finding a space that they understood whether it was from the classical teachings about sitting in silence, or one of the other ways that they had found to enter that space that would quiet their embodied self in a contemplative way with God. One participant shared:

> *It made that sitting in silence a familiar place and a place that I longed to be, not something I should do. (P28)*

Participants' data reflected on their desire to make a space for God to reveal who God is, without one's own limited expectations. In whatever way the space was perceived, it was an embodied space in which one felt connected within and in union with God.

5.3.4 Embodied in God

The fourth concept within the conceptual category of Embodiment is: *Embodied in God.* This concept represents aspects of CCP's lived experience including the practitioners' sense of being able to open themselves more fully to God and understand more of who they are in God. In their understanding, they recognized being able to be more honest about their perceived imperfections, becoming even more receptive of God's love for them. Within their CCP practice they embodied greater union with God and awareness of the temple of God within themselves. This also helped to establish an enhanced growth in their relational awareness of God's presence, which they then carried into their daily life in God. This furthered an awareness of the participants' growth in unceasing prayer and in their relationship with God. Their CCP practice strengthened their appreciation of their embodied self as being embodied in God, both within their prayer time and in their daily lives. Within their CCP practice, participants recognized themselves more fully as embodied in God's presence, in the present moment. It is an awareness, as one participant noted of being able to *sink into the divine presence (P27),* to become fully enveloped in their embodied presence with God.

> *I love you [God]. I want to be in the presence of you and I know you are within me all the time. (P5)*

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> *It just puts, it puts God right there at the front of my mind like: Okay…Hi God, here I am. (P10)*

> *When you sit in contemplative prayer, your mind is active, in a different kind of a way. Right? Not an active way with our brains thinking, but it's still engaged in God's presence. (P17)*

Through their CCP practice and their heightened consciousness of God's presence, participants also became more capable of opening themselves and accepting more honestly their own *character defects* (P34).

> *I just have to discover the ways to open, open myself, you know it can be scary to get to certain points and now I can. It's that experience of being with God […] opening yourself to that experience and God's love. (P5)*

> *Yes. Not the roles I play, not the job I hold, right? We are held in God, and Centering Prayer helps us to come to God, with all that I am, including bad parts. (P17)*

> *He is with me no matter what. He sat with me all those nights when I was depressed. My contemplative practice has allowed me to be who I am, where I am. It has made our relationship completely safe. I know there is nothing I can do that will cause him to turn away from me. (P22)*

> *I think like any practice it leads to conviction, but it also expands my understanding of God's love for me. It can expand my knowledge of my character defects, or things done and left undone. I think that is an important part of our prayer life, but also to realize my love for God and God's love for me. (P34)*

In this way they were more receptive of God's love for them as a child of God, in ways that some expressed not receiving as well before. Through their CCP practice they were understanding themselves as increasingly loved and lovable in God.

> *And I think in terms of healing and Centering Prayer, oh my Lord, there's a real connection for me of opening, being open to God's healing love, you know, so healing. […] God's healing love is God's gift. This is God. It's all about love. […] it's that love, and it's healing. The love of God created the whole of whatever exists, you know love, and my goodness, what a thought. (P5)*

> *We had a priest who experienced Centering Prayer and he said afterwards that he never realized how much God loved him. I have had that in Centering Prayer, in which I feel love from God and the other people in the group. (P13)*

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> *It is strange that I had to live so long without realizing anything about contemplative prayer. It has to do with the love of God, the incarnational, that is rigidly Christian. […] Unfortunately, it is the best kept secret. (P29)*

Through their openness with God and receiving God's love for them, practitioners' CCP practice allowed them a place of rest for their whole being to be embodied in God's presence. They felt more connected to God through their contemplative union with God; thereby experiencing greater unity with God.

> *But I think the way I conceptualize that has changed that if I can put it into words, as long as I try to, when I think of a relationship with God, then it is God is the other. But when I sit in Centering Prayer and rest in God, there's no separation. That's how my relationship with God has changed. That is counter-cultural you know, so in a way I feel like it's almost like being bilingual that I didn't dwell on the contemplative, um, to a certain extent and that unitive consciousness. But I don't stay there all the time, I bring something of that with me into my relationships. I feel like I'm usually kind of going back and forth between those worlds. (P3)*

> *I began to think is this really a union with you in a pure form. (P12)*

> *I feel that whatever I think God is, He is not. I think in its purest form, it leads to unity with God, whatever that is. (P21)*

In recognition of one's embodied self and movement within CCP, movement, as part of their CCP practice helped some practitioners to *get out of [their]head and into [their] body* (P28). This increased their feelings of closeness to God and their contemplative union with God.

> *I have always loved to move a lot. I felt a deep connection to God through movement. […] Running always was contemplative for me, although I did not really realize it at the time. It helped me get out of my head and into my body. I found yoga, but not Christian yoga. I would take the Savasana pose, the final pose in yoga, which in Sanskrit is corpse pose. You simply lie there. I would get to Savasana and weep and feel the closeness of God. I heard God in a way that I had never heard Him before. It stilled the chattering in my mind. It was not transactional, or checking a box, or something I should do, which was my experience before. It was this experience of beloved and Beloved, created and Creator. This is the Being still and*

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> *knowing God, it is deeper than this head experience rather it is embodied. It was a way of calming my mind and body to feel that intimacy. So, for me it is a very embodied experience, and yoga helped me with that embodied experience, helped shape my relationship with God. Then I found Christian yoga and I really liked it. I enter the relationship from a place of peace because I have received what I need from the Lord. I think the embodiment is huge. […] It is a bodily experience, and that is what contemplation, or the contemplative experience is part of. (P28)*

Participants embodied sense of union with God was further supported by their understanding of carrying the temple of God within, and their understanding of the Incarnation of God in Christ, with its associated valuation of the human body. Through their CCP practice they became progressively aware of God with and within them as the temple of God.

> *…contemplation I think of as meaning I'm carrying the temple [of God] within, and so that closeness to the sacred to what is holy. Carrying that with us all the time, so being aware of what we are carrying. (P3)*

> *Then one can rest in peace and revel in the love of God. So that is what contemplative prayer is about, to be at home with yourself because that is the temple of God. (P29)*

Within participants' embodied experience in God is a recognition of union with God, both related to their CCP experience and also as an increasingly relational sense of unity with God in their daily life. Participants attributed their CCP practice as helping them to develop a heightened daily awareness of God's patience, presence, and love. This awareness is part of their lived experience, both of their CCP practice and their daily life in God.

> *So, in my daily life, I can feel his presence much stronger than I could before. (P2)*

> *When I am really being quiet with God and listening to God, and maybe reading the Bible at the beginning [of my Christian contemplative prayer time], I find things happen during the day and I'll say, oh, that's really very nice. You know, I don't hear God talking to me, but it's in experiences. (P4)*

> *It impacts my relationship in that, that's when I feel closest to God is when I'm out in the world doing active things. (P9)*

The other piece to solitude is silence. It helps me to not have to speak in moments, and to let God speak into them. Hearing God in quiet, has helped me hear God — on the go. That has been invaluable. (P12)

I guess it has allowed me to just, sit with God and then I get up and walk with God. I always tell others that. It helps me to partner with God throughout the day. I am more aware of God's presence at all times. (P24)

It is a journey, I am becoming more one with God, but it is a process. (P25)

To feel the rhythm, the pulse of our being. There isn't anything that cannot be an expression of being in the presence of God. (P29)

Their CCP practice also helped them to be more receptive to God's love, but also as one participant expressed: [growing in] *that conviction that I'm a son of God and a beloved child of God. (P6)*

My early childhood had screwed me up so bad […] yet through Centering Prayer I am realizing I am loved, and I am learning that God loves me. (P1)

Somebody asked once, what has Centering Prayer done for me? And it's hard to put any sort of answer to that other than I know it is moving me in the direction of love and relationship. (P2)

If there's one thing I've told people that I hope they remember is that we don't have to earn God's love, that God loves us no matter what. What defines us, it's not what the world says about us, but that we're defined by the fact that we're beloved children of God. So, I think, through my Centering Prayer, I've just grown to that conviction that I'm a son of God and a beloved child of God. I think, it's made me, I think less judgmental of others to realize that they too are beloved daughters and sons of God. (P6)

I think it's [CCP] taken away some of the Protestant guilt I inherited with the sort of Old-Testament-angry-God concept; [through CCP] I understand now that I am loved, lovable, and forgivable. (P22)

Their embodied CCP practice also had an influence in helping participants connect in a more holistic way. That further helped them recognize themselves as an embodied whole.

The greatest healing was the reconnecting to my body and so I want to offer that to others. I think a lot of violence towards other's bodies happens from a disconnect to your

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> *own body. I think that a lot of violence towards the self also comes from that disconnect. For me, it relates to Christianity, because we're primarily focused on the Incarnation, on God choosing to become flesh and blood. The aspect of the body being important, whereas other traditions operating at the time had a definite mind-body-split. Christianity itself has gone through phases of trying to have that mind-body split to where you like experience some self-flatulating and everything, in order to purify your spirit because your spirit is more important than your body. At the heart of Christianity is a sense that the body, it's connected, it's holistic, the importance of the body of God, saying the body is important enough that I will become incarnate, then Jesus, healing physical bodies. (P11)*

Their growing awareness of God's presence in their life, and their embodied union with God also created a greater appreciation for unceasing prayer in their life. It was their growing consciousness of God's embodied presence in their CCP practice that helped them develop an increasing realization of God with them throughout the day. This further promoted an understanding of praying without ceasing.

> *So, I think a big impact is the awareness, prayer without ceasing. (P23)*

> *It is the closest I have come to unceasing prayer. It is not only the prayer time, but it is a prompt to pray again throughout the day. (P34)*

> *I have seen the fruits of these practices. I would also say I am coming closer to unceasing prayer. (P35)*

Long-term practitioners of CCP experienced a sense of being embodied in God within their prayer practice. Their relationship with God was one of greater connection, with a greater realization of God's love for them. As they sat in contemplation with God, they were aware of being in contemplative union with God and carrying the temple of God within themselves. This led to a greater awareness of God's presence and being embodied in God, and a daily awareness of unceasing communication and prayer with God.

5.4 Conclusion of Data Presentation

> *Being centred is more an expression of who I am and how I live. One of my favourite expressions is: Jesus said the Kingdom of God is within you and among you. More of a lived experience. There is a time and place for prayer and so on, but it is a lived experience. It becomes the filter that you filter everything else through. (P31)*

This study aimed to develop a substantive grounded theory of the lived experience of CCP among long-term practitioners. The data from the 36 interviews has been collected and analysed using the constructivist grounded theory coding method. This chapter has summarised the data and resultant emerging conceptual categories, as nuanced by their concepts, properties and dimensions. Subsections described each of these conceptualizations, which were illustrated using examples from participants' data to ensure each category remained grounded in the data. The previous literature on the subject of long-term CCP practitioners is limited, therefore this grounded theory strategy was utilized to generate theory from the empirical data. The following chapter will discuss these findings as the conceptual categories are informed by the CCP literature in an integrated presentation of the lived experience of long-term CCP practitioners

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION

This chapter seeks to answer the primary research question that inspired this thesis: *What is the lived experience of Christian contemplative prayer (CCP) among long-term practitioners, and how does it relate to the practitioners' embodied well-being and perceptions of embodiment within this spiritual discipline?* This chapter addresses that question by integrating the findings of the previous chapter within the context of existing CCP, well-being, and embodiment scholarship. Since no single theory supports the relationship of CCP, well-being, and embodiment within the long-term CCP practitioners' lived experience, theories will be introduced that support individual aspects of this process. Rather than using the existing theories as a preconceived framework, this study has remained focused on the constructivist grounded theory principle of allowing the participant data to guide the developing substantive grounded theory for this study. Consideration of this thesis' conceptual categories and their relation to existing theories has aided the development of this emergent substantive theory.

The first section, titled *Christian Contemplative Prayer Practice,* answers the secondary research question: *How is Christian contemplative prayer (CCP) initiated and practised within the lives of long-term practitioners?* This question is addressed by examining the meanings behind the participants' responses regarding their initial interest in this prayer practice. Participants described aspects of movement, stillness, and silence within their practice, while acknowledging that sometimes their descriptions were beyond words. This section also addresses the differing embodied methods, which participants used as part of their CCP practice.

The second section, titled *Well-Being,* answers the secondary research question: *How do long-term Christian contemplative prayer (CCP) practitioners describe well-being within this practice?* This question examines the meanings behind the participants' responses regarding the influence of their long-term CCP practice in their life. While this section focuses on well-being, it continues to elevate the responses in such a way that reveals connections between well-being and embodiment. This section will continue to affirm aspects of this prayer practice as they influenced the practitioners' well-being and advance the interrelation of well-being and embodiment in the lived experience of CCP practitioners.

The third section, titled *Embodiment,* answers the secondary research question: *How is the practitioner embodied within their long-term Christian contemplative prayer (CCP) practice?* Although the important role of embodiment has been overlooked within the CCP scholarship, this study will affirm this important element within this spiritual discipline. This will serve to integrate a necessary element of embodied wholeness as an integral aspect of both the actual CCP practice and also the practitioners' embodied lived experience, as influenced through their long-term CCP practice.

The fourth section demonstrates why this research is relevant within the discipline of Christian Spirituality. Emerging from the participant data, these findings illustrate aspects of Christian Spirituality including the lived experience, conscious process, holistic development, self-transcendence towards God, and the uniqueness of individual lived experiences (Schneiders 2003). These aspects became a hermeneutical lens with which to explore the participant data of long-term CCP practitioners and their lived experience. Establishing this connection within Christian Spirituality is important, because this discussion will seek to present the contribution of these findings to the growing corpus of Christian Spirituality scholarship. The concluding section presents a discussion, with graphic illustration, of the constructivist substantive grounded theory emerging within this study.

Within this chapter, participants' quotes are presented in an in-text integrated way. The majority of the actual participants' quotes were located in Chapter 5, where the participants' quotes are presented and grouped together in a way that reflects the rich thematic data supporting the developing theory. In this chapter, some participant quotes are integrated with the theoretical concepts that have emerged in this study and the related theories that support the substantive grounded theory.[52] In this way, the participants' insights are formatted in-text and integrated more fully to support the development of the theory.

6.1 Christian Contemplative Prayer Practice

This section addresses the secondary research question*: How is Christian contemplative prayer (CCP) initiated and practised within the lives of long-term practitioners?* This builds on the limited scholarship, which has given attention to practitioners' initial

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[52] Longer quotes are presented in an indented format, due to their length, and in a consistent way as they were formatted in the findings chapter; however, they are still integrated in the text of the development of the substantive grounded theory.

attraction to this prayer form and to the different ways in which CCP is practised. This section introduces the important element of embodiment within the initiation and the development of a long-term CCP practice. In so doing, it begins to expand upon the under-theorized aspect of embodiment within CCP.

6.1.1 Developing Christian Spirituality Depth

As the findings indicated, it was sometimes the desire for a deeper relationship with God and spiritual nurturing of the sacred in one's life that created the impetus for many participants' interest in CCP. Prior to developing their CCP practice, some participants expressed a dissatisfaction with their Christian spirituality as a lived experience, and/or simply being drawn towards silence and a more satisfying depth within their Christian spirituality. Simply put, this aspect of 'spirituality is more concerned with lived, individual experiences' (Frederick 2008:554). Christian spirituality is further grounded in the 'spiritual quest' of the 'presence of the sacred' as developed through the power of the Holy Spirit, mediated by Jesus Christ, in communion and union with God and all creation in all aspects of living the Christian life (Downey 1997:30). As Simpson *et al.* (2008:132) suggested, a relationship with God 'may reflect the very goal of many Christians' spiritual lives'. The desire for a fuller lived experience of the presence of God helped to initiate participants' search that led to CCP, as one participant expressed: *The fullness of what it means to exist* (P29).

Fundamentally, participants expressed a seeking for the presence of the sacred and a deeper connection with God. A 'relational connection between humanity and the Divine' is a part of many spiritual practices (Simpson et al. 2008:125) and is an integral aspect of the lived experience within Christian spirituality. As Schneiders (2006:208) insisted, of primary concern in the study of Christian spirituality 'is to understand the religious experience as and in the "individual"'. As participants expressed, they were often drawn to CCP in varying ways, but often because of their own desperation, dissatisfaction, or desire for a deeper level in their own spiritual lived experience. *And so, it was just … just the feeling, the call to the idea of quiet and solitude and just time with God and going deeper, you know, all the ways it was described (P8).* In the varying ways participants were drawn to CCP, they found a spiritual practice that helped them to develop a greater depth in their Christian spirituality.

Downey (1997:42), in writing of the four levels of Christian spirituality,[53] noted that the second level was that which comprised 'the experience which actualizes or realizes the human capacity to be in relation with another, others, and God'. Within this level the full dimensional lived experience of the 'quest for integration through self-transcendence' could be realized (Downey 1997:43). This illustrated the holistic development that was expressed by participants as influenced by their CCP practice. The practice helped participants to realize a greater embodied growth in their intentionality to become more aware of God's presence in their lives and to grow in their relationship with God, others, and all of creation.

6.1.2 Communal Christian Spirituality

This personal longing for more led some to connect to a CCP practice through other people or to connect with others through their teachings. As Schneiders (2003:167) insisted, Christian spirituality recognized aspects of bringing 'life together in an integrated synthesis of ongoing growth and development'. This process often led participants to a greater communal development. As others were sought out who participated in this prayer practice, there developed a common bond in their desire for the divine and that further reinforced their interpersonal connections. Participants reflected on their initial introduction to CCP as often having both a personal and communal group aspect.

> *I was in seminary, going for my MDiv, [...]. The seminary also offered spiritual formation groups, which I was very drawn to. I began seeing my first spiritual director at the seminary. [...]. So, through her [spiritual director] and spiritual director training, I was officially introduced to CCP practices. (P36)*

Frederick (2008:559) noted aspects of 'a community that transcends the individual. This community provides a belief set, a narrative framework for understanding spiritual experiences, and most importantly, a community outside of oneself that may confront and support one to develop a deeper, more complete relationship with the Divine'. For many participants, their integration of this practice in their lives also influenced a greater embodied communal development. As participants noted, the practice itself influenced a

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[53] Downey (1997:42) refers to the 'rich, multivalent' levels of Christian spirituality as 1) the reality of the spiritual dimension of being a human in the world, 2) the lived experience of humans with each other and God, 3) the teachings, writings, visual arts, and the many ways that Christian spirituality can be 'formulated', and 4) the academic discipline which studies the lived experience of Christian spirituality'.

personal holistic integration within their Christian community and also in the lived experience of the individual. As Schneiders (2003:168) contended, spirituality unites one with a broader community, in helping to connect 'oneself as a personal whole to reality as a cosmic whole'.

6.1.3 Conscious Development of Christian Contemplative Prayer Practice

In exploring the long-term CCP practice, practitioners revealed an intentional development of their consistent CCP practice. As Schneiders (2003:167) noted, conscious processing was neither an 'accidental experience' nor an 'episodic event'. A conscientious effort to develop this practice was also expressed in the ways in which participants were drawn to the practice. Participants sought out opportunities and ways to experience silence with God, as they read books on spiritual growth and CCP, and attended related workshops, conferences, and classes. They also participated in silent retreats or even short-term residential lived experiences at monasteries and priories. Some gained spiritual direction in CCP alone, while others sought CCP counsel from friends or the broader Christian community. This was evident with practitioners who not only intentionally pursued an involvement in this prayer practice, but who also consciously pursued a faithful, long-term prayer practice.

As was evidenced among participants, there was a continuum of conscious process involvement among long-term CCP practitioners. When I visited the WCCM's monastery in Bonnevaux, there was a very consistent, punctual attentiveness to the daily CCP practice for all transient and permanent residents. A bell rang routinely at three specific times during the day. All residents would disengage from their current activity and meet in the chapel for a time of communal CCP. This faithful pursuit of a conscious process was also reflected in participant comments such as: *the only time that I don't do it [CCP] is maybe Easter Sunday, I give myself permission not to because it's an exhausting day and I … by the time I come home from family gathering and so on, am ready for bed (P6).* Yet, many also recognized the complexities of life that sometimes interfered with their desire to practice CCP twice a day, as one participant expressed:

> *On those afternoons when I couldn't quite manage to get in a second time, because of whatever wildness was going on in the household, I didn't beat myself up, but if I had an opportunity later, you know, I would sit down and do my prayer. So eventually I really had an established practice. (P3)*

For many, although this practice is integrated into their life, it was sometimes practiced more spontaneously on any given day. As another participant reflected: *I see my ebb and flow as continually contemplative* (P34). Schneiders (2003:167) insisted this conscious process of spirituality 'is an ongoing and coherent approach to life as a consciously pursued and ongoing enterprise'.

As participants developed this practice in their lives, sometimes differing methods were discovered and practised. Within this study, diverse methods of CCP were not anticipated. When practitioners were initially asked about participating in a study of CCP among long-term practitioners, they were asked if their prayer time consisted of silence. The responses were always 'yes'. As interviews commenced, sometimes it became obvious that practitioners engaged in some type of silent, integrated, prayerful movement that led them into a place contemplative union with God.

A diverse conscious process among Christians in their lived spirituality has been recognized in various ways. Downey (1997) noted diversity as Christians live out their spirituality in the midst of various stages of life. For example, Christian spirituality's lived experience will look different throughout human development, including the challenges of aging, illness, health and so on; however, as Downey (1997) observed, there still remained a common denominator of this lived experience as part of a right relationship with God. These different stages were traversed by Christians of various cultural, ethnic, and personality variations. This diversity exemplified the uniqueness of individual Christians' lived experience. This was a vital aspect of participants' expression of their CCP practice. Various methods emphasized the importance of allowing and accepting uniqueness among CCP practitioners, while recognising that these methods still brought practitioners to a place of silence and stillness within an intentional contemplation in union with God. The goal was the same, although it was reached by various paths. Frederick (2008:553) insisted that there were 'highly personal, individual, and subjective elements' within the comprehension of spirituality constructs. This was reflected in the various CCP methods. Throughout participants' lived experiences, there was still a commonality of holistic development and self-transcendence towards God, as also reflected within Christian Spirituality (Schneiders 1989, 2003, 2006). The uniquely personal aspects of this practice coupled with the aspects of wholeness and transcendence were all foundational elements which brought recognition to CCP as a consciously pursued, embodied, spiritual practice.

6.1.4 Embodied Spiritual Practices

Throughout this grounded theory study, CCP participants' data emerged supporting a theory of an embodied spiritual practice that reflected the uniqueness of the individual practitioners. This embodied perspective became evident as participants spoke about their initial attraction to this spiritual practice. One participant summarized this integrated yearning in these words:

> *But as an adult, you know we all have this longing to integrate our whole selves: our heads, our hearts, our spirit, and everything ... with our spiritual practices. (P35)*

The human body is embodied, being assimilated with the immaterial mind and spirit of an individual (Allison 2009). Greenwood and Delgado (2013:943) insisted that the body, in its most integrated whole, 'exists as one, so that any act of our bodies is an act of our spirit and vice versa'. What one does in and with one's body impacts the whole self, and bodies in and of themselves are uniquely invaluable. Greenwood and Delgado (2013:943) contended that 'when human beings yearn toward God, we do so with body and spirit'.

In this study, the initial awareness of the important role of the body in CCP became one of the building blocks for the importance of embodiment in this prayer practice. A sense of what Greenwood and Delgado (2013:944) referred to as '"embodied brokenness"' described a person's '"disconnect" between a vision of how they wished their bodies could function and how they functioned in actuality'. Similarly, in this study embodied incongruity, was an element involved in a practitioners' spiritual dissatisfaction. This helps to describe the way in which practitioners recognized their whole being in relation with God. This dissatisfaction and longing for embodied wholeness of body, mind *and* spirit helped to draw them towards CCP. Psychologist Elizabeth Hall and theologian Erik Thoennes (2006:30) argued that, through the Incarnation, Jesus exemplified embodied wholeness and is 'a model of embodied existence unmarred by sin'.

Theologians relate an understanding of the Incarnation and its affirmation of embodiment within humanity. 'The incarnation of God in Jesus and the sacramentalism it grounds are at the heart of Christian faith. Herein lies the amazing revelation that divinity is available to us in and through humanity' (Schneiders 2003:180). The Incarnation supported a perspective of embodiment that revealed a Christians '*true* humanity' and an affirmation of the 'goodness of human nature in its spiritual *and* physical aspects' (Hall & Thoennes 2006:41). These theological teachings exemplify the importance of the totality of one's being, as reflected in practitioners' awareness of the

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important role their physical body also had in their CCP practice. Hall and Thoennes (2006) affirmed that Christians should actively engage their bodies in their spiritual practices of devotion and worship. As Jesus exemplified, the body provides agency for divine presence (Reagan 2013). Integration of body, mind and spirit is an important aspect of a Christian's spirituality. As Allison (2009:5) insisted: 'Human embodiment, then, is according to divine design'. He continued by emphasizing that 'people should embrace embodiment as a gift from God'. In a similar way, embodiment needed to be understood as it permeated the CCP experience. In this way, divine presence, and a desire for embodied wholeness helped to draw Christians towards CCP. The following section will explore holistic aspects of well-being influenced within this embodied spiritual prayer practice.

6.2 Well-Being

This section addresses the second sub-question: *How do long-term Christian contemplative prayer (CCP) practitioners describe well-being within this practice?* This builds on the CCP scholarship examined in the literature review. Studies have examined, to some extent, the influence of this prayer practice on the practitioners' well-being (Finney & Malony 1985a, 1985b; Stavros 1998; Kuiper 2004; Johnson *et al.* 2009; Ferguson *et al.* 2010a; Kruse 2012; Lysne 2012; Asbill 2015; Fox *et al.* 2015, 2016; Rubinart *et al.* 2017), yet there has been minimal investigation, from a grounded theory perspective of the practitioners' description and meaning of well-being in their lived experience of CCP. This study continued to examine concepts of well-being within this practice as grounded in the understandings of the practitioners themselves.

6.2.1 Christian Contemplative Prayer Well-Being Mirrors Eudaemonic Well-Being

As a Christian's lived experience of spirituality, CCP influenced various aspects of the practitioners' well-being. Additionally, there was growing empirical evidence connecting well-being and spirituality (Joseph *et al.* 2016; van Dierendonck & Mohan 2006). As reviewed in Chapter 3, CCP scholarship has explored elements of the practitioners' lived experience, recognizing CCP's impact as: a psychotherapy intervention (Finney & Malony 1985a, 1985b), as a phenomenology (Kuiper 2004; Fox *et al.* 2015), and as an influence on practitioners' well-being (Stavros 1998; Johnson *et al.* 2009; Ferguson *et al.*

2010a; Kruse 2012; Lysne 2012; Asbill 2015; Fox *et al.* 2016; Rubinart *et al.* 2017). Yet, there appears to be limited in-depth grounded theory research that analyses hedonic, eudaemonic, or spiritual well-being directly from the meanings that practitioners articulate within their interview data and experience in their life.

Chapter 5 delineated participants' exploration of well-being within this prayer practice. Christian Spirituality incorporated a holistic development that involved 'body and spirit, emotions and thought, activity and passivity, social and individual aspects of life' (Schneiders 2003:167). Eudaemonic well-being relies on this integrated, optimally functioning, holistic development of the self (Pritchard *et al.* 2020), which was also recognized within participants' data. Many participants perceived their long-term CCP practice was integrated into their life, at a level that became vital to their embodied, holistic well-being. Analysis of personal well-being among participants mirrored concepts of eudaemonic well-being as: meaning and core values, self-awareness, and aspects of functional wholeness and its connection with participants' holistic well-being.

Within eudaemonic well-being scholarship, Ryff and Keyes' (1995) scale of psychological well-being distinguished six core well-being dimensions including: personal growth (developing one's abilities or potential), meaningfulness, goals, and purpose in life, autonomy (making independent decisions), command of one's environment, self-acceptance (positive affirmation of one's self), and positive relations with others (Table 6.1 below). These further related to holistic development of one's self. Although embodiment is not a specific dimension within the scale of psychological well-being, Ryff and Singer (2003: Abstract) refer to well-being as a vitality that is strengthened by challenges in life and one's physical health as a 'biological embodiment of well-being'. As this measure does not specifically address transcendence and spiritual well-being, Fisher's (2010) SHALOM assessment was also reflected upon in relation to participant meaning of well-being from a personal, communal, environmental, and spiritual perspective. Ryff and Keyes (1995) developed this instrument that is used by researchers examining well-being. While no well-being instrument was utilized in this study, analysis of participants' data emerged with meanings that mirrored some of Ryff and Keyes' (1995) dimensions of well-being.

Table 6.1 Ryff and Keyes Core Well-Being Dimensions emerging in Christian Contemplative Prayer Data

Ryff and Keyes Core Well-Being Dimensions	Eudaemonic Elements of CCP*
Personal growth	Personal development and realizing potential
Meaningfulness, goals, and purpose in life	Valuing developing meaning and core values
Autonomy	Not seen as a vital element of the developing well-being within CCP practice
Command of one's environment	Not seen as a vital element of the developing well-being within CCP practice
Self-acceptance	Becoming more accepting and aware of one's true self and less judgemental of self
Positive relations with others	Improvement of social relations, more forgiving and accepting of others

*CCP - Christian contemplative prayer   adapted from Ryff & Keyes (1995)

Aspects of the Ryff and Keyes' (1995) scale of psychological well-being did not appear to be equally demonstrated in participants' reflected meanings of well-being. For example, elements related to autonomy or a command of one's environment were not elevated to a level of importance as participants spoke about the influence of their CCP practice on their well-being. Yet, elements such as: personal growth; meaningfulness, goals, and purpose in life; self-acceptance; and positive relations with others were integral components of positive well-being in their CCP lived experience. As participants expressed, these elements of wholeness, self-awareness, and meaning developed within the practitioners' life as they continued with their CCP practice, reflecting important concepts of well-being within a eudaemonic framework (Ryan & Deci 2001; Waterman 2008).

Their CCP practice helped to bring participants a greater awareness of their interior life, the changes and meanings ascribed to those developments, and a sense of becoming more aware of what was going on within themselves in the present moment. As participants noted, these influences brought such progressive changes as an increased sense of peace, centredness, authenticity, awareness, ability to make different positive choices, greater awareness of one's own emotions, healthier relationships with others, patience, acceptance of self, and ultimately their self-transcendence in God and who they were in Christ.

> *Centering Prayer helps me to identify who I really am at the deeper levels, and then that impacts my day to day in whatever I am doing. Then it just impacts the rest of the day, because I have centred in on that identity of who I really am in Christ. (P17)*

These realties were integrated within eudaemonic well-being in the practitioners' life, as delineated by participants and as defined by the comprehensive construct defining one's eudaemonic sense of well-being (Ryan & Deci 2001; Kragh *et al.* 2016).

Eudaemonic well-being encompassed the individual's optimum state of well-being (Boiler *et al.* 2013). This also created a greater realization of the potential found in becoming more of one's true self, which led one towards increased meaning in life (Ryff & Keyes 1995; Ryan & Deci 2001; Pritchard *et al.* 2020). Keating (2007) recognized aspects of this practice which led to greater abandonment of one's false self and the becoming more of one's true self. As one participant reflected: *It [CCP] has helped me to become my true self (P24).* Participants perceived a positive process towards meaning in life, greater awareness of one's true-self, and optimal, wholistic functioning of their embodied self. There was a level of eudaemonic well-being that was developed through their self-realization of their true-self and meaningful purpose in their life (Ryan & Deci 2001; Waterman 2008). This was further realised through a holistic involvement and appreciation for life.

6.2.2 Recognizing Holistic Healing

Schneiders (2003:166) insisted that 'each individual develops her or his spirituality in a unique and personal way, analogously to the way individuals develop their common humanity into a unique personality'. Individuals came to their CCP practice from their own habitus in life, therefore their personal path to well-being was similar, yet unique to each individual. While some participants recognized the potential for curative healing, within their belief that: *It [CCP] also has a curative process on my [their] health (P20).* Others expressed their ideas of healing within this practice as ongoing: *I think that there is always healing going on in that [CCP]. I would say there's always healing going on in Centering Prayer on all of our being. I think whether we're aware of it or not (P3).* Many participants reflected on healing and well-being as being holistic within their being: *But that time in contemplative prayer helps to bring a healing, which I recognize as a wholeness in that moment. Complete healing is just that we are whole (P17).*

Within their descriptions of well-being, some participants spoke of an embodied healing of their emotions. Keating (2007:19) noted that '[o]ur emotions are perfect recorders of what is happening inside: hence they are the key to finding out what our emotional programs for happiness really are'. These programs were recognized by the emotions that they generate, which Keating (2007:20) suggested 'might be reduced to

anger, grief, fear, pride, greed, envy, lust, and apathy'. Participants shared various emotions that had been personal obstacles to their well-being, yet their prayer practice had helped them to grow beyond those hinderances.

Emotions are an important element of being human and as Sociologist Arlie Hochschild (1979) argued they are very important in human interpersonal relations. The intent in this discussion is not to present a treatise on various theories of emotions and emotion management, nor can I do full justice here to the question of emotional healing or related theories. I have chosen a couple examples to support the theoretical understanding of emotional healing among participants in this study. For example, Hochschild's (1979) emotion management model related *surface acting* of individuals as they recognized how to act or display emotions in a given situation, or *deep acting* in which individuals attempted to make their emotions seem genuine to themselves and others. Hochschild (1979) proposed an actual management of emotions, as compared to Bourdieu's theories on emotions and his concept of *habitus*.[54] He conceptualized an individual's *embodied history* within their habitus (Wacquant 1998; Addison 2017). According to Lizardo (2004:6), Bourdieu (1968: xx) defined habitus as:

> A system of lasting, transposable dispositions which, integrating past experiences, functions at every moment as a matrix of *perceptions, appreciations, and actions* and makes possible the achievement of infinitely diversified tasks, thanks to analogical transfers of schemes permitting the solution of similarly shaped problem.

This embodied history or habitus reflects an unconscious disposition, or inclination within individuals. An individual's 'embodied dispositions' support one's actions and feelings (Addison 2017:13). These dispositions or 'unconscious schemata are acquired through lasting exposure to particular social conditions and conditionings, via the internalization of external constraints and possibilities' (Wacquant 1998:6). Keating (2007:5) contended that human beings carry a disposition of 'prepackaged set of values and preconceived ideas which, unless confronted and redirected, will soon scuttle our journey'.

Conditioning through a long-term practice of CCP and the practitioners' contemplative union with God enacted subtle changes in practitioners' habitus and

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[54] According to Wacquant (1998:6), 'Habitus is an old philosophical concept, used intermittently by Aristotle (under the term *hexis*), Thomas Aquinas, Hegel, Weber, Durkheim, Mauss, and Husserl, among others. Bourdieu retrieved it in a 1967 reinterpretation of art historian Erwin Panofsky's analysis of the connection between Scholastic thought and gothic architecture in the medieval era and refined it afterwards, both empirically and theoretically, in each of his major works. His most sophisticated explication of the concept is in Pascalian Meditations (Bourdieu 1997/2000: esp. 131-146 and 208-237)'.

consequently in their emotional well-being. These concepts emerged in the participants' data as participants spoke about emotional well-being, which they also recognized as part of a growing awareness of becoming more authentic and more engaged with their true self. For Keating (2009:35), practitioners experienced an inner peace as they allow the 'process through Centering Prayer [CCP] and recognize the dynamics of the unconscious, [their] spiritual faculties and true self are being liberated'. The true self was liberated from the false self which Keating (2009:192) described as: 'The self developed in our own likeness rather than in the likeness of God; the self-image developed to cope with the emotional trauma of early childhood. It seeks happiness in satisfying the instinctual needs of survival/security, affection/esteem, and power/control, and bases its self-worth on cultural or group identification'. This false self can maintain itself as an objective self with all its 'tenacious need to maintain [its] separate, external, egotistic will. Referring all things to this outward and false "self" can contribute to an alienation of ourselves from reality and from God' (Keating 2009:21). Addison (2017:13) further contended that the true self was not an intangible core. Bourgeault (2016:84) insisted 'that the true self can never simply be a cleaned-up, high-functioning version of the "false self". It exists on a whole different level'. On a level that Bruteau (1984:308) portrayed as coinciding 'with the subjective awareness in the very act of being aware' of one's being with the divine. This was illustrated much the same way that two spotlights overlap and can 'perfectly coincide, so that only one circle of light shows on the floor, although we can still see two beams coming down from the projectors' (Bruteau 1984:311). These are non-dualist images of the true self in union with God in participants' developing awareness, as Bruteau (1984:308) contended in such a way that the 'the duality of subject and object has been transcended', and 'is in any sense continuous with God or discovered as in union with God'. It was a conceptual bridge of mind, body, and spirit not of emotional management, but one of ultimate non-dualistic awareness of union of the true self and God.

In this continuing embodied development, participants expressed feeling more of a connection with their emotions, their thoughts, and bodily actions as they practiced letting go in prayer. They further recognized their true self in contemplative union with God, experiencing embodiment within themselves and their Christian spirituality. CCP practitioners recognized greater peace within themselves, which for them meant they found they were also better equipped to handle difficult emotional situations instead of merely reacting to them (Keating 2009). Keller (2008) contended that through listening

and letting go of control, there was a transformation that develops in Christians. Participants expressed a deepening longing to become more of one's true self, a greater reception of God's love, and a growing desire to live more fully within the image of God. Keller (2008:132) argued that CCP was an intentional awareness that was filled with the grace of God, which further helped to develop and sustain 'a change of consciousness, leading to deepening love of God and neighbour'. Keating (2007:5) insisted that CCP 'heals the wounds of a lifetime', which were bound within one's habitus. This supports the changes that this practice enacted within an individual's habitus, bringing about a greater sense of one's authentic self and emotional healing. In their own unique ways of spiritual growth, participants conveyed an increasing sense of overall emotional well-being as influenced by their prayer practice. Aspects of well-being were not only reflected on a personal level, but also socially and environmentally. As practitioners continued their practice, they developed an increasing self-acceptance and awareness of their true self, which translated towards a greater acceptance of the other.

6.2.3 Communal Well-Being

A comprehensive understanding of an individual's well-being, which was consistent with eudaemonic well-being, must extend beyond the individual to include the integration of interpersonal relationships (Bauer *et al.* 2008). A socially vital component of Ryff and Keyes' (1995) scale of psychological well-being was positive relations with others, which was also reflected in participants' meanings of increasing well-being. These aspects of positive relations comprised three areas of participants' interrelationships in which they:

- recognized becoming more kind, compassionate, loving, forgiving, accepting, and authentic
- became aware of others noticing positive changes in participants, which participants suggested were related to their CCP practice
- realised the need to repair struggling relationships and took action to do so

Within these three realms, participants identified increasingly positive relationships with others, recognizing that meditation *can be seen as a benefit, contributing to mental and emotional health. One becomes more patient, and in relationships that really helps (P21).* Practitioners also recognized others noticing positive changes as reflected in the words of this participant: *I think it is what people tell me, like they have said: you're different, you react differently, seem more real or more present (P7).* Equally as important, participants were aware of the need to repair struggling relationships realising that *it was*

through Centering Prayer and knowing myself and loving myself enough […] I had to get this resolved I couldn't let this go on. […] We finally have a good relationship (P1). They related these improving interpersonal relationships to intrapersonal aspects as described in the previous discussion regarding personal well-being. As participants became more aware of their true self, they also developed a greater authenticity in their interpersonal relationships. Keating (2007) insisted one's interior freedom allowed people to develop greater understanding of the needs of other people. Participants' acknowledged improvements in relationships meant increasing acceptance, patience, forgiveness, openness, authenticity, love and compassion towards others. These improved interpersonal relationships helped participants to realize a more positive, integrated sense of eudaemonic well-being.

6.2.4 Environmental Well-Being

Christian Spirituality explores one's relationship with God and also how that relationship informs one's interaction with the environment. Duke (2020:5) argued that '[f]rom a Christian perspective, the relationship between nature and spirituality has a transcendental and ontological basis since everything belongs to God'. Duke (2020:36) further insisted an aspect of 'rediscovering the inner peace that comes with a renewed interconnectivity with nature'. Participants reflected on three realms in which their CCP practice influenced their improved connection with the environment and their environmental well-being. These were:

- a sense of their practice effecting the world
- ways in which their prayer practice strengthened their connection with God and all of creation.
- a deepening appreciation for nature and increasing *awe* of creation.

In correlation with these three realms was a sense of participants' greater awareness, appreciation, and connection with God and all of creation.

> *I just spent a lot of time outside in nature walking and sitting and praying. It has been in those extended times that I have reached a point of, wow, I really have a sense of some healing that has happened emotionally and internally, you know, big. It is part of the healing process in the world. (P9)*

This helped to enhance environmental well-being. One's sense of environmental well-being was recognized as not only important within their own self-awareness but in their

connection with all of creation: *I think the major thing is feeling more connected, both internally and to the universe, and more aware of my strengths and weaknesses (P27).*

Duke (2020:34) proclaimed: '**nature does not need humankind; it is human beings that need nature**' (author's bold print)! Therefore, recognizing greater connection with one's environment and a sense of being in awe of creation can contribute to efforts related to conservation and sustainability of creation. This was further echoed through the ways in which human beings cared for all of creation. This could be a by-product of the influence on environmental well-being perceived by participants. Fisher (2010:10) insisted that a strong sense of well-being and relation with the environment was not only important for 'sustenance', but also a part of humankind's well-being. Duke (2020) insisted that ecological spirituality goes beyond connecting with nature, to attitudes and a way of life that held a deep appreciation for the gift of God in nature. He (2020:36-37) recognized that an important element for Christians, within their 'eco-consciousness' was that humans needed to develop a greater sense of integration with nature and a simultaneous reversal of the 'modernist ego and age-long anthropocentrism', which created a false sense of humanities central importance in nature. This aspect of human connectivity to all of creation enhanced a peace within humanity that was discovered through realising one's integration more fully with nature (Duke 2020). CCP practitioners felt that their prayer practice had supported and strengthened their renewed awareness and connectivity with nature. In an integrated way within the self, participants recognized that their environmental, social, and personal well-being strengthened their self-transcendence towards God.

6.2.5 Spiritual Well-Being and Self-Transcendence Towards God

Schneiders (2003) insisted that an endeavour in holistic development was pursued by the Christian through a self-transcendence towards God. One's self-transcendence was realised as being within oneself and also held there in an intentional way. Participants' self-transcendence within CCP was recognized, in part, as opening to God and contemplative centring in union with God, and *when that truly happens, God can work (P8).* Within their self-transcendence, participants also recognized a greater sense of spiritual well-being.

In his lived experience component of SHALOM, Fisher (2010:209) delineated the Transcendental domain, within spiritual well-being, in accordance with: 'personal relationship with the Divine/God; worship of the Creator; oneness with God; peace with

God; prayer life'. Although this grounded theory study depended on participants' meanings emerging directly from the data, and not on other evaluation methods or measures, participants reflected on spiritual well-being that resonated with items on the SHALOM Spiritual Well-being questionnaire and evaluation. For example, participants' data emerged with meanings of spiritual well-being recognized in:

- growing more spiritual

- realizing one's identity as a child of God

- recognizing God as loving; opening to God's presence

- allowing the Spirit to work in their life

These counterpart aspects of the SHALOM evaluation developed within participants' long-term CCP practice, aiding in the strength of their relationship, and their sense of oneness with God. These aspects supported a growing sense of spiritual well-being in the lived experience of long-term CCP practitioners.

Fisher's (2010) four domains within his SHALOM evaluation of spiritual well-being analysed one's personal, communal (or social), environmental, and transcendental well-being as delineated in Table 3.2. Participants' data in this study illustrated positive correlation in these four domains as a part of their overall spiritual well-being. In his evaluation of spiritual well-being, Fisher (2010:116) insisted that it was not commonly held that people consider themselves 'spiritually self-sufficient'; many recognized that they needed assistance to inform them in their quest for purpose and meaning in life. Participants in this study found guidance towards spiritual well-being in their CCP practice. Their time spent in contemplation, in connection with creation and others, and in union with God provided for them the personal guidance and reassurance they needed in developing a strong sense of spiritual well-being and self-transcendence towards God.

6.2.6 Therapeutic Aspects of Well-Being, Spiritual Practices, and Wholeness

Participants lived experience of a long-term CCP practice was recognized as an integrated conscious process of holistic development, which helped to cultivate embodied well-being in the practitioners' life including aspects of personal, social, environmental, and spiritual, transcendental well-being. Lee and Newberg (2005) insisted that aspects of one's religious life were an important facet of many people's lives and this has an influence on their health. As delineated in this study's literature review, CCP research has shown the influence of this practice on the practitioners' holistic well-being. Other studies have also indicated health benefits of meditative practices. For example, Barrett

et al. (2012) conducted a study, among participants 50 years and older, to determine the potential therapeutic effect of meditation or exercise participation in reducing susceptibility to acute respiratory infection (ARI). They observed the illness' incidence, duration, and severity within three randomized groups: 1) mindfulness meditation (45 minutes daily), 2) moderate-intensity exercise (45 minutes daily), or 3) observational control. In general, their findings reported observations of 'substantive reductions in ARI illness among those randomized to exercise training, and even greater benefits among those receiving mindfulness meditation training' (Barrett *et al.* 2012:342). They concluded that 'this ground-breaking randomized trial of meditation and exercise vs. wait-list control among adults aged 50 years and older found significant reductions in ARI illness' (Barrett *et al.* 2012:345). Barrett *et al.* (2012:342) noted that this was the first randomized trial to assess mindfulness meditation on ARI illness and the first to use a 'validated outcome measure' in assessing exercise effects on ARI illness. They affirmed the need to confirm 'these results in future studies due to the public and private health-related policy and practice, as well as for scientific research regarding mechanisms of health maintenance and disease prevention' (Barrett *et al.* 2012:345). These studies explored the benefits of a meditative practice among practitioners, noting the positive influences on health and well-being.

An embodied approach to well-being is reflected throughout the participant's data in this study. Religion and health scholar, Meredith McGuire (1996:103) argued that the 'limiting epistemology' inherent within the dualistic approach to the mind and body, needed to be reconstructed to bring greater understanding into the ways in which religion and its associated practices can be connected to 'the health and healing of the body/mind/self'. This should more fully analyse ways 'by which believers may transform their selves' (McGuire 1996:111). Integration of the whole person, body, mind and spirit, was an important element of a Christian's spirituality, and as practitioners' data indicated: holistic well-being of the whole person as recognized within long-term CCP practices. This important role of one's whole embodied being was illustrated in the meanings supporting participants' lived experience of CCP and well-being in their life.

6.3 Embodiment

This section addresses the secondary research question: *How is the practitioner embodied within their long-term Christian contemplative prayer (CCP) practice?* Elements of embodiment supported the practice of CCP in a holistic developmental way related to the embodied self, embodied in Christian community, embodied space, and the participants' embodiment in God. From each of these perspectives, the body was recognized as an essential aspect, and as Hall (2010:173) contended 'all of the spiritual disciplines are done in the body and with the body'. Various scholars recognize the importance of recognizing the body and its role in one's Christian spirituality (McGuire 1990, 1996; Willard & Simpson 2005; Hall & Thoennes 2006; Allison 2009; Hall 2010; Greenwood & Delgado 2013; Van Niekerk & Niemandt 2019); however, as Allison (2009:13-14) argues: 'Regrettably, the church has developed its neglect or rejection of this embodied reality because of being negatively influenced by Platonic philosophy. Plato maintained that the human soul or spirit, being of divine origin, is inherently good, while the human body, being of earthly origin, is inherently bad'. He continued that this permeating thought led to a picture of salvation relating to the release of the spirit from the sinful body; leading some Christian thinking to support the body to be a 'hindrance' to spiritual growth and to be considered 'the root of human sinfulness'. It is not the goal of this thesis to engage in this debate over embodiment, but rather to generate a theory based on participant data which theorizes the long-term practitioners lived CCP experience. From participants' meanings and perspectives, embodiment helped to support their holistic development and well-being within their CCP practice.

6.3.1 Embodied Lived Experience of Christian Contemplative Prayer

Many participants spoke about the importance of embodiment within their lived experience of their CCP practice, in which they meant that their body was an integral subjective, embodied aspect of their practice. Allison insisted (2009:5) that, '[t]he normal state of human existence is an embodied existence'. Theologians Pieter Van Niekerk and Nelus Niemandt (2019) contended that a Christian spirituality lived experience was embodied, as experienced in the totality of the individual. In response to concepts of embodiment, Hall and Thoennes (2006:30) asked the questions: 'How should we as Christians understand our embodied experiences'? 'What is the right relationship with our bodies'?

For many long-term practitioners, a CCP embodied lived experience was part of their right relationship with God. While embodiment can be recognized as a cognitive scientific theory relating the body's role in shaping the mind (Kiverstein 2012), within the lived experience of long-term CCP practitioners the body was also recognized as an integral part of their contemplative union with God. McGuire (1996) argued that within the connections of religion and the body: bodies matter. She proposed two supporting ideas: 1) the body was important because one's body matters to the person who inhabited it; and 2) they were the 'material reality' which helped to ground one's lived experience in reality (McGuire 1996:104). Bodies matter because of the strong identity people have with them, and as McGuire (1990:284) insisted, 'the "lived" body is our vehicle for perceiving and interpreting our world'. She emphasized the need to recognize the subjective link of body and mind, as one experiences things 'done to our bodies as done to ourselves' (McGuire 1990:103). As such, things were not just experienced in the body or in the mind, but rather experiences encompassed the embodied self; the totality of God's creation of the human being in body, mind, and spirit. These concepts supported the CCP lived experience. This spiritual discipline was experienced in and through the embodied self, which brought a holistic sense to this lived experience.

Recognizing the contribution of theological insights to embodiment, Greenwood and Delgado (2013:948) emphasized that the 'infusion of the creativity of the Spirit, initiated by God's grace, provided the human person with the potential to be as God intended: the integrated wholeness of body and soul'. They (2013:942) recognized, 'the concrete/lived/experiential data of real bodies struggling for wholeness and yearning for a deeper, more significant relationship with creation and creator'. As participants expressed, the lived experience of CCP was one that engaged not only the spirit and the mind, but the body as well; it was a spiritual embodying practice engaging the whole person: body, mind, and spirit.

The body was a vital part of what it means to be a human being, and equally important from a theological perspective. Hall (2010:159) recognized that Christianity has had an 'ambivalent relationship with the human body', despite 'biblical affirmations of the body'. She argued that this ambivalence had impeded the construction of a strong theological view of the embodied individual that might inform the Christian's lived experience of embodiment. This allowed dualism to alter Christianity's recognition of an embodied view of created human beings, and the fullness *that* realization brings to the

understanding of one's Christian spirituality. Hall (2010:161) presented a complementary way to view the body within theological and social science studies:

> theology provides answers to the intended functioning or purpose of the creation of humans (and of their bodies) by telling us what they were created for, while the social sciences focus on description by documenting in detail the actual functioning of the body.

Studying the embodied lived experience can lead to a greater understanding of the need to integrate more fully an awareness of the body's role in one's Christian spirituality and spiritual practices. As a lived experience of CCP, long-term practitioners pray with the entirety of their being: body, mind, and spirit. Allison (2009:13) emphasized that God's design for human beings was one of embodiment, and as beings 'created for embodied existence both now and in eternity, we do well to live our human embodiment'. Within the CCP practitioners' lived experience of embodiment was the integration of their theological understanding of *imago Dei* and the Incarnation.

6.3.2 Embodiment, *Imago Dei,* and the Incarnation

Christian theologians affirm that human beings were created in God's image; *imago Dei* (Greenwood & Delgado 2013). Humans were created to be embodied beings not separated from their bodies, but rather personifying a created wholeness. In building upon the understanding and words of Aquinas related to '"imago Dei"' 'as a composite of body and spirit, or "existence/essence"', Greenwood and Delgado (2013:943) argued that '[a]t their most integrated level, they exist as one, so that any act of our bodies is an act of our spirit and vice versa'; therefore human being's longing towards God is done with body, mind, and spirit in concert together. This was recognized within CCP practice in which the practitioners' believed that their embodied, unified intention on God allowed for a union with God in contemplation involving the totality of the embodied self.

This embodied experience also recognized the importance of the body as sanctioned through the Incarnation. As one participant shared: *The Incarnation itself is the highest endorsement of the human body there is. So, we can't just say, bodies don't matter (P35).* Willard and Simpson (2005:131) argued that Christ came to this earth 'in a real human body so that he might bring redemption and deliverance to *our* body'. Hall and Thoennes (2006:30) insisted that Christians must look to Jesus' 'model of embodied existence unmarred by sin'. In Jesus the dualism of body and mind is integrated in the whole of human existence of body, mind, and spirit. (van Niekerk & Niemandt 2019). Participants realised the importance of the Incarnation to their lived experience of CCP. Greenwood and Delgado (2013:948) argued that the Incarnation affirms the importance

of the body as not being the 'farthest from God: on the contrary, the body/human and spirit/divine are one through Jesus'. Therefore, a dualistic approach to the body and spirit alters the message of the Incarnation: that of the unification of body, mind, and spirit as one. Hall and Thoennes (2006) insisted that the Incarnation is important within our understanding of embodiment. As long-term practitioners understood their embodied lived experience, they considered the unity with their body. In this, as Greenwood and Delgado (2013:949) argued, through their body they could fully understand their 'incarnational, enfleshed being'. This understanding was part of participants' understanding of their union with God in contemplation. Van Niekerk and Niemandt (2019:9) contended that within the Incarnation of Jesus' earthly body, through the 'radical embodiment of God', there was the example for Christians to live out their Christian spirituality that was embodied and vulnerable. The *imago Dei* and the Incarnational aspects of the Christian's being animated the lived experience of CCP: the union of the divine with humanity.

6.3.3 Embodied Conscious Process

Within one's CCP practice was an embodied conscious process involving one's entire totality. For some practitioners, their embodiment was recognized in the way they referred to their time in CCP. Some referred to their CCP as a spiritual practice or discipline, yet for some, they specified their time in CCP as a *sit*. The sit references the passive involvement of the embodied self to sit still while releasing all thoughts and resting in contemplative union with God. In this sit, the body was very intentionally, passively engaged. For others, their body was actively engaged as reflected in the words of P16: *I think my prayer practices for me are generally based around movement*. For some participants there was an awareness of the necessary active participation of their embodied self within their CCP practice. Active and passive bodily participation became a way of grounding the practitioner as they centred in God. As P35 noted: *We are one whole: mind, body, and spirit*. Involving the body in CCP *comes out of a desire for embodiment, not just to be [in prayer] from the neck up*. Yet, this passive and/or active engagement of the body did not reflect a bodily awareness, but rather an intentional, embodied aspect within CCP.

This intention on God can be likened to Philosopher Diego D'Angelo's (2020) theory of embodied attention, which explained an embodied lived experience that differs from simply a cognitive activity emanating as a directed beam of concentrated attention.

In contrast to classical approaches of bodily self-awareness, in which one was either attentive to or unattentively aware of their own body, D'Angelo (2020) contended that embodied attention existed when one was inattentive to their own physicality. He argued that an embodied attention relies on different phenomenological aspects from bodily awareness, as they are two different processes. He further pointed to the phenomenology of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, which showed that bodily movements were an important part of attention, upon which D'Angelo (2020) built concepts that addressed the way in which attention is important in shaping lived experiences. D'Angelo (2020:964) argued that '[i]ndeed, the posture of our body is crucial in determining our ability to really pay attention to something. **In all these cases, we try to find a posture in which we do not have to think about the body anymore; the body functions in such a way that we do not have to pay attention to it, allowing us to direct our attention toward something else that occupies us**' (author's bold print). Posturing was a conscious process in which a CCP practitioners' intention on God was embodied either in the sitting or the activity of their body. There was a conscious process to involve the body, and as Willard and Simpson (2005:139) contended, times of silence or solitary retreat include the quietness of the body and soul, with an admonition to '[p]ut your body into it'. Putting one's body into it was a holistic process that involved the whole embodied self. This was reflected in the embodied conscious process which was integrated within long-term practitioners' CCP practice.

Within this embodied attention, one began their time of CCP either purposely at rest or engaging kinaesthetically. Once the self was engaged in siting or some other active CCP method, the embodied self became important for anchoring in the CCP lived experience, in this case, contemplative union with God. D'Angelo (2020) argued that bodily attention was a process in one's daily life that requires attention that is especially directed at bodily activity. He contended that this was not simply bodily self-awareness, with the body as an object, rather this was the phenomenon of embodied attention in which the subjective body stayed in the background, and an individual was not necessarily aware of or attentive of their body. He further argued that being aware of and attentive to one's body related more to one's bodily awareness; whereas embodied attention allowed one's body to be aware of and attentive to its experience. Willard and Simpson (2005:133) proposed that 'it is the nature of the human being that the "inner reality of the self" settles into our body —becomes fused with it'. There were aspects of the body which were already operational in one's experience, being recognized

sometimes as a bodily attention. In this way, the body was an integral component of the unity of the practitioner to focus their intention on contemplative union with God.

6.3.4 Embodied Self

Participant interviews emerged with insights into perspectives of CCP as an embodied lived experience. Within the data, participants reflected on the ways in which embodiment was recognized, interpreted and given meaning as an integral component of contemplation. Participants' meanings revealed ways in which the prayer practice was experienced within one's body. One participant specifically insisted: *It is a bodily experience (P28).* Others noted aspects such as*: my body creates a way of ushering me in [to contemplative prayer] (P30);* of helping *[me] a lot to centre (P13);* of creating a way for this prayer practice to be *experienced through their own bodies (P1);* and that the embodied nature of CCP *gives me something to do with my body (P34).* As a bodily experience, the totality of one's being was engaged in this prayer practice.

Participants also recognized the ways in which their body's involvement had a pivotal role in *'releasing of energy that's stored [in their body] and has been held tightly because of defence mechanisms (P7).* Similar to the way in which D'Angelo (2020) related posture to attention, participants insisted that the more 'relaxed' the physical posture, or subservient to the process of intention on God, the better the participants were able to posture themselves mentally and release thoughts and rest in contemplative union with God.

Participants also described the important role their body had in bringing them to a physically relaxed state, which further assisted their mentally and spiritually relaxed state. For some, this was beginning in a restful, sitting posture, but for others there was a need for kinaesthetic activity in order to quiet their body in eventual silence and contemplative union with God. As this participant (P16) noted, *When I get to that place [of contemplation], I can almost feel the peace and comfort.* The practitioners' subjective body became importantly engaged within their resting embodied attention.

While participants did not have an objective, self-awareness of their body during prayer, they still recognized aspects related to their body such as: *the body knows things that the mind does not* (P30); noting that contemplative prayer methods *helped me get out of my head and into my body* (P28). They further recognized that: *Your mind can only take you so far. Right? There's another dimension to our knowing that takes us to the whole level of depth in the deepest part of our self so powerfully (P7).* Participants'

expressed an understanding of a deeper level that brought meaning into their CCP experience, which D'Angelo (2020) insisted is an embodied attention that helps support meaning making. For practitioners, meaning was found within their embodied contemplative union with God, an experience of body, mind, and spirit.

Within this embodied prayer practice, participants recognized the importance of the Incarnation and its valuation of the human body. This was further supported in the awareness of the body and its ability to help ground one in the present moment. As participants reflected: being present *in this body right now* (P3); *this moment could be the best, because that is where God is* (P14). As Hall and Thoennes (2006:44) insisted, 'we should be aware that the body matters'. Human beings are created in such a holistic way that the body, mind, and spirit cannot be separated in this earthly life (Allison 2009). This holistic understanding helped practitioners recognize the embodied nature of their prayer practice. The body was not only important in the practice and being in the present moment, it was also an integral element of the unified person and their holistic development. As one participant offered: *Some contemplative and meditative prayer practices seek to transcend, overcome or tame the body. Others invite the body to participate and to offer the wisdom it carries in its physicality* (P34). CCP was embodied in the self and the contemplative self was embodied in the Christian community.

6.3.5 Embodied in Christian Community

Christians (like other human beings) are not merely disembodied spirits. Their lived experience of Christian spirituality is interconnected in and through their bodies, both individually and socially. The body is an integral part of one's sociality (McGuire 1996). Spickard (1991) emphasized the importance of the meaning that comes from shared religious experiences and the understanding found in exploring those shared experiences in the understanding of sociality. CCP was embodied in the self as an important element of this practice; however, as Hall (2010:168) noted, when considering the embodied human being, the 'social dimension' must also be recognized. Participants expressed various ways that this practice embodied them within their Christian community. These relational aspects were integrated in ways that *strengthened [their] practice even more sitting with a group (P8);* giving a sense that being in CCP *with other people, it* [quieting one's mind] *is much easier (P14);* recognizing *permission [from others] to do nothing and feel no guilt; being over doing (P29).* Related to their group prayer times, participants reflected that *it's just a very different feeling of energy (P7). It is a sense of connection*

(P9); in which one can feel *a sense of love (P4); love just to have human love for the people that are in the groups with me (P11);* and *feel love from God (P13).* It's as if *I feel like I've been carried by that collective intention (P3); our group conscience (P8). Being in a community of meditators is vital. You can express how your journey is going. It energizes you and gives you confirmation (P19);* and *there is a way in which you are being held by the group. The group silence is different (P34). So, it's a communal experience, even broader than just the group (P7);* and *it is crucial that you belong to a community of meditators (P19). It is almost like a oneness of consciousness or a unity (P23).* These comments reflected just some of the vital elements of CCP's embodiment within one's Christian community.

Hall and Thoennes (2006:43) drew on insights from social sciences which advanced the view that bodies are important to human beings in their relational lived experiences. McGuire (1996:104) contended that as human beings in their embodied lived experiences, there was both a 'reflexive (as sensation of oneself) and relational (as presence to others)' assimilation within the experiences. Participants' meaning experienced both themselves, and their relation to others as part of a vital element of this practice. Within this relational interface, elements of psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's work on *flow* research (Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi 2002), and philosopher and social phenomenologist Alfred Schütz's (1951) work on *inner time* both bring understanding to participant experiences within CCP. Psychology scholars, Jeanne Nakamura and Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi's (2002:89) work on 'flow research' has provided understanding of individuals lived experience as they are involved in an activity in the present. Additionally, Schütz's (1951:92) insights on 'flux of experiences in inner time' enhanced understanding of relationships within communication. Although their work did not specifically address religious or spiritual experiences, the focus was on the relating of individuals in their embodied presence together.

Flow research and theory presented a perspective in which the phenomenon was a means unto itself (Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi 2002). Csikszentmihalyi's work in the 1990's situated itself by describing the interrelated involvement of body and mind as "flow", in which he proposed that activities requiring high levels of physical and mental concentration (for example, chess masters and rock climbers) required participants to engage in flow. This involved a certain holistic state of consciousness and sensation during these activities. He used this term to illustrate the intensely dynamic aspect of an experience in which the individual controlled their actions, yet they perceived little

distinction between themselves, others, or their environment. The individual remained actively engaged and assimilated in their embodied self wholly within the activity and their surroundings.

Sociologists, Neitz and Spickard (1990:18) built upon 'Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's theory of flow experience and Alfred Schütz's theory of the tuning-in relationship as possible tools for opening religious experiences to sociological study'. While neither of these scholars focused on religious experience, they both suggested a theoretical understanding about 'transcendent experiences of individuals'. Similar to Neitz and Spickard's (1990:18) argument, parallels can be recognized between what participants described as CCP lived experiences and what Csikszentmihalyi calls "flow experiences", although the authors argued Csikszentmihalyi did not fully recognize social aspects of others in their embodied presence. In flow, one did not lose a conscious awareness of their surroundings, but rather became absorbed within their embodied presence in their environment with others, and in the case of CCP their embodied presence with God. Spickard (1991:192) argued that lived experiences are the subjective aspect of religious gatherings, and these experiences were social 'in a deeper sense, in that they were shared in the flow of time'.

Additionally, building upon Schütz's work from the 50's regarding the tuning-in of relationships, Spickard (1991:192) outlined a sociology of religious experience that 'erodes the experience-is-private/belief-is-social dichotomy', and 'illuminates a neglected side of religious life'. In these social religious encounters, he insisted, individuals share '"inner time"' in which they were present with one another in a way that can 'help people "tune-in" to one another, to share an inner state of consciousness'.

Framing their concepts upon Schütz's tuning-in theories, Neitz and Spickard (1990) recognized the resonance of a vivid present-time of sharing religious experience and the sense of sharing inner time. These effects of flow and tuning-in of experiences contributed to the connection and powerful experience especially found in the embodied presence of group CCP. Schütz (1951:96) emphasized that communication infers a mutual tuning-in relationship, which established the reciprocal sharing of the other's flux of experiences in inner time, by living through a vivid present-time together and by experiencing this togetherness as a '"We"'. The individual became absorbed in the embodied presence of themselves and others. McGuire (1996:113) insisted that the unity of the embodied self gives substance to the social perspective of religious lived

experiences and the interpersonal time shared, emphasizing that 'participation of "mindful" bodies in ritual action can create an intense sense of togetherness'.

Theories related to flow, inner time, tuning-in, and their relationship to social transcendent relationships helped explain the dynamics of embodiment within group CCP. They also bring further understanding to what participants describe as meaningfully, powerful aspects of group CCP practice. These aspects contributed to a connection and harmony between self, others, God, and creation. Yet, another important element within the CCP embodiment of Christian community was recognized in the integrated aspect of the Body of Christ. As Reagan (2013:57) insisted, the profound awareness of recognizing that Christians, as embodied selves, were also 'corporeal members' of the Body of Christ is a vital aspect of the Christian's faith, and also their sociality of their lived experiences within CCP. Reagan (2013:57) further argued that '[t]he Body of Christ in 1 Cor 12:12-27 is an empty metaphor without the bodies that constitute it', and that Christians were called to 'enflesh' the metaphor of the Body of Christ. While it was important to recognize the embodied self within CCP, as Hall (2010:162) argued, individualism and a focus only on one's individual relationship with God, de-emphasized one's embodied lived experience within the broader community of the Body of Christ. Beyond the social science theories, there is an influence of the connective power within the Body of Christ that also went *beyond words*. As Hall (2010:169) contended, both the 'physical body' and the 'group Body of Christ' were 'expected to be a sacred place of God's presence', a sacred place that may defy description and embody experience. This element of CCP embodied in the Christian community became for the participants, a sacred place.

6.3.6 Embodied Space

Another important aspect for the long-term CCP practitioner was related to their embodiment within their prayer space. In consideration of space, Freundschuh and Egenhofer (1997) proposed a unified taxonomy of spaces based on: a space's degree of manipulability (a space smaller or larger than a human body, for example a chair versus a room), locomotion requirements to navigate the special experience, and size of space. CCP practitioners expressed various perspectives on actual space related to their chosen CCP method. For example, a method involving contemplative photography, contemplative gardening, or contemplative physical exercise might include a space that requires a significant amount of area for locomotion. In contrast, such methods as

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Centering Prayer, contemplative art or contemplative journaling might require a minimal amount of locomotion. Yet, for all methods of CCP within a sacred space, participants expressed that the ultimate intention was stillness and silence in contemplative union with God. This physically embodied space could be reduced to a chair, a place to kneel, or a place to lie down. The Centering Prayer method, or John Main mantra method, both begin and end in this physical space of stillness and silence. For all variations of physical spaces, practitioners recognized an embodied aspect of their prayer space. As noted in greater detail in Chapter 5, apart from the physical nature of the space, one's locality was recognized in ways that reflected a place to: *let go of everything (P1); be a less stressful space (P10); be in a much better place (P2); be in nature (P36); be in a meditative place (P15); be in the embodied space […] recognized as an intentional space (P15); be confronted [by the space] (P20); create a tent [space], hold this space for people (P8); invite others into that space with me (P31);* and *a place I understand (P32).*

Psychological scientist Victor Counted and professor of religion and mental health, Hetty Zock (2019), in their study on Place Spirituality, presented an illustration of The Circle of Place Spirituality, which is depicted in Figure 6.1 below. This figure clarified what the authors referenced as 'the to-and-fro movement of the religious believer away from God to explore the world of opportunities around them (or towards God to escape a frightening world)' (Counted & Zock 2019:20).

Figure 6.1 The Circle of Place Spirituality
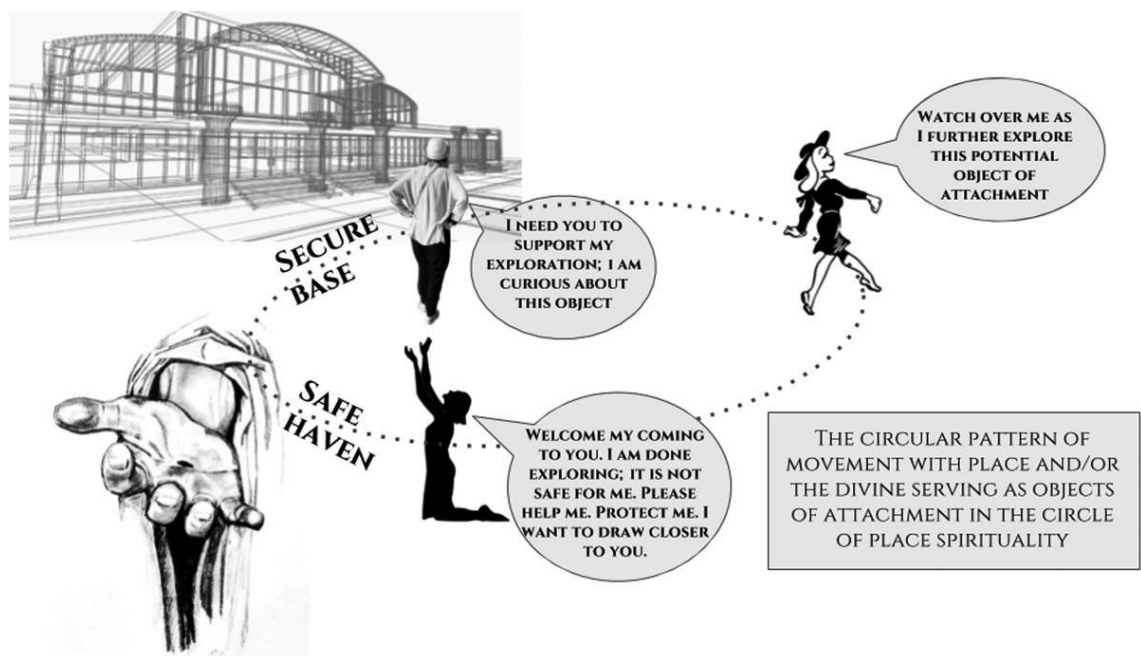
Counted & Zock 2019: 21

As participants reflected on their concept of space within their CCP practice, they referenced a meaningful place of union with God that is: *sitting in silence, a familiar place, and a place that I longed to be (P28); a place of rest (P22); a wonderful space with God (P32); a space to just be with God (P9); pure union with God (P12); a silent space (P30);* a way to enter *into a place of contemplation (P16); accessed by the Spirit of God (P12);* a space that can *make you feel safe and enclosed (P11).* Similar to Counted and Zock's (2019:21) depiction of a 'secure base' or a 'safe haven', CCP practitioners appeared to recognize their embodied prayer space as a place to be with God and then explore the world from, or a place to return to the security, safety and love of God, in order to rest in contemplative union with God. Practitioners did not speak of staying in that CCP embodied space consistently, but yet it was a space to go *to-and-fro* as Counted and Zock (2019) proposed in their Circle of Place Spirituality.

Participants also recognized their CCP space with God and its influence on their well-being. In her book *Healing Spaces,* Esther Sternberg, physician and mind-body-stress-environment- interrelationships scholar (2009:2) asked: 'But do our surroundings, in turn, have an effect on us? Can the spaces around us help us to heal?'. Sternberg answered these questions with a resounding: Yes. Various studies have also shown that spaces can be a part of healing awareness within people. Winchester and McGrath (2017) recognized that geography has been directly related to landscapes, to which Gesler (1992) further promoted the concept of *therapeutic landscapes* to explore the potential healing aspect associated with a place. Since then, researchers have investigated the therapeutic landscape concept in many ways including the influence of specific places such as: the coast (Bell 2015), yoga and massage retreat (Lea 2008), tourist destinations which enhance opportunities for rest and relaxation (Majeed & Ramkissoon 2020), and locales in which residents and visitors 'are invited to enact and embody spiritually significant therapeutic practice' (Perriam 2015:27). Therapeutic landscape studies have also investigated action of shared movement in creating therapeutic landscapes (Doughty 2013), and explorations extending beyond physical places and 'human co-presence' to explore such concepts as migration and associated 'landscapes of the mind' (Gastaldo et al. 2004:171). Additionally, the work of Emmerson (2019:600) contributed to the idea of 'more-than-therapeutic landscapes' noting other components including the relational aspects within therapeutic landscapes. Gorman (2017) also addressed the way in which human-animal interactions create therapeutic landscapes, and the interactions found within 'social, emotional and spiritual geographies that co-constitute

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therapeutic/regulatory spaces of recovery' (Williams 2016:45). These studies brought insights to some of the many different ways that a space can be influential and even contributed to well-being.

Nakamura and Csikszentmihalyi's (2002) continued flow research recognized the environmental influence on an individual's experience of flow. They argued for the importance of recognizing the whole individual within the synergism of individual and environment. The fluid assimilation of the CCP practitioner into their embodied space compliments the intentional focus on the divine. Nakamura and Csikszentmihalyi (2002) insisted that the dynamic experience of flow was informed by both the individual and the environment. The embodied experience of CCP was attended to by the embodied space of the practitioner. This intentional perspective of the practitioner was not represented by objective means. Rather it was the subjectively lived experience within the presently embodied space that allowed for and supported the individual's prayer. This was similar to ways in which Nakamura and Csikszentmihalyi (2002:91) described other actions taking place in 'unfolding flow'. They argued that a person can experience flow in many activities, yet it was based on subjective influences, not objective ones that guided an individual's lived experience. Nakamura and Csikszentmihalyi (2002) argued that facilitating flow was enhanced by one's attention both past and present within their current activities.

This embodied space enhanced the connection of the practitioner, within themselves, with others, and with God. Merleau-Ponty (2015) argued that the idea of space was not the physical setting in which things can be arranged, but rather it provided the capacity whereby things within the space can be positioned. He further suggested that instead of envisioning objects placed in a space or viewing the space theoretically as a characteristic that the objects have in common 'we must think of it as the universal power enabling them to be connected' (Merleau-Ponty 2015:243). Similarly, Perriam (2015:27) insisted on the relational aspect of connection between individuals and groups in a place with others whose 'presence has similar meaning'. This connection, as Perriam (2015) argued, is multi-facetted, involving complex interrelation, emotional, and spiritual relation with others. This realised connection in CCP, of shared meaning, purpose and focus, served to connect self, others, and God within an embodied sacred space (Perriam 2015). Claxton (2015:292) explained that deep connectivity with others and the world around us as a means in which people resonate with one another, such that an individual becomes a part of the larger group around them. This connection of believers was not

static, but rather a dynamic sense of an interconnection; one to another. In this embodied space, the practitioners recognized their embodied self, their embodied community and also their embodiment in God.

6.3.7 Embodied in God

Within their lived experience and self-transcendence towards God, practitioners realized their CCP practice as the centre of their spiritual life, bringing a fuller awareness of their union with God in contemplation. Bruteau (1984:304) argued:

> the heart of the spiritual life is the practice of meditation, the focusing of the consciousness in the center [sic] of one's being, in appreciation of the Mystery, the Life, the Light, and the Love that dwell there. (304)

CCP practitioners recognized their experience of God's love. Practitioners meant that their CCP practice was embodied in God's love and presence, which united a healthy love of self, others, and God. Greenwood and Delgado (2013:953) further noted the importance of this love in affirming the creation of one's body in God's image, in such a way that 'we refuse to bifurcate our body from our spirit'. It was an embodied experience. Embodied in God's love and presence reflected within the lived experience of CCP in the totality of the practitioner. CCP led towards self-transcendence, and as Keating (2007:18) insisted, a 'call to transforming union' with God moving one towards greater realisation of divine love. This loving embodied presence of God was recognized in the words of participants who insisted that: *This is God. It's all about love (P5).*

Hall (2010:171) argued that this was an intersect of social science and theology, which brought understanding to the beneficial aspects of embodiment and relationships. It further reflected on the theological emphasis within the role of the body in glorifying God. The body was 'crafted to facilitate this relational goal' and this purpose was suggested in various 'aspects of our embodied life' (Hall 2010:171). As Neitz and Spickard (1990:16) argued, various religions' emphasis on gods and demons was not merely just about conceptual objects but also 'potential experiences', such as the Christians' call to '"let Jesus into your life"', not merely in thought, but rather an 'experiential act'. This mirrors the lived experience of CCP as embodied in God. Participants expressed the aspect of experience and God's love: *You know, I don't hear God talking to me, but it's in experiences (P4).* Reagan (2013:51) recognized the importance of individuals becoming aware of their own embodiment, 'believing that God is experienced within their physicality'.

Through their growing awareness of God's presence and love, participants expressed a greater CCP embodied connection with God (and as previously shown a connection within themselves, others, and the space they embody). This helped them develop better connections with others within the Body of Christ, and their embodiment within the Christian community. Participants realised this as a *sense of being liberated into a life that was more connected to the life of God and didn't need mechanics and it would emerge out of one's life in God (P12),* and that within *the heart of Christianity is a sense that the body is connected; it's holistic (P11).* This profound sense of embodiment in God was reflected in the words of this practitioner: *when I sit in Centering Prayer and rest in God's love, there's no separation. That's how my relationship with God has changed (P3).*

Participants CCP embodied nature with God reflected the way in which they 'participate in the mystery of God's revelation through the Incarnation in Jesus' and as van Niekerk and Niemandt (2019) continued to argue this shared relationship with God demonstrated a relationship of embodiedness. Human beings are created in God's image, having a connection with God and reflecting that image in their embodied being. Van Niekerk and Niemandt (2019:2) contended that an 'embodiment of God as love in the flesh' provides not only a 'living connection' of humans with God but also human beings with one another.

Another important element of embodiment with God was found within the complex concept of *interiority*, or 'first of all, presence to oneself' (Frohlich 2001:70). Frohlich (2001:73) further referenced this concept as: 'an engagement and intimacy with God involving the most profound depths of one's being'. This was the heart of CCP; an embodied intimacy within one's inner most being. Frohlich (2001) expanded this further to illustrate that interiority supports the potential for self-transcendence towards God, that is the embodied self as embodied in God. This interiority focused on one's interior life, yet that cannot minimize the value of one's exterior life, as both are united within one's embodied self. Rather as Frohlich (2019) argued it was the endeavour to construct meaning of one's lived spirituality in consideration of the interior/exterior life. Discussion of interiority did not present a dualistic perspective, but rather an embodied state 'capable of a living union between inner and outer, material and transcendent, communal and solitary, eternal and transient' (Frohlich 2019:74). Van Niekerk and Niemandt (2019:2) further insisted that 'the pivotal character of the Christian faith lies in the embodiment of God'. Within the practice of CCP was the reality of one's interiority,

the union of interior and exterior in the embodied life, realizing an embodiment within the practitioner's contemplative union in God.

For many participants, embodiment in God was further recognized within the Incarnation and the Christian's awareness of their body as temple of God. In the Incarnation, the Son of God, Jesus, took on human flesh and came into the world. As Scripture expresses in John1:14: 'The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us'. One participant insisted: *For me, it relates to Christianity, because we're primarily focused on the Incarnation, on God choosing to become flesh and blood* (P11). Van Niekerk and Niemandt (2019:2) emphasized the 'deep incarnation of God' in Christ as the 'embodiment of God'. For CCP practitioners, these implications supported the Christian's embodied relationship with God, a relationship that included the human body. As theologians recognized, God not only identified with embodied human beings, but also identified as an embodied being in Jesus. God became embodied in Jesus and accepted the limitations of a human body (van Niekerk & Niemandt 2019). CCP allowed humans to recognize their embodiedness in their limitless God, with all their human limitations. Van Niekerk and Niemandt (2019:1) insisted that '[a]n authentic Christian spirituality is embodied'. This reflected the CCP practitioners' embodiment in God, as holistic in body, mind and spirit.

Participants recognized another aspect of their embodied nature in God as the temple of God (or the Holy Spirit). Hall (2010:169) argued that scriptural testimony of God's temple among human beings was established in 1 Corinthians 3:16 and 1 Corinthians 6:13-20[55] as the 'holiness of the Body as a group of believers', and individually as 'the temple of the Holy Spirit is applied to the body of the individual believer with its implications of holiness and sacredness'. Allison (2009:7) further affirmed Scriptures admonition '"that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit" (1 Cor 6:19)'. In these ways, the human body of Christians was to be a 'sacred place of God's presence' (Hall 2010:169). Through their CCP practice, this scriptural teaching became more of a reality as practitioners referenced *carrying the temple within us (P3);* and the fact that it was what *contemplative prayer is about, to be at home with yourself because that is the temple of God (P29).* Hall (2010:174) insisted that 'spiritual disciplines allow

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[55] These two scriptural references help explain how a Christian's body is '"' for the Lord"' depicted as: the body as 'part of Christ', as a' dwelling for the Spirit' and 'as a slave to Christ' (Hall 20120: 168). Hall (2010) argues that '"For the Lord"' means that one's 'body is joined to Christ' (168), and 'is a dwelling place for his Spirit' (169).

us as whole, embodied people, to show God's indwelling presence—His glory—in His temple'.

Embodied in God was a multi-faceted, complex relationship that participants recognized as being at the centre of their CCP experience. It was an experiential relationship within the love and presence of God. It enveloped the mystery of God within the practitioner, in the depth of their interiority. Its importance was reflected in the Incarnation of God in Christ and the value of the created embodied Christian as the temple of God; God within the CCP practitioner. Although it was more of an embodied attention as D'Angelo (2020) describes, the long-term CCP practitioners in this study realised their embodied selves, their embodiment within a Christian community, their embodiment within their prayer space, and their embodiment in God as they rested in contemplative union with God.

6.4 Diagramming the Substantive Grounded Theory: Christian Contemplative Prayer, Well-Being, and Embodiment

This thesis has focused on developing a substantive grounded theory integrating CCP, well-being, and embodiment. In order to consistently present the research process and subsequent findings throughout this study, various means have been utilized including text, tables, and figures, which have served as 'generative/analytical techniques and communicative tools' (Buckley & Waring 2013:149). These means have helped to illustrate and define the theory which must theorize and develop relationships, further linking together emerging *conceptual categories* with the extant literature (Charmaz 2014). Chapter 6 has developed the constructivist substantive grounded theory. This final section concludes the discussion by conceptually illustrating the theoretical relationships within CCP, well-being, and embodiment. Buckley & Waring (2013:152) emphasised that diagrams can help to illustrate the interrelation of the codes, extant theories, and conceptual categories within the substantive grounded theory. Grounded theory scholars recommend the use of diagrams as 'visual representations' of the developing theory (Strauss & Corbin 1990:223), offering images to interconnect ideas (Charmaz 2014). Buckley & Waring (2013:149) affirm that in the initial stages of the research, simpler figures and diagrams may serve well to clarify the developing concepts; however, as the investigation continues increasingly complex diagrams can graphically depict an overview of the interrelation of the substantive theoretical concepts. This final section

presents two different illustrative diagrams of this constructivist, substantive grounded theory of CCP, well-being, and embodiment and its interrelation within Christian Spirituality.

Figure 6.2 demonstrates:

- The nature of this grounded theory study and its findings as they relate to the long-term CCP practitioners' lived experience of well-being and embodiment. The diagram also depicts CCP practice and its interrelation within Christian Spirituality as recognized in: lived experience, conscious process, holistic development, self-transcendence towards God, and the uniqueness of the individual lived experience.

Figure 6.3 presents:

- The dynamic relation of the long-term CCP practitioners' realisation of physical, mental, and spiritual well-being, integrated within their embodied lived experience of their long-term CCP practice.

This section will diagrammatically advance explanations indicating how these conceptual ideas relate to one another and influence the lived experience of CCP practitioners.

6.4.1 Christian Contemplative Prayer and Christian Spirituality

This thesis explored the lived experience of long-term CCP practitioners, including the development of a constructivist substantive grounded theory emerging from the constant comparative data analysis of the participants' data. The academic discipline of Christian Spirituality provided a hermeneutical lens, which helped orient the emergent theory. This theory, which indicates the interrelation of CCP, well-being, and embodiment, is graphically presented in Figure 6.2 below.

Figure 6.2 Christian Contemplative Prayer: A Christian Spirituality Substantive Grounded Theory
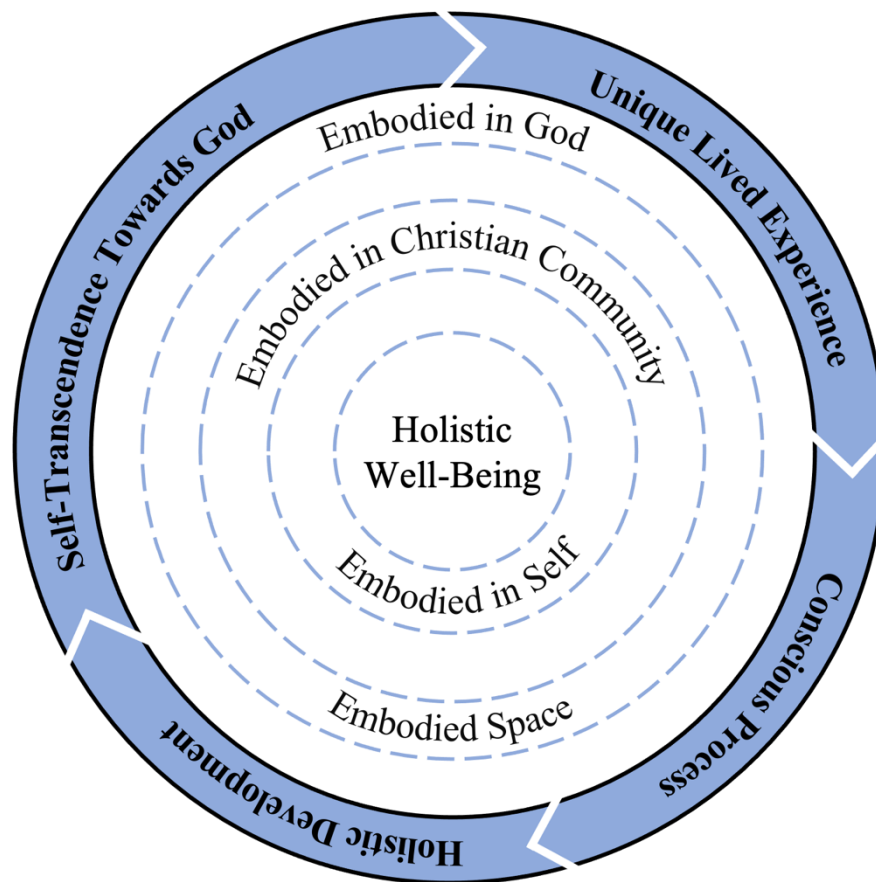
This figure depicts the enveloping aspect of Christian Spirituality in orienting this study within the grounded theory analysis of participants' data. For illustrative purposes, two aspects of Christian Spirituality have been combined into one: lived experience and uniqueness of the individual lived experience being represented in the diagram by *unique lived experience*. The orienting aspect of Christian Spirituality is illustrated by the encircling chevrons in the diagram. Within the circle are the various aspects of CCP embodiment, with each one located within the previous one, yet all interrelated as illuminated by the concentric *dashed lines*. At the very core of the illustration is embodied, holistic well-being: spiritual, mental, and physical. This sense of well-being within one's self, with others, and with God is the core of CCP. Practitioners expressed this continued holistic sense of well-being, which is a part of their embodied CCP practice, being further illuminated through the perspective of the practitioners' Christian spirituality.

6.4.2 Christian Contemplative Prayer, Embodiment, and Well-Being

This second theoretical framework, represented in Figure 6.3 below, represents the integrated connections which emerged in this study of CCP. This framework reflects the interconnection between CCP, well-being, and embodiment conceptual categories, and their relation to relevant theories. This also illustrates the processes by which multiple categories inform and shape the long-term practitioner's lived experience, within their embodied CCP practice. Emerging through the grounded theory constant comparative data analysis, the category of embodiment developed an analytic power to explain this research and its interconnections. Rather than just a descriptive awareness of well-being, experienced by participants, aspects of embodiment helped to create a coherent picture of CCP, well-being, and embodiment.

Figure 6.3 Christian Contemplative Prayer, Well-Being, and Embodiment
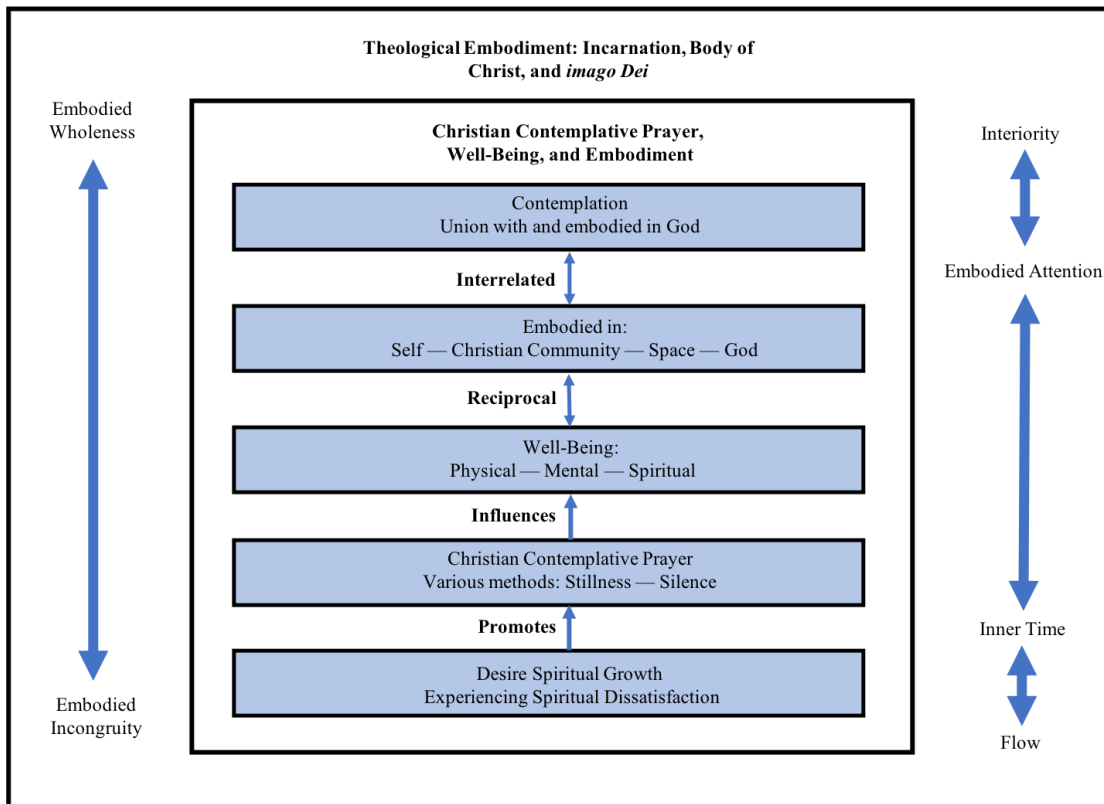
Desire Spiritual Growth/Experiencing Spiritual Dissatisfaction — This suggests that one's desire for spiritual growth and increasing dissatisfaction with one's own Christian spirituality can help *promote* an openness, interest in, and longing for CCP.

Christian Contemplative Prayer — Within one's pursuit of God's presence and embodied wholeness of one's self, there was a potential discovery of various methods of CCP, which allowed one to enter a place of stillness and silence in God's presence. CCP practitioners then recognized that their prayer practice *influenced* their various states of holistic well-being.

Well-Being: Physical, Mental, and Spiritual — Among CCP practitioners there was a sense of a *reciprocal* effect of increasingly positive well-being and different aspects of embodiment ongoing within one's realization of embodied wholeness and contemplation in union with God.

Embodied in Self, in Christian Community, in Space, and in God — Participants recognized the ways in which their prayer practice was facilitated through aspects of embodiment. Within the concept of embodied self, participants realized that they did not pray in a dis-embodied way, but rather their embodied self was engaged in CCP. In this way, their embodied self was involved in CCP, giving them a greater sense of wholeness in God's presence. Embodied in Christian community helped to explain the interconnected aspects of this spiritual practice with others. This was realised in a sense of unity and oneness with others. Embodied space helped to develop a fuller aspect of the way in which the place of prayer played a role in practitioners' prayer practice, both in the way it helped to facilitate the prayer time and the way that it generated aspects of wholeness. Embodied in God reflected the way in which the participants' prayer time was interconnected with God's presence. From these perspectives, practitioners' sense of embodiment was *interrelated* with an awareness of their holistic being in contemplative union with God.

Contemplation: Union with God — It was this interconnectedness of embodiment that helped to create an awareness of contemplation in union with God; the contemplative resting place of this spiritual practice as embodied in self, in Christian community, in an embodied space, and in contemplative union with God.

Theological Embodiment: Incarnation, Body of Christ, and *imago Dei* — Within Chapter 6, extant literature concepts of theological embodiment were developed and integrated with participants' understandings of those importance aspects within this

prayer practice. This was recognized especially within the Incarnation (Schneiders 2003; Willard & Simpson 2005; Hall & Thoennes 2006; Van Niekerk & Niemandt 2019), the Body of Christ (Hall 2010; Reagan 2013), and *imago Dei* (Allison 2009; Greenwood & Delgado 2013). The framework illustrated in Figure 6.3, depicts the importance of theological embodiment (noted at the top) as reflected by its encompassing nature of the CCP process.

Flow - Inner time - Embodied Attention - Interiority — This framework suggests the progression of flow (Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi 2002; Neitz & Spickard 1990) and inner time (Schütz 1951; McGuire 1996) developing within the practitioner and their practice of CCP. This continues to progress in a process of embodied attention (D'Angelo 2020) and aspects of interiority (Frohlich 2001, 2019).

Embodied Incongruity towards Embodied Wholeness — This framework begins with a sense of the Christian's embodied incongruity, which helps to create an openness and desire for CCP. Throughout their long-term practice of CCP, practitioners continue to develop a sense of greater embodied wholeness. This wholeness is a part of their increasing holistic well-being within this embodied prayer practice.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

This thesis has aimed to answer the primary research question: *What is the lived experience of Christian contemplative prayer (CCP) among long-term practitioners, and how does it relate to the practitioners' embodied well-being and perceptions of embodiment within this spiritual discipline?* In so doing, it has contributed knowledge of CCP's lived experience among long-term practitioners, generating several insights related to CCP and well-being, and is one of the first studies to explore embodiment within CCP.

This thesis responds to calls for increasing investigations of CCP (Johnson *et al.* 2009; Blanton 2010; Ferguson 2010a; Fox *et al.* 2015, 2016). It builds upon the limited CCP scholarship, further addressing the gap in understanding of the lived experience of CCP long-term practitioners. It has demonstrated a descriptive analysis of practitioners' initial attraction to this prayer practice and to the different ways in which CCP is practised. This emerging data analysis furthered understanding of CCP's influence on the practitioners' well-being, while expanding upon the under-theorized aspects of embodiment within CCP.

While the participants' data were primary, the study was further oriented within the multi-disciplinary, academic discipline of Christian Spirituality (Schneiders 1989, 2003, 2006; Liebert 2002). Emerging within this study were aspects of the practitioners' well-being and their perception of embodiment within this spiritual discipline. This study was designed using the grounded theory framework (Glaser & Strauss 1967; Strauss & Corbin 1990; Charmaz 2014). Additionally, the philosophical basis of a constructivist grounded theory was utilized, which allowed for a co-constructing of the data with participants. Further analysis developed the emergent codes from the interview data (Charmaz 2014). Through this investigation a constructivist substantive grounded theory was developed relating CCP, well-being, and embodiment. The intention of this chapter is to bring the data analysis and subsequent discussion chapter into a concluding presentation of this thesis' theory of long-term CCP practitioners' lived experience. This chapter will summarise this thesis and its findings, additionally outlining the study's contribution to knowledge. It will conclude with a discussion of the study's limitations, followed by recommendations for future research, and final personal reflections on this study.

7.1 Thesis Overview

This thesis began by introducing the aim of this qualitative study: addressing the lacuna in our understanding of long-term practitioners' CCP practice. This lacuna existed within the limited studies that have explored the lived experience of long-term CCP practitioners. Following the opening introduction in the first chapter, Chapter 2 presented the orienting hermeneutical lens of Christian spiritualty. Also included in this chapter was a brief exploration of the historical links of CCP (Bourgeault 2004; Laird 2006; Keating 2009; Ferguson *et al.* 2010a; Paintner 2016). After discussing the historical influences on this practice, Chapter 3 presented an initial literature review, conducted to expose the research gap and bring academic familiarity of this practice to the forefront of this investigation.

Within the literature review, a variety of extant theories related to CCP were critiqued, including those related to:

- psychotherapy intervention (Finney & Malony 1985a, 1985b)
- phenomenological investigations (Kuiper 2004; Fox *et al.* 2015)
- explorations of this prayer practice's influence on participants' well-being (Johnson *et al.* 2009; Ferguson *et al.* 2010a; Fox *et al.* 2016; and the PhD studies of Kruse 2012; Lysne's 2012; Asbill's 2015)
- investigations of the Jesus Prayer's influence (Rubinart *et al.* 2017; and the PhD study of Stavros 1998)

Each of these studies provided insight into positive aspects of a CCP practice and its relation to well-being; however, this literature review helped to further reveal the gap in understanding of long-term CCP practitioners' lived experience. This literature review continued to be a dynamic, integrated, revelatory process throughout this study, including literature on well-being and embodiment.

Following this literature review, Chapter 4 outlined the methodology and the methods that supported this grounded theory investigation. The data collection comprised semi-structured interviews with long-term CCP practitioners, within a constructivist grounded theory framework. The analysis of the 36 participants' data helped to develop an emergent theory integrating the relationship between CCP, well-being, and embodiment. Throughout the analysis, the theorizing was an interpretive process that involved co-constructing of participants' data into the emerging coding scheme (Charmaz 2014).

Chapter 5 delineated the findings of this work and began to clarify the importance of recognizing the subjective role of the embodied self within CCP. Aspects of embodiment, within CCP, were expanded to recognize not only the embodied self, but also embodied in Christian community, the embodied space, and an embodied contemplative union in God. Findings from this study further suggested the influence of this embodied prayer practice in the holistic well-being of the individual physically, mentally, and spiritually.

Chapter 6 continued the development of this substantive grounded theory by applying relevant theories, especially those related to well-being and embodiment, to the emerging participant data analysis. Drawing upon these theories strengthened the development of this substantive grounded theory. In the absence of one over-arching, comprehensive theory describing the interrelatedness of CCP, well-being, and embodiment, various theories were integrated in the multi-disciplinary discussion. This helped to demonstrate how this current thesis, and its relevant findings have contributed to knowledge in understanding long-term CCP practitioners' lived experience.

Chapter 7 concludes this thesis by presenting the thesis' contribution to knowledge, study limitations, concepts for future research, and personal reflections on the self-implicating nature of this study.

7.2 Thesis Contributions to Knowledge

The following subsections present the specific contributions of this investigation recognized as:

- First, this study highlighted the lived experience of long-term CCP practitioners within their Christian spirituality
- Second, it provides qualitative descriptive analysis, combined with supporting multi-disciplinary extant theories. In doing so, it has furthered insights related to CCP and well-being, and it has elevated the important role of embodiment within this spiritual discipline.
- Third, it creates a bridge with previous CCP studies to further link CCP, well-being, and embodiment.

7.2.1 Lived Experience of Practitioners

Through rich participant data, this thesis has illuminated the lived experience of long-term CCP practitioner's and CCP's influence on well-being. More than simply describing CCP practitioner's lived experience, this thesis has analysed and interpreted meanings, which have emerged in new theoretical insights. The subsequent grounded theory demonstrated aspects of well-being related to CCP and also theoretical concepts of embodiment within this prayer practice. Embodiment was not simply an anecdote to CCP, but rather an integrated part of the participants' lived experience, even potentially playing an initiating role in their developing prayer practice.

This thesis posits that recognizing the embodied self was an important aspect within the lived experience of CCP, and that a sense of embodied incongruity often helped to lead Christians towards discovering and developing this practice. This embodied incongruity sometimes encompassed a spiritual dissatisfaction in participants' Christian journey and relationship with God, a relationship that is at the root of spiritual life for many Christians (Simpson *et al.* 2008). It is likely that a range of motivations within their embodied (mind, body, and spirit) incongruity influenced a conscious development and desire for spiritual growth. This desire helped to promote an openness to CCP, which for these participants has matured into a long-term prayer practice and continued lived experience of well-being and embodiment within their prayer practice.

7.2.2 Qualitative Evidence Linking Well-Being and Embodiment

This thesis has helped to substantiate CCP scholars who have suggested CCP's influence on well-being (Johnson 2009; Ferguson 2010a; Fox *et al.* 2016). Furthermore, the thesis' findings have reflected participants' eudaemonic sense of well-being, which has helped to provide a nuanced understanding of CCP's influence on well-being. Some of these aspects were recognized within Ryff and Keyes' (1995) six core dimensions of well-being, in which participants' data reflected: personal growth; purpose; self-acceptance; and positive sociality. For the individual there was increasingly positive growth in their interior life related to such aspects as peace, authenticity, kindness, centredness, and patience. There was concurrently a greater sense of one's true self (Keating 2007) and an influence on one's habitus (Bourdieu 1968) as practitioners continued their long-term CCP practice and the associated contemplative union in God. These aspects of increasing development of one's true self and positive influence on habitus suggested emotional healing versus simply being an example of Hochschild's (1979) emotional management.

The findings further offered a contribution to the ways in which CCP influences not only individual's personal well-being (leading to embodied wholeness), but also their communal, environmental, and spiritual well-being.

Participants increasing positive relations with others led to greater communal well-being. This was realized not only in relationships, but also in the way that others recognized positive changes within the practitioner and also the practitioner's desire to restore difficult relationships. Participants' well-being was also extended towards and within all of creation. This connection with nature seemed to help support an inner peace (Duke 2020), a strengthening of their relationship with God and nature, and a deepening of practitioners' appreciation and awe of the natural world. This thesis explored the processes that supported well-being within CCP, which were also recognized in Fisher's (2010) four domains within the SHALOM assessment of spiritual well-being. Participants' increasing spiritual well-being, greater awareness of God's presence, and growing relationship with God were all part of their long-term CCP lived experience. This thesis is one of a few studies to explore CCP and well-being and offers one of the first grounded theories in the relationship of not only well-being within this prayer practice, but also an interrelatedness of embodiment within CCP.

7.2.3 Connecting Christian Contemplative Prayer, Well-Being, and Embodiment

While limited CCP research has supported understanding of this prayer practice's influence on well-being, this thesis has highlighted the interrelatedness of CCP, well-being, and embodiment. In so doing, it has clarified the possible connections as they relate within the lived experience of long-term CCP practitioners. It has also delineated four aspects of long-term CCP practitioners embodied lived experience, especially as it relates to: embodied self, embodied in Christian community, embodied space, and embodied in God. This study has further advanced these various elements of embodiment within this constructivist substantive grounded theory of CCP. It begins to illustrate embodiment as an integral aspect of CCP, along with CCP's influence on well-being. By coordinating this construct with extant theories on well-being and embodiment, and also Csikszentmihalyi's theories of *flow* (Nakamura and Csikszentmihalyi 2002), Schütz's (1951) work on *inner time,* D'Angelo's (2020) theory of *embodied attention*, and Frohlich's (2001, 2019) understanding of interiority, a greater understanding of the dynamic relationship between CCP, well-being, and embodiment within this prayer practice's lived experience has been theorized.

Scholars have discussed elements of embodiment, as outlined in Chapter 6 (McGuire 1990; Allison 2009; Van Niekerk & Niemandt 2019). Greenwood and Delgado (2013:943) also emphasized that 'any act of our bodies is an act of our spirit and vice versa'. Hall and Thoennes (2006) insisted that the Incarnation is important within our understanding of embodiment, and Willard and Simpson (2005:131) argued that Christ came into the world to redeem the whole person, including '*our* body'. This thesis further emphasized the recognition of *imago Dei* (Greenwood & Delgado 2013; Allison 2009) , the Incarnation (Schneiders 2003; Willard & Simpson 2005; Hall & Thoennes 2006; Van Niekerk & Niemandt 2019), and the communal Body of Christ (Hall 2010; Reagan 2013), as important theological concepts integrated in the embodiment within CCP.

This is an important contribution as both the lived experience of long-term CCP practitioners and the subsequent understanding of embodiment within this practice is under-developed and under-theorized. This study helps to advance insights into this embodied prayer practice and its influence on the long-term practitioners' well-being. This increasing understanding of CCP, well-being, and embodiment can benefit CCP scholars, Christian leaders who teach on CCP or who wish to understand CCP better, CCP practitioners, and Christians who do not yet practice or understand CCP. Schneiders (1989:677) argues that theologians have focused more seriously on academic studies of Christian spirituality, making 'explicit the roots of their constructive work in their own faith experience and their conscious intention that their work should bear fruit in the lived faith of the Church as well as in its speculation and teaching'. Greater clarity of this practice can open doors of understanding for the global church community helping Christian traditions and individual's alike to better understand and potentially embrace this embodied prayer practice within their own spiritual disciplines. In this way they can further comprehend, participate, and benefit from this embodied Christian prayer practice.

7.3 Limitations

The previous subsection outlined this study's contribution to new knowledge; however, it is also important to assess the limitations inherent within a particular study.

7.3.1 Study Limitations

This grounded theory study is based on specific participants, which can present a limitation of qualitative research in its ability to generalize the findings to people who were not included in the study (Fox *et al.* 2015). However, this qualitative research of CCP practice can still provide insights into the experience of this prayer practice. Second, although this grounded theory method utilized purposive sampling, followed by snowball sampling, and theoretical sampling, still the sample remained relatively homogenous. The sample consisted primarily of Caucasian Christians, educated, middle class or retired. Most were active in one of a small number of different Christian denominations: Catholic, Episcopalian, Lutheran, Methodist, Presbyterian, and Anglican. Additionally, snowball sampling can contribute to limits in representation and concerns of bias within the research sample. Future studies may benefit from selecting a more diverse participant sample.

Third, my experience as an emerging grounded theory researcher could have created limitations. Those limitations could be recognized within my limited experience as an interviewer, and also in my evolving understanding of the constructivist grounded theory method and associated data analysis. I have conducted interviews based on my nature as an engaging, listening communicator and my studies of interviewing techniques. However, I am sure there are ways in which my personal style or interviewing inexperience impacted the interview process. Additionally, although I was very diligent in my constant comparative analysis of the data, still I am a nascent researcher, and this could have also had a limiting impact. A more seasoned researcher, or one with a different interview style, may have discovered slightly different results, although both approaches would have still discovered new concepts within the data analysis.

Fourth, as a reflexive researcher, my goal was to maintain an awareness of my own position within the research. I am aware that my own presuppositions regarding God and prayer could also have influenced the interpretation of the data.

Fifth, the study of lived experiences can be a limiting factor in its difficultly to interpret and analyse.

7.3.2 Studying Lived Experiences

Researching lived experiences within participants' Christian spirituality is a challenge, but this does not mean we should abandon our rigorous endeavours. Liebert (2002:31) attests to the academic study of spirituality and its 'intrinsic relationship to that notoriously slippery concept, "experience"'. Frohlich (2001:69) counters with this rhetorical question: 'If we stand in the messy reality of lived spirituality, have we fallen all the way down the "slippery slope" to wallow in sheer subjectivity? She responds, 'I don't think so'. Within this rhetoric lies the call to humbly persevere and be open to gaining new insights, while investigating lived experiences. This study responds to that call using vigorous transparency to navigate intelligently and diligently within lived experience and academic study, while still recognizing the inherent potential for limitations within this research work.

7.3.3 Concluding Thoughts on Limitations

Despite these limitations, this constructivist substantive grounded theory provides a significant contribution to the limited research on CCP and to insights on long-term CCP practitioners' lived experience of well-being, and aspects of embodiment within this spiritual discipline.

7.4 Future Research

The absence of substantial evidence regarding long-term practitioners' CCP practice and the subsequent gap in this understanding gave credence to the necessity of this current study. Furthermore, practitioners have a rich wealth of knowledge to share about their lived experience of CCP, which could continue to advance our academic understanding and insights of this spiritual practice. There could be continued value in comparative studies between long-term practitioners who use a mantra method (for example the WCCM) and those who do not (for example Centering Prayer practitioners within CO). These specifically CCP practices could also be comparatively studied with other meditative practices, for example mindfulness, or loving-kindness meditation.

Furthermore, this is one of the first studies to explore embodiment within long-term CCP practitioners. Further research is warranted to explore each of these aspects of embodiment: embodied self, embodied in Christian community, embodied space, and embodied in God. Studies could focus more specifically on the aspects of the subjective

embodied self within this practice, both its conscious and sub-conscious roles. Future studies could also investigate age, race, and gender factors affecting CCP research findings.

Embodied in Christian community could be studied more in-depth within a single community of practitioners. For example, within one prayer group, or even within one regional group of practitioners. This would bring richer insights into the interactions among practitioners within their own culturally embodied CCP community.

Embodied space could be researched more deeply. How is the practitioners' embodied CCP space different whether they pray alone sitting in a chair, or alone in any of the other various methods used, as illustrated in Figure 5.1. This could be contrasted with the lived experience within their prayer group, group prayer at a seminary, a church, a sanctuary, or a lecture hall with a larger group. What is their lived experience in these different embodied spaces? Is it the same? Or is there a realised difference between the varying spaces?

Embodied in God needs more attention. This is the goal of CCP: contemplation in union with God. This aspect, that can go *beyond words*, needs to be given more attention to continue to build on our understanding of the influence of this prayer practice in the lived experience of long-term CCP practitioners. Future studies could look more specifically at the influence of CCP practice and the influence on the daily lived experience of the practitioner. This study has presented dialogue related to the lived experience of practitioners beyond their actual prayer time; however, limiting factors of time and length of this thesis have not allowed for in-depth analysis of this day-to-day lived embodied CCP experience beyond the prayer experience. Embodied in God would be a concept to explore more fully in the daily life of the long-term CCP practitioner, as this was outside the scope of this study. There is a depth of understanding to be gained in any of these academic pursuits. To God be the glory.

7.5 Self-Implicating

As a researcher of CCP, I resonate with the following words of Frohlich (2001:68) on the self-implicating nature of a Christian Spirituality study:

> I have become convinced that "lived spirituality" is, and must remain, the key point of engagement for any study of spirituality. In saying this, I am clearly taking a stand for the "self-implicating" character of such study. What we study, how we study, what we learn, is rooted in our own spiritual living. In this context, "spiritual living" does not necessarily mean adherence to a defined religious or spiritual tradition. It does mean, however that one attends with as much authenticity as one can muster to the truth of one's own experience. Clarifying and affirming this context makes the study of spirituality a tremendously energizing and exciting process for most students.

This academic pursuit has been an endeavour which has added new knowledge to the corpus of Christian Spirituality and also personal experiential knowledge in my own Christian spirituality as a lived experience. I believe it is important, as Frohlich (2001:70) argued, that we as researchers, are willing to assess 'our own subjectivity, our self-presence, our embodied self within the study'. This can further become a 'hermeneutical enterprise' which connects the 'world of the scholar and the individual phenomenon being studied' (Schneiders 2006:207).

Ellingson (2017:19) further affirms the importance of recognizing bodies, within qualitative research, as being 'both discursive *and* corporeal'. Ellingson (2017:1) argued that although meaning is made within our embodied selves, still many researchers 'remain unconscious of it (or even deny it)', yet, 'embodiment is an integral aspect of all research process'. We must recognize that embodiment can also be recognized as relational, thus suggesting the collaborative aspect of researcher and participant, and the ways in which our 'embodied selves are highly interwoven with the presence and actions of others' bodies' (Ellingson 2017:22). In the process of researching, this includes the embodied researcher and participants, as living in the world through their embodied selves. I believe I have had to grow in this realisation as a researcher, and I dare say I have not arrived fully. It is a process of growth.

Within the study of participants' Christian spirituality, we must further recognize that lived experiences are part of one's holistic embodied knowledge, which not only includes the body and the mind but also the spirit. Liebert (2002) argued that the academic discipline of Christian Spirituality must be connected to the spiritual lived experience of the researcher as well as the individuals, texts, or phenomenon being studied.

Frohlich (2019:133) connected the researcher's recognition of the participants' data and their lived experience, in their own awareness of its resonance 'in ones' own spirit'. For Frohlich (2019:133-134), this resonance does not place the researcher 'inside another's experience', but rather it connects researcher and participant in 'the same room, so to speak. The "room" is spiritual experience as the root of spirituality'. This helps the researcher to go beyond mechanistic theoretical analysis to a reflexive reflection of the participants' lived experience. Frohlich (2019:136) argued that: 'We cannot study spirituality without the constitutive resource of our own spiritual experience'. Additionally, the study of Christian spirituality, can expose the researcher 'to significant influence from those we study. Thus, the study of spirituality is doubly self-implicating'. Frohlich (2001:75) insisted that our study of Christian spirituality allows us to enter into

the lived experience of others, and that this 'activity, taken seriously, will demand the utmost of us, both in our living and in our scholarship'. We need to consider our own self-implication and embodiment in our process of Christian spirituality, but as Frohlich (2019:136) argued, we need to continue to purposively study lived experience and analyse the resourceful ways in which this can 'credibly contribute to academic scholarship'. I believe I have grown spiritually throughout my efforts to advance trustworthy CCP scholarship and subsequent theory.

7.6 Personal Reflections on Self-Implication

In the self-implicating context of this study, CCP is a relatively new practice in my own lived experience of Christian spirituality; a prayer practice that has only begun to commence since the start of this study. My unlikely introduction to meditation (and subsequently CCP) came through my readings related to Herbert Benson, MD and his introduction of techniques which could elicit the *Relaxation Response* (Appendix 16). After that initial introduction, I attended the 2016 Harvard Medical School (Continuing Global and Community Education)[56] conference entitled: *Mind Body Medicine: It's Role in Compassionate Medicine; Harvard Medical School; Boston, Massachusetts*. This furthered my exposure and understanding of aspects of well-being associated with meditation in general. It was then that I began to look into the Christian perspective of meditation and discovered the teachings of CCP practice. Throughout this study, I have attended various CCP events and prayer gatherings, and I have gradually incorporated a CCP practice into my own spiritual discipline.

I do not believe I am experiencing this prayer practice and its influence in the same way as long-term CCP practitioners, nor would I expect to. But I do believe I am experiencing contemplation within this prayer practice and am becoming more aware of its influence as expressed by the participants in this study. I recognize that it will continue to be a positive part of my own spiritual discipline and practice for years to come. Only then might I realize the full impact of CCP in my own Christian spirituality and embodied lived experience. Through this study and my related self-implicating experience, I am grateful for having learned in depth about CCP from such faithful practitioners.

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[56] https://postgraduateeducation.hms.harvard.edu/

APPENDICES

Appendix 1: The Method of Centering Prayer

Step One: Choose a word, which can be used to ground one's intention toward the consent of God's presence and action during Centering Prayer time. This word is not a mantra. It is just simply a way to help one return in a receptive way to God's presence. This is not a word to focus on, just to help you return to a receptive awareness.

Step Two: Choose a place to sit that will be conducive to exterior silence, to help support the interior silence of Centering Prayer. This is supported by these words of Jesus: 'But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen' (Matt6:6). For Centering Prayer practitioners, the inner room is that space deep within, away from the cares and chaos of the external world where one can meet with God in secret and in the most intimate ways.

Step Three: As thoughts come, they are simply released in a way that opens up one to be receptive to the presence of God, in the stillness and quiet. One can acknowledge any thoughts and then let them go.

Step Four: When distractions arise, simply release them and return to your receptive awareness.

Step Five: Continue to be open, in a loving and faithful way to the presence of God, and the awakening of your true self in God.

(adapted from Keating 1996; Bourgeault 2016)

Appendix 2: Well-Being Investigations

Author	Study	Reference to Well-Being
Spano *et al.* 2020	MA*: community gardening and horticulture on psychosocial well-being	'the psychosocial well-being, which can be defined as the perception of the individual on the quality of his/ her relationships in his/ her community, in the neighborhood [sic] and in any social group to which he/ she belongs' (Spano et al. 2020:2) referencing Ryff and Keyes' definition of well-being, 1995)
Pritchard *et al.* 2020	MA*: nature connectedness and eudaemonic well-being	This study uses eudaemonic well-being and it references the debates over conceptualizing well-being.
Syrén *et al.* 2020	Factors such as income with personality traits as moderators on mental well-being	'existing economics literature has paid limited attention to defining well-being, typically describing this in terms of happiness or life satisfaction,' (548)
Aghaie *et al.* 2018	MA*: Mindfulness-based interventions related to well-being, mental health, general health and quality of life	This study does not define well-being, it simply references 'well-being' as an outcome of the various studies along with mental health, general health, and quality of life. (6)
Hatzipapas *et al.* 2017	laughter therapy and psychological well-being	No specific definition of well-being is given, but a report that: 'Through daily exposure to laughter sessions, the care workers experienced more positive emotions, improved social relationships and improved ways of coping as well as lower levels of anxiety, depression and stress' (210)
Kragh *et al.* 2016	environmental volunteering and well-being	Data were analysed based on Seligman's multidimensional PERMA ('positive emotion', 'engagement', 'positive relationship', 'meaning', 'achievement') model of well-being. (Abstract)
Weiss *et al.* 2016	MA*: randomized controlled trials on psychological well-being	References to positive and negative affect are addressed, with no definition of well-being given.
Würtzen *et al.* 2015	RCT on MBSR reduction of somatic symptoms, distress, mindfulness and spiritual well-being	Among other measures, evaluation of spiritual well-being related to measured levels of faith, meaningfulness, and peace, (714).
Boiler *et al.* 2013	MA*: positive psychology interventions on well-being	Combines WHO[57] definition and 'positive functioning' as 'core elements of mental health' (2).

*MA: Meta-analysis

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[57] WHO (World Health Organization) definition of well-being: 'Mental health is a state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community.' (WHO: Promoting mental health: concepts, emerging evidence, practice (summary report): Geneva: World Health: Organization; 2004)

Appendix 3: Grounded Theory Well-Being Investigations

Author	Study	Emerging Core Category of Well-Being
Helvik *et al.* 2011	Elderly person, somatic health problems and optimizing well-being	'By calibrating and adjusting the life expectations to actual abilities, elderly persons can maintain a sense of well-being in their lives' (9).
Mokgatle-Nthabu *et al.* 2011	Well-being interpretations among youth head of household in South Africa	'Our view on the interpretations of well-being in child/youth-headed households in rural South Africa means getting access to services that are rendered by the government' (74).
Utriainen *et al.* 2009	Well-being among ageing hospital nurses in No. Finland	This study revealed that among this population well-being was linked to communal aspects at work, and caring for another human being, inner rewards and meaning of work.

Appendix 4: Evidence of Limited Long-term Practitioner Investigations

Author/year (Published studies only)	Data collection method	Participant prior length of CCP practice in years	Homogeneous or Comparative CCP study done	Number of Participants
~Finney & Malony 1985b	~Time series quasi-exp. design	0	CP only	9
~Johnson *et al.* 2009	~Mixed methods	0	CP only	9
~Blanton 2011	Case Study	0	CP only	2
~Ferguson *et al.* 2010	~Mixed methods	0	CP only	30
~Fox *et al.* 2015	~Qualitative ~semi-structured interviews	~ 5+ years of experience	CP only	20
Fox *et al.* 2016	~Mixed methods	~6P some experience; 3P none	CP only	9
Rubinart *et al.* 2017	~Mixed methods	0	Jesus Prayer	10

cp – contemplative prayer
P – participants
CP – Centering Prayer
CCP – Christian contemplative prayer

Appendix 5: Examples of Probing Questioning in the Interviews

Follow-up questions:
'Then what did you find?' (P#12)
'Something you're searching for. In what way?' (P#14)
'When you are more consistent, what does that look like?' (P#19)
Contrasting questions— to make comparisons:
'What do you see as the difference between those two?' (P#3)
'…would you say […] versus […]?' (P#4)
'Can you describe differences between those situations?' (P#9)
'Can you share how those are similar or different?' (P#13)
'What do you think of group versus by yourself.' (P#18)
Probing questions— *to draw out more complete narratives:*
'…let me go back to a comment you made where you said […]. Have you found that…'? (P#2)
'Can you explain what it was'? (P#3)
'In what way? Can you clarify that'? (P#5)
'So, you mentioned, you know […] is there anything else that you would say about […]'? (P#6)
'Can you describe that […] more fully'? (P#7)
'Describe that just a little bit more, please……. what you mean by that if you can'. (P#8)
'I think you've kind of in a roundabout way […] touched on that. […] anything to add to that?' P#10
'Wait, can you reflect on that a little more'? (P#16)
Opinion/Value questions— to elicit an opinion:
'What do you think causes […]'? (P#16)
'What would you say'? (P#17)
'[…] what do you think is the contribution […]'? (P#21)
Emotional/feeling questions — to encourage the sharing at the emotional level:
'And then if I hear you correctly, you say that through that you feel that […].' (P#3)
'In what way do you feel […]'? (P#16)
'How do you feel at the end of your hour'? (P#20)
Specifying questions — to create more precise descriptions:
'…I know you've already touched on it in different ways […], but how would you say that…' P#11
'But the prayers that you associated with movement, when would those be?' P#16
'[…] looking back on that time…how does that help you to answer those questions?' P#16
Direct question — to more clearly direct the response:
'So, what do you think were the most important things that helped you realize that'? (P#1)
'Have you ever specifically…'. (P#1)

Indirect questions — to ask a projective question:
'Why do you think she wants you to do that'? (P#14)
'What do you think causes people to be resistive'? (P#15)
Structuring questions/comment — to close off a topic of discussion and begin another
'Well, just a couple more questions.' (P#3)
'I just thought of a question that I haven't really asked…'. (P#7)
'Let me ask one more question.' (P#12)
Interpreting questions — rephrase a response to clarify or interpret, rather than gain new information:
'Are you saying now…'? (P#1)
'Do you mean you were talking, or do you mean you were…' (P#14)
'What do you mean by that'? (P#20)

Adapted from deMarrais 2004; Qu & Dumay 2011

Appendix 6: Information Sheet for Participants

Research Topic: Towards an Understanding of the Experiences of Contemplative Prayer

Researcher: Kathleen (Kathy) Holley

Awarding Institution: Middlesex University, London, United Kingdom

Collaborating Institution: Oxford Centre for Mission Studies, Oxford, United Kingdom

Thank you so much for considering to be part of this research project on contemplative prayer and its influence on one's relationship with God, one's self and other people. I am engaging in this research in conjunction with the above institutions, and people like you who would like to share their experiences of contemplative prayer. If you wish to participate in this study, I would simply like to interview you regarding contemplative prayer. In this way, I can further understand contemplative prayer and we can be part of the increase in this practice among the global Christian community.

What you tell me will be kept confidential, and you certainly do not have to share anything you do not want to. I will be recording our conversation, because I do not want to miss anything we talk about. In our discussion, I depend on and value your input greatly, and want to genuinely represent your experience. Your participation in this project will remain anonymous. However, if you would like, I can refer to your input by using all or part of your name in the final dissertation. That is totally up to you.
.
If you have any further questions about this research project, please do not hesitate to contact me using the email address or telephone number below.

Kathy Holley
Email: kholley@ocms.ac.uk
Cell: 253-880-2680

_____Participant's Signature

_____Date

_____Researcher's Signature

_____Date

Appendix 7: Consent Form for Participants

Research Topic: Towards an Understanding of the Experiences of Contemplative Prayer

Researcher: Kathleen (Kathy) Holley

Awarding Institution: Middlesex University, United Kingdom

Collaborating Institution: Oxford Centre for Mission Studies, United Kingdom

**Please read each statement carefully and initial each one if your answer is: YES.

___ I understand that my identity will be kept confidential, unless I have indicated otherwise.

___ I have read and understood the information about the research project

___ I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the project

___ I understand that I can choose whether or not to take part in this project and I can withdraw at any time without giving a reason.

___ I give permission for my story to be used in this project.

_____Participant name (please print)

_____Participant's Signature

_____email (optional)

_____Date

_____Researcher's Signature

_____Date

Appendix 8: Other Attempted Participant Contacts

Indicates unsuccessful attempts to locate CCP practitioners. These contacts were made to other religious affiliations as reported. Attempts was made to contact some of the prominent mainline denominations in the USA, along with those within the Jewish and Orthodox religions. These contacts were all made within the March - May 2018 timeframe. Since these varying reasons were not part of this research's inquiry, they were not addressed any further in this investigation, other than to simply report that a contact was made, and participation was declined for reasons given.

**Lutheran (*two main divisions within the Lutheran church in America: ELCA and LCMS)*
Missouri Synod Lutheran Church (LCMS):**

Administration at the national headquarters sent me documents which addressed the church's position on contemplative prayer and stated the LCMS does not take a specific stand on this form of prayer.

In speaking with an LCMS music pastor who practises contemplative prayer, he stated that the denomination does not promote contemplative prayer due to its affiliation with the Catholics and Buddhists.

Administration at the LCMS Northwest district office suggested further inquiry be made to the Centre for Prayer and Renewal. However, messages were not returned from this centre.

Methodists - Contacted 13 churches

There was no central headquarters or single executive authority to contact, although the 13-local church administrators that were contacted indicated that their church had no contemplative prayer practice.

Baptists - Contacted 16 churches

None of these churches I contacted had any contemplative prayer practice affiliation.

Assembly of God (AG) - Contacted the national and local offices only

The national office administration indicated that all AG churches are sovereign, so if a pastor had interest, they could promote contemplative prayer within their church. The national and local offices were not aware of any churches with parishioners who practised contemplative prayer.

Jewish - Contacted 14 synagogues

None of the synagogue contacts returned my calls or emails, except for one Rabbi who declined an interview, and noted he preferred quiet walks in the woods to sitting in silence.

Orthodox - Contacted 3 churches or cathedrals

An individual in leadership from one of the churches agreed to an interview, but scheduling became very prohibitive and ultimately the Orthodox and Jewish traditions were not included in this study.

Appendix 9: Participant Demographics

#	Interview Date	Religious Affiliation	Gender	Occupation
1	2 May 2018	Episcopalian	Female	Retired
2	3 May 2018	Catholic	Male	Temporary Jobs
3	3 May 2018	Catholic	Female	Leadership with CO*
4	3 May 2018	Episcopalian	Male	Retired
5	3 May 2018	Episcopalian	Female	Retired
6	4 May 2018	Catholic	Male	Priest
7	15 May 2018	Catholic	Male	Parish Leadership
8	17 May 2018	Catholic Monastic	Female	Monastic
9	17 May 2018	Catholic Monastic	Female	Monastic
10	17 May 2018	Catholic Monastic	Female	Monastic/ Retired Nurse
11	11 July 2018	Lutheran ELCA**	Female	Pastor
12	11 July 2018	Presbyterian	Male	Pastor
13	17 July 2018	Catholic	Female	Retired
14	17 July 2018	Lutheran ELCA	Female	Student: Master's in divinity
15	23 July 2018	Lutheran ELCA	Female	Administration
16	23 July 2018	Lutheran ELCA	Female	Pastor
17	10 August 2018	Catholic	Female	Spiritual Director
18	10 August 2018	Methodist	Female	Retired
19	17 September 2018	Catholic	Female	Economist
20	23 September 2018	Catholic Monastic	Male	Monastic
21	26 September 2018	Catholic	Male	WCCM leadership*** &Nurse
22	6 July 2020	Catholic background/Protestant affiliation	Female	Spiritual Formation****
23	7 July 2020	Protestant	Female	Author/Mentor
24	13 July 2020	Protestant	Male	Financial Advisor/Author
25	15 July 2020	Protestant	Male	Spiritual Formation
26	16 July 2020	Protestant	Male	Pastor
27	16 July 2020	Protestant	Female	Professional contemplative arts and blogger
28	21 July 2020	Protestant	Female	Christian Yoga instructor
29	22 July 2020	Catholic	Male	Trappist monk / author
30	22 July 2020	Protestant	Male	Spiritual formation
31	24 July 2020	Catholic background/ Protestant	Male	Hospital leadership
32	27 July 2020	Anglican	Female	Priest/Chaplain/Quiet Garden leadership
33	27 July 2020	Protestant	Male	Electrical Engineer
34	28 July 2020	Protestant	Female	Author/Retreat Leader
35	4 August 2020	Protestant	Female	Seminary Professor
36	4 August 2020	Protestant	Female	Pastor/ Spiritual Formation

Appendix 10: Interview Questions for Research on Contemplative Prayer

1. How did you become involved in a contemplative prayer practice?

2. Has your practice been consistent or has it fluctuated somewhat with different seasons in your life?

3. How long have you been involved in this prayer practice?

4. What does a contemplative prayer practice mean to you?

5. What is your understanding of Centering Prayer or contemplative prayer?

6. Do you participant in a contemplative prayer group practice or just independently?

7. How has your contemplative prayer practice influenced your relationship with God?

8. How has the practice of contemplative prayer influenced your understanding of yourself?

9. How has the practice of contemplative prayer influenced your relationships with others?

10. How would you describe any personal transformation that has been influenced by your practice of contemplative prayer?

11. How would you describe any experience of healing that you have experienced through your contemplative prayer practice?

12. Is there any particular challenge you are currently facing in your life which is being influenced or helped by your practice of contemplative prayer?

13. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Thank you so very much for your participation, and for sharing with me.

Appendix 11: Participant Observations Events

4.5.1 Participant Observations

As part of this work, I have become an observer in various contemplative prayer events. In these situations, I have engaged in contemplative prayer with those at the event, and I have also made observations of the setting and responses of other participants both before and after the contemplative prayer seminar, conference, or affiliated prayer sessions. From this perspective, I was able to collect data through my own experiences, and field notes, although this material was not specifically coded and analysed and the interview data from participants were always the primary data sources. These opportunities helped to broaden my understanding of this prayer practice and its affiliate practitioners and international organizations.

2016

**20-23 October 2016
Harvard Medical School[58] (Continuing Global and Community Education);[59] 'Mind Body Medicine: It's Role in Compassionate Medicine; Harvard Medical School; Boston, Massachusetts

Lectures attended:
-Mind Body Medicine: Past, Present and Future
-Integrative Medicine: Seeds of Change and future Directions
-Mind Body Medicine and Compassionate Care
-The Science of Resilience: Lessons from the Resilient
-Recent Advances in Mind Body Medicine Research
-The Relaxation Response (RR) and Genomics
-Mind Body Medicine and Genomics
-The Economic Impact of Mind Body Interventions
-Increasing Appeal and Decreasing Barriers to Physical Activity
-A Health System Model for Integrative Care: Five pillars of Health and Wellness
-Meditation and the Brain
-Compassionate Care: Life-Changing Medicine
-The Therapeutic Power of the Patient-Provider Relationship
-Mind Body Medicine and Sleep
-Introducing Mind body Medicine to Patients
-Why American Medicine is Failing to Fulfill Its Public Health Responsibility and How Science of Resiliency Can Help Restore the Mission

Workshops attended (related to meditation):
-RR: Meditation Techniques, Applications and Benefits

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[58] https://www.massgeneral.org/psychiatry/treatments-and-services/benson-henry-institute
[59] https://postgraduateeducation.hms.harvard.edu/

2017

**7-9 July 2017
Summer Ignatian Retreat
Catholic Palisades Seattle Retreat Center; Federal Way, Washington

This three-day guided silent personal retreat[60] included presentations based on the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius; suggestions and time for prayer and reflection; opportunity for spiritual direction; morning and evening prayers; and the shared Eucharist. Retreatants were encouraged to receive the gift of rest, and an opportunity to discern God's presence and direction in their life. All faiths were welcomed, although it was predominantly a Catholic audience.

2017-2018

** October 2017-May 2018
'Oasis'; St. Placid Priory;[61]
500 College Street NE,
Lacey, Washington

This nine-month long program followed a monthly meeting schedule that included time for contemplative quiet and prayer, spiritual direction, small group classes related to ancient mystics, liturgical prayer, and meals with the priory residences. It also included a Fall (October 2017) and Spring (March 2018) weekend long retreat with a similar format to the daily sessions and much time allowed for contemplative quiet and prayer.

Required reading: *Illuminating the Way; by* Christine Valters Paintner

The brief summary of the program stated:

'Contemplative Time'

Do you yearn for rest, prayer and nurturing in your busy schedule?

What would your life look like if you gave yourself two retreat opportunities and six quiet afternoons during the year?

Spiritual direction and *lectio divina* are available to aid your reflection, as is silence. If you desire less structure, that is also an option' [62]

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[60]https://static1.squarespace.com/static/593eef52e6f2e1fc18ca6dd9/t/5ac400826d2a7353643a22a9/15227 94627196/Retreatants%27+u Schedule+2017+%28as+of+27+June+2017%29.pdf
[61] https://www.stplacid.org/
[62]http://www.stplacid.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/2017-18_Oasis-Brochure.pdf

2018

** 10 February 2018
Contemplative Outreach Northwest (CONW);[63] 30th Anniversary Celebration
St. Joseph Jesuit Parish (Catholic)
732 18th Avenue East
Seattle, Washington

This all-day event chronicled the development of CONW, from the first Contemplative Outreach 1987 Intensive Retreat with Father Keating at Indianola, Washington to the present-day presence of Contemplative Outreach in the Northwest.
This event also included a videotaped message from Father Thomas Keating (at age 94) celebrating CONW 30th Anniversary.[64]

**23-25 March 2018
Centering Prayer Retreat; St. Placid Priory;
Lacey, Washington

'Description: This silent retreat is a rare opportunity for experienced practitioners to be with others committed to the contemplative path. Sustained by multiple periods of Centering Prayer and tapping into chant, lectio divina, and meditative walking, we intentionally create an environment that supports our continuing Centering Prayer practice'.[65]

This retreat, located at St. Placid Priory, was primarily conducted in silence and was guided by two very advanced, trained and seasoned Centering Prayer practitioners. Retreatants were encouraged to maintain silence throughout the three days, including all meals, which were taken in a private silent dining room. There were 17 'sits' (a period of time sitting in contemplative prayer with the group) scheduled throughout the retreat, in addition to a 'sand' experience (in which each retreatant was encouraged to find a six foot by six-foot space to remain in contemplative prayer for thirty minutes), Lectio divina, and a thirty minute very slow intentional, contemplative walk. They intentionally created an environment to support Centering Prayer practice.

**12 May 2018
Lectio Divina Workshop;
St Andrew's Episcopal Church; Seattle, Washington

'Contemplative Reading of Sacred Texts: An Introduction to Lectio Divina'
'Lectio divina is an ancient practice designed to move our reading of Scripture from our minds to our hearts. It involves relating to the Ultimate Reality on all levels of our being—from mental exercise to a deep listening within that may lead to resting in God'.[66]

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[63] Contemplative Outreach Northwest supports Centering Prayer in the Pacific Northwest of the USA by providing retreats, workshop, and continued support for both individuals and group prayer. https://contemplativeoutreachnorthwest.org/
[64] https://contemplativeoutreachnorthwest.org/
[65] https://contemplativeoutreachnorthwest.org/previous-events/
[66] https://contemplativeoutreachnorthwest.org/previous-events/

**10 August 2018
Contemplative Prayer Group;
Aldersgate Methodist Church; Bellevue, Washington

I was invited to join a contemplative prayer group gathering, which meets weekly. I attended one meeting, which consisted of six people. The other was a mix of contemplative prayer for approximately 20 minutes and lectio divina, with intermittent five minutes or so of silence.

**17-20 September 2018
Pre-seminar Silent Retreat;[67] World Community for Christian Meditation (WCCM); Torhout, Belgium

During 15-17 September 2018, I was able to attend the WCCM's pre-seminar silent retreat in Torhout, Belgium. An initial time of socializing among the other approximately one hundred and fifty retreatants was followed by silence for the remainder of the event, except for the five lectures given by Laurence Freeman. The retreat schedule had opportunities for silent contemplative prayer, both individually and as a group, and scheduled contemplative walks in which about thirty percent of the attendees participated. Retreatants were also given the opportunity to meet with Father Laurence one-on-one, which I chose to do. The final meal at the retreat was a time in which retreatants were able to speak with one another. After the close of the retreat, the retreatants were bused back to Bruges, Belgium to attend the WCCM John Main Seminar 2018.

**20-23 September 2018
John Main Seminar 2018: A Contemplative Response to the Crisis of Change; World Community for Christian Meditation; Bruges, Belgium

During 17-20 September 2018, I was able to attend the WCCM annual John Main seminar in Bruges, Belgium. The seminar convened leaders in various disciplines to present a contemplative approach to major global crises.[68] This seminar presented an opportunity to hear various philosophical perspectives on contemplative prayer, and its potential global impact. I also participated in times of group contemplative prayer, shared meals with attendees, and two seminar workshops. Throughout this seminar, I was able to make observations and reflective journal entries. This is the JMS 2018 speakers list:

- **Charles Taylor** (Philosopher)
- **Robert Johnson** (Executive Director of the Institute for New Economic Thinking)
- **Sean Hagan** (General Counsel of the International Monetary Fund)
- **Dr Barry White** (Consultant Haematologist)
- **Laurence Freeman** (WCCM Director)
- **Sr Teresa Forcades** (Benedictine nun of Montserrat)
- **Herman Van Rompuy** (Politician, the first President of the European Council)

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[67] https://www.jms2018.org/subscribe-now.html
[68] http://www.wccm.org/content/jms-2018-contemplative-response-%E2%80%8B-crisis-change

- **Marco Schorlemmer** (leads AI research at the Artificial Intelligence Research Institute of the Spanish National Research Council)'[69]

  http://wccm.org/content/jms-2018-contemplative-response-%E2%80%8B-crisis-change

I also attended two workshops at the John Main Seminar 2018:

1. **Liz Watson:** Meditation: healing and hope
'As a long-standing member of the World Community for Christian Meditation, Liz has served in various capacities including UK National Coordinator. She now focuses on teaching meditation, leading retreats, and offering spiritual direction'.

2. **Jenny Scott**: What means Theology in a Secular Age?
'Currently the Executive Director for the World Community for Christian Meditation, Jenny was, until recently, the Communications Director and co-Head of Strategy at the Bank of England and Adviser to the Governor. She is an economist by training and also spent 16 years as an economic and political journalist for Reuters and the BBC'.

http://www.jms2018.org/speakers.html

**24 September – 1 October 2018

While at the silent retreat, I learned about Bonnevaux,[70] which is a former 12th century Benedictine Monastery in Southern France that now serves as the global meditation and conference centre for the WCCM. At the time, Bonnevaux was just in the initial renovation stages, yet it could house about five guests and volunteers. I was able to stay there for a week from 24 September – 1 October 2018 and experience the former monastery and the small resident community. This experience allowed me opportunities for observations, a couple of interviews, participation in the group contemplative prayer three times a day, and participation in the community life at Bonnevaux.

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[69] http://wccm.org/content/jms-2018-contemplative-response-%E2%80%8B-crisis-change
[70] https://bonnevauxwccm.org/

Appendix 12: Open Coding for Varying Portions of P11 Interview

Gerund	Interview Transcript	Line-by-Line Coding
-Realizing community importance	*There was, first of all, the community approach to it.*	-Community prayer important
-Preferring solo prayer -Encompassing community -Caring community -Connecting wisdom, life, others -Appreciating	*A lot of people think about contemplative prayer as a solo activity, and there certainly is still an individual part to the practice, but for me it was all encompassed by community and a community of caring people who cared about connections to wisdom, connections to life, and appreciating life in the moments.*	-Others may prefer solo CP -Encompassed by community -Caring community -Connecting to wisdom and life with others -Appreciating life
-Withstanding -Following God -Doing social justice work -Loving -Relating	*Using contemplative practice as a way not to flee from the world, but to withstand the pressures of the world. That makes it possible to follow God's call in our life, and to do peace and justice work in the world. It helps us to love our neighbors, because without some kind of practice to be able to withstand people with tender souls, tender hearts or with trauma histories it can be hard.*	-Withstand pressures through CP -Follow God's call -Social justice action -Love one another -Relating with tender hearts and souls
-Forgiving	*It gives you capacity for self-forgiveness, capacity for forgiving others.*	-Self-forgiveness -Forgiving others
-God desiring -Relating -Supporting	*And I think all of those pieces are aspects of God and what God desires for us as people. So, to me the relational aspect is key, practicing and being supported and lifted up by others.*	-God's desire for us -Relational aspect is key -Supported by others
-Sharing -Recognizing -Maintaining beginner's mind	*The fluid sharing of wisdom, the acknowledgement that there is some expertise, but all of the experts in the field would say that they still have beginner's mind the same time.*	-Sharing with others -Recognizing experts -Maintaining beginner's mind

Appendix 13: Elevating Coding to Conceptual Categories

Interviewer question- 'Please tell me more about your group CCP experience'.

Data	Open Coding Line-by-Line	Open Coding Gerund	Axial Coding	Selective Coding	Conceptual Category
Well, I have had times of group Centering Prayer that were really profound. In all kinds of contexts, like being in the prayer hall, the Chapel at Snowmass in the retreat centre, it's just the amount of prayer that's happened in that room you know, it's mainly silent. Those are times when I feel like I've been carried by that collective intention to consent to a much deeper level of consent within myself. That's just, it's a treasure, and that's something that I can't maintain on my own. I think that we're not even supposed to try to maintain that on our own, that kind of experience nourishes us and feeds us and sustains us. But we can't hold onto that any more than we can hold onto anything. P3	-profound group time -various group contexts -synchronous silence -collective intention -group helps sustain practice -nourishes -can't hold the moment	-recognizing group difference -synchronizing -sustaining -nourishing	Recognizing Group Difference Sustaining in Group Synchronizing	Synchronous Difference	Embodied in Christian Community
Well, like I said, I definitely like doing Centering Prayer in a group. I feel sort of a comradery when I feel like, okay, there are people in this group doing the same practice together.	-comradery -synchronous prayer	-connecting -synchronizing			

There is something very powerful about having other people around in prayer. Something about having others in the room just keeps me in that moment more. P10	-powerful -keeps me in that moment	-energizing -sustaining	Gathering	Held within Group	Embodied in Christian Community
There is something sacred to find that we are all in that one moment sitting in the presence of Christ. Sometimes once a month I lead people into contemplation, there may be some art with that, or music, or lectio, then sitting in silence. In a group, that can lead to something rich or powerful. It can be difficult to put words to it. P25	-sacred, synchronous -various CCP methods -synchronous silence -powerful -beyond words	-synchronizing -synchronizing -energizing			
I think being with people you know who are doing exactly the same thing as you, is very nice. Now I invite people into my garden by ZOOM. It ensures that I have 2 hours, when I am in person, and it ensures that I do it. Sometimes we go for a walk to the sea, but it is all in silence. P32	-synchronous, nice -inviting others -walking in silent prayer -synchronous action	-synchronizing -inviting -moving -synchronizing	Energizing in Group		
I think it is more powerful I think there is a lot we do not understand scientifically. Probably chemical and physical properties that connect us to one another. In a group, holding us together all that Scripture	-powerful incomprehensible connections -held by group	 uncomprehending -sustaining	Aiding		

about being gathered, where two or more are together, the spirit, not that the spirit, cannot be with us as individuals. There is a palpable awareness, the energies as the spirit is present in that. Especially for beginners, who feel intimidated. It is an important starting place. P35	*-being gathered* is scriptural -Spirit's presence *-palpable awareness* -energy -benefitting beginners	-gathering -recognizing Spirit -energizing -aiding			

Key
-Line-by-line codes that are in italics are 'in-vivo' codes

Appendix 14: Additional Participant Quotes

Beyond Words

> *Centering Prayer may play a different role in ways that we don't understand. Like I have said, I can't really put this into words, or I can't really explain it. But the way I feel about it seems like centring prayer has had an impact. (P2)*

> *I am not sure how to explain it. (P19)*

Silence

> *I guess I have always been attracted to silence. (P24)*

> *I found contemplative prayer in the quiet garden so extraordinary. (P32)*

> *I also have things to colour for those people who cannot sit in silence for 2 hours. When I tell people, we will sit for 2 hours [in the garden in silence], they say: what. But some things can help, like I have colouring books out and that can help. (P32)*

> *Sometimes that stillness is silence. Sometimes people ask if I use music, I say you can do whatever you like. If I use music it distracts me, I want to dance, and it can keep me from the stillness. If it has words, I want to sing. (P34)*

> *We don't even know what prayer is. When it says be still, what does that mean. Does it mean shut up? I think contemplative is whatever gives me that inner stillness, and whatever helps me to become open to God's presence. When I use words, it does not have that meditative stillness quality. I hope it is becoming part of my whole life. I tend to be a multitasker; I would like to think I am taking one more thing as at a time. Sometimes that stillness is silence. Sometimes people ask if I use music, I say you can do whatever you like. If I use music it distracts me, I want to dance, and it can keep me from the stillness. If it has words, I want to sing. But there are no rules on that. (P34)*

Group silence

> *We did something last year in Holy Week. We took one service on stillness, and we just did contemplative prayer. It was so interesting because we rarely do that. Give ourselves time for silence or to breath. Another pastor told me once, he is retired now, but when he visits church's he has counted and when there is silence, and rarely do you make it past 10 before the pastor starts speaking again.*

And when I was on internship, we would do that, and we were told we had to wait a full minute. What I found interesting, you watch people and they start looking up and they get antsy, and then, soon, you start to see their whole body relax, and you see the comfortable silence in which people start to relax. We purposely made it so they had to listen. People said it was so calming, and it was permission. We do not get that permission to sit quietly in place. (P16)

Discomfort with silence

We are really trying to get people to engage in it. I have been a little disappointed because people need it. Here we have people that work for Google and Amazon and they have a tough time being able to engage in silence, you know they work for these fast-paced jobs and it's hard for them to slow down. But there is a spiritual depth that comes when you engage in contemplative prayer that I think more people would really enjoy finding if they let themselves. (P16)

It takes a semester and I require some work out of class. I think generationally, the neurological architecture, they have been formed by digital culture, multiple screens, by multi-tasking, by texting while I am watching a movie, while I am looking at email. What is normal is neurological overloads. If I am not overloaded, then they get anxious. So, to just name that, and hold that, and they may never be able to be still. Or they may become more aware of these things that are forming them in this way. I do a class on History of Christian spirituality. These are adults. (P35)

Participant Data on Christian Contemplative Prayer Practice

Psalm 118:5, one of my favourites…I called to you from my narrowness, and you answered me from your expanse. I think that is what contemplation does. (P22)

I am a little uncomfortable separating contemplative prayer from other prayers. (P34)

It has been a huge way to experience God. I know you are entering the mystery of God and the oneness of God and that has deeply impacted my faith. Deeply impacted my sense of God with me always. And deeply impacted me with others, like when I sit with them in direction, and they say, I don't feel God, I'm in the dark. Being able to say to them, there is no magic formula, but if you learn to sit with God and be with God. Learning to rest in God, and of course it

takes us forever to learn that. Generally, they are open to it. They might be very tentative. Then talking about their experiences with them. Then talking with them about their contemplative practices whatever that is. (P36)

How God reveals himself and it is different with our different personalities. (P36)

Various Methods and Personalities

It's like there were too many structures around that. Now I always failed and then I felt bad. Right? And I tell my clients that too. I said, that's good to have some discipline and everybody's different, but don't set yourself up to fail and then say I can't do it because I tried, and it didn't work for me. That's what I hear all the time. I tried, I used to do it after dinner, or did it every Tuesday, and then I failed. Well, life gets in the way. So, how do you incorporate it into your life without feeling like a failure? Right? And the way you do that is just by being more spontaneous to and having different ways. So, it's not just one thing. (P15)

Yes, one is Soul Types: Finding the Spiritual Path that is right for you] by Sandra Krebs Hirsch, and What's Your God Language by Dr. Myra Perrine? So, Soul Types was really interesting, it talks about how you pray best, how you worship. And one of the things in there was about movement. Um and that was one of the things for me, for my Meyers Briggs was movement. And I thought I always pray better when I am moving. (P16)

I do not have a specific time because I find myself to be more frustrated and less authentic. So that said I have been trying to become more intentional. (P16)

I went to study prayer at the St Placid Priory, in Lacey. It was a wonderful opportunity to explore different ways to pray. (P17)

I would say that the contemplative art is a standard part of my contemplative life. (P22)

Well I centre with my eyes open, and yes, my eyes are open, so maybe it's more like the mantra. It is still the spaces between the thoughts. You are in the spaces between your thoughts in Centering prayer, in the labyrinth, I am just getting there by using different ways. I also like Visio Divina. My friend stares at one spot, and that is how he does contemplative prayer. (P24)

You can do this ought ness to yourself, I ought to get up at 5:15 every morning, but I think it is better just to have a rhythm. I also start my day with sitting in silence. Out of that comes a variety of things. During the day, if I find anxiety rising in me, I go back to sitting with God. (P25)

Where Centering Prayer is an often fraught attempt to open myself to the divine (and by fraught I mean my own thoughts are constantly interfering so I seem to learn more about who I am and what's important to me than I learn about God), the time I spend with the photos really IS an opening, a welcoming practice, an invitation to speak, and only rarely interrupted by my own brain's constant machinations. (P27)

So, I have practiced Yoga for over 10 years. I have always loved to move a lot. I felt a deep connection to God through movement. Most of the people I teach are Protestant or even missionaries, or teachers and my students will say I have never experienced silence with God, but I get on my mat and experience God and weep. Yoga is the avenue that I am in and it works for me, but it could also be running or other movement. (P28)

When I sit in the garden, it is just what I needed. That time in contemplation is so different from the day. I don't just do prayer in the morning and evening, because I am told, I do what really works for me. (P32)

I used to look at people who had hobbies and think can't you do something of value? Now I recognize that maybe God can meet them there. I also think I am more comfortable with the unknown. There is a lot of healing that is unknown, but it is going on through God's healing. (P33)

One time I was sitting on my back porch and doodling. I like to draw amorphous shapes. I realized I wrote the name Sue. I kept drawing and added colour, and then after 5 minutes I actually thought I am praying for her. I have been so worried for her, but now it was this wordless time, me, Sue and God. I realized I was not worrying, and worry was not a substitute for prayer. It is a starting place along with guilt but not a staying place. I started doing that for other people. And I don't know if I am a visual learner, but I am a visual holder of information. I realized that if I did this through the day, I could prayer for these people. For me it is mostly prayer without words, but that is not the point (P34)

For me, Visio Divina is very powerful. Again, since I am someone who easily comes to God through beauty, a picture or sculpture. I am very fascinated with the creative process. So, something that is trying to express something about God, I am really drawn in. I think it brings me to that place of contemplation more quickly. It might help get rid of distractions, but then I look at the setting and the colours and I sit with that and I contemplate what God is saying through it. (P36)

Now I am someone who likes variety, not that I do not thrive in routine. But my personality likes to change it up. So, I did not stay in the strict sense of it. I call it prayer walking with God, for many, many years. That is contemplative for me. (P36)

Appendix 15: Participant Thoughts about Christian Yoga

Participant 11

I think that there's been a long-term prejudice in Christianity, especially certain forms of meditation or against anything that sounds too New Age. I mean, I've had people tell me that yoga is about the devil, you know, so that's definitely still there and still being taught. And so, there's this sort of concern, well, is it really okay to do this or is this a betrayal of my professed faith in Jesus? So that's a part of it. And what do you tell them? If the devil is in it, well it's a widely respected part of a world religion that's much older than Christianity. Jesus in very many stories in Scripture does something that looks like meditation when he goes off to be quiet by himself. When he, teaches his disciples how to pray, he chooses features as physical sacraments to honour the body. Like I talked about before, we are just trying to make it okay and when somebody's willing to express that interest, what they're looking for is permission from a faith leader to say, yes, it's okay. The people who tell me is of the devil just want me to feel bad that I'm not Christian enough and that I'm going to hell. So, they're just not open to hearing about it. But looking for permission, like if faith leaders could give us more signals, even if they don't practice these things themselves, if they could give more signals that these are valid good practices (P11)

Most people would use yoga in a religious setting. It developed as a way to prepare the body for quiet seated meditation. And now most people, many people who practice it use it either as a fitness routine or as a meditation in and of itself, but when it's, when well taught, it kind of keeps some of the usual structure. The last I like to try to leave 10 minutes, sometimes I go over a little, but um, you, you lie down in Savasana which literally means corpse pose and you lie still and it's the time when the body, the practice you've just taken the body through, integrates into the experience, you know, integrates with the rest of your whole self so that it can have a beneficial impact on you and on the world. And so, it's a time of quietness, of mind, quietness of body. I'm very peaceful. (P11)

Participant 28

So, I have practiced Yoga for over 10 years. I have always loved to move a lot. I felt a deep connection to God through movement. Raised in Christian home. Read bible. Growing up you were always doing something, praying, reading. But always struggled to have a daily quiet time. Running always was meditative/contemplative for me, although I did not really realize it at the time. It helped me get out of my head and into my body. I found yoga, but not Christian yoga.

I would take the Savasana pose, the final pose in yoga, which in Sanskrit is corpse pose. You simply lie there. I would get to Savasana and weep and feel the closeness of God. I heard God in a way that I had never heard Him before. It stilled the chattering in my mind. It was not transactional, or checking a box, or something I should do, which was my experience before. It was this experience of beloved and Beloved, created and Creator. This is the Being still and knowing God, it is deeper than this head experience rather it is embodied. It was a way of calming my mind and body to feel that intimacy. It made that sitting in silence a familiar place and a place that I longed to be, not something I should do. So, for me it is a very embodied experience, and yoga helped me with that

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embodied experience, helped shape my relationship with God. Then I found Christian yoga and I really liked it.

I think the embodiment is huge. Most of the people I teach are Protestant or even missionaries, or teachers and my students will say I have never experienced silence with God, but I get on my mat and experience God and weep. Yoga is the avenue that I am in and it works for me, but it could also be running or other movement. This is something that the ancient Yogis found this. Yoga was very much centred around meditation because they realized it is hard to sit in stillness, so how can we still the body, so the mind can be free. So, in the practical aspect it is only a piece of a broader experience. Yoga is about supporting this different way of being and living.

The word yoga is a Sanskrit word that means 'to yoke' or 'to unite': the divine and the human or the disparate parts of our self, mind and body. So, the avenue in a yoga practice is through the breath and manipulating the breath. You begin by noticing your breathing, just like in contemplation there is this moment of grounding. We take time to notice how we are breathing. If we are anxious, we are breathing way up here, if we are relaxed, we are breathing from way down here

In a general level, Christians come to yoga because they are tired of that nagging low back. So, yoga can help with that on a practical level and make us better vessels for the Lord. On a spiritual level yoga creates this container in which others can create this space in which they feel safe, because if you said sit here and experience God, that can be intimidating and distracting due to pain, distractions and they are intimidated. So, when I get Christians in class and they are on the mat, and I encourage them to breath slowly. And they just can't. But they continue, and they start to realize that they are seen by God and they can lay there and relax and not have to be in control and they find a freedom to let go. So, on an emotional or spiritual level, there is a freedom to relate to the Lord. On another note, people grow up and realize this tradition they were raised in and they decide they don't need the Lord. Then they find Christian yoga and they realize that it can help them hear from and worship God in a different way. It is freeing, mobilizing, and fulfilling. One of the joys working in this sphere is seeing people who were falling away, and they realize that God exists. And relating with God does not have to look like checking off your prayer list. That once you quieted your body, it quiets your mind and they realize they can relate to God.

I have been teaching for about 5 years. I think yoga can be a combined with lectio into one experience. You can end class with perhaps a 10-minute Lectio. Or using mantra throughout the yoga, like there are sacred mantra that have these certain vibrations and so on. I don't use a mantra, but some do. It is a bodily experience, and that is what contemplation, or the contemplative experience is part of.

Appendix 16: The Relaxation Response

One of the initial medical research contributors to the field of mind-body healing is Herbert Benson M.D., who's pioneering research began in the 1970s at the Harvard Medical School. Through ongoing studies, he has recognized the Relaxation *Response* (RR), which is part of an individual's innate physiological counterpart to the *Fight or Flight* stress response. This RR has distinct similarities and dissimilarities to the practice of CCP. Both of them are based on a meditative experience, in which one sits in stillness for about twenty minutes.[71] In a similar way, the recommendations given regarding the thoughts is very similar. While sitting in silence, one is encouraged to essentially release any thoughts that come to one's mind.[72] In this way, the mind is seen as being free of any significant focus on anything else other that meditation. Additionally, further work is revealing the incredible healing potential of the body's RR.[73]

Ongoing research in this area is revealing healing at the cellular and genetic levels. Especially during the last ten years, studies have been done in the field of epigenetics[74] and the potential impact of RR on genetic activity. A cross-sectional study was done with long-term RR practitioners, who had been practicing this response daily for about seven years, and they were matched with controls of the same gender, age, education, and race, who had never practiced the RR. This is the summary of the study:

> The blood cells from whole blood measured the genetic activity. It was found that in the long-term practitioners, the genes that controlled metabolism, stress, aging of the body were activated. Genes that were controlling the immune system and inflammation systems of the body were quieted down. There was little change in the control group. With this finding there could no longer be any separation between mind and body. The mind could quiet the body at the genetic level. Even the controls, when taught the RR, showed the same genes being changed, albeit to a lesser degree than the long-term practitioners. This helped establish the efficacy of the long-term practice.[75]

This work with the RR continues to reveal healing contributions found within its practitioners, and these changes are not only found within long-term engagement, but they are found with a prescribed eight-week long practice. These empirical studies are beginning to reveal aspects of healing that cannot be recognized without the use of specific medical tests.

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[71] Proponents of the Relaxation Response advise a length of time of about twenty minutes, as do practitioners of Centering Prayer. However, some other contemplative prayer practitioners, including followers within the World Community for Christian Meditation also encourage meditation of about thirty minutes.

[72] In this releasing of thoughts, one is encouraged not to ponder any thoughts that come to mind, but only to acknowledge them and let them go, returning to meditation and stillness.

[73] Benson, Herbert and William Proctor 2010 *Relaxation Revolution* New York: Scribner

[74] Epigenetics is the science which studies the expression or activity of genes. This study does not just study the genetic make-up of an individual, but the activity of the genes within their DNA. That activity can consist of the actual turning off or on of specific genes.

[75] https://brainworldmagazine.com/tracking-mind-body-connection-interview-dr-herbert-benson/

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